

April to June 2015

**“Devotional Thoughts
For The Pilgrim Way”**

by
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About the Author



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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

JOHN 14:1-14

HEBREWS 4:14-16

*“For he knoweth our frame;
he remembereth that we are dust.”*

OUR SAVIOUR’S WORDS OF COMFORT (1)

John 14 is commonly known as the comfort chapter of the New Testament. In earlier chapters, Jesus had warned His disciples that He would soon be arrested and killed. The eleven disciples would have to face not only a depressing and frightening situation, but also a dismal future without their beloved Master. They had left all to follow their Lord. Now, what would they do without Him?

Jesus knew that the impending trials upon His disciples would be hard to endure. Soon they would watch Him being forcefully taken away by His enemies, tortured and crucified – a spectacle that would send them to the lowest depths of despair.

Anticipating the sorrow that would overwhelm them, the Lord Jesus took time to comfort His gloomy disciples: *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:1-3).

The Lord knew His disciples well; He understood their fears. He was touched with the feelings of their infirmities; He shared their sorrows (Heb 4:15).

Even the best of God’s children and servants are prone to disquieting fears. How precious the thought that the Lord knows our frailties and understands that we are but dust. He will always be there to share our struggles and to comfort us. May this blessed truth encourage our hearts.

THOUGHT: “Was there ever a kinder shepherd, half so gentle, half so sweet?” (William Hendricksen)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy comfort in trying times.

THURSDAY, APRIL 2

JOHN 14:1-14

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

*“Trust in the LORD with
all thine heart...”*

OUR SAVIOUR’S WORDS OF COMFORT (2)

Jesus had a remedy for the fears of His despondent disciples – faith in the Father and in Himself: *“Ye believe in God, believe also in me”* (John 14:1). Jesus was putting Himself on an equal plane with God. He was actually saying, *“Have that same trust in Me.”* Though the disciples would not have Jesus by their side, they must not doubt His continued presence and help. He was, and would be, their ever faithful and omnipresent God. They must continue to trust Him fully to guide them through their difficulties.

Are we perplexed by life’s difficult circumstances? Is our faith being tested and tried? Let us commit our cares to the Lord who knows what is best for us.

As Jesus comforted His disciples, He announced that He was going to His Father’s house – a reference to Heaven. With that statement, He made a most delightful promise: *“I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2). Heaven is specially prepared for the redeemed to dwell with God and His Son forever more. The fact that there are *“many mansions”* reveals that there will be enough room for all who belong to Him. Jesus exhorted the disciples to look forward to the glorious prospect of their heavenly home.

Just as certain as His departure would be, so would be His return to *“receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:3). *“...the sad disciples were challenged to look beyond the present with its immediate disappointments to the glorious future that was just as certain of fulfilment”* (*Studies in the Gospel of John* by Homer Kent).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not only preparing Heaven for us, but will also return personally to take us there. Thank God for this precious promise to every blood-bought believer.

THOUGHT: Am I ready to meet the Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for my heavenly inheritance.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3

LUKE 22:39-46

2 KINGS 19:10-20

*“Blessed be God, which hath not
turned away my prayer...”*

JESUS' AGONY IN GETHSEMANE (1)

The account of Jesus' agony in Gethsemane is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1). Let us picture the Garden scene.

Faced with His upcoming arrest, humiliation and death, Jesus was in deep anguish and sorrow. The burden that weighed upon His soul was a heavy one. He knew He would soon be crucified. The weight of the world's sin would be laid upon Him. No man can ever understand how great that burden must have been.

According to Luke, Jesus was *“in an agony”* (Luke 22:44a) which signifies deep internal conflict and pain. Three times the Lord drew nigh unto His Father in prayer. He needed God's grace and strength to go through His final dark hours. As the thought of the weight of the world's sin bore down upon His sinless body, *“he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground”* (Luke 22:44b). Most commentators are of the view that the mental pressure arising from Christ's deep anguish caused his pores to send forth great drops of blood. Does not this crushing load upon our Saviour speak to us of God's great love? May we respond appropriately with a deeper love for our Lord as we consider His great suffering for our sakes.

When in deep distress and grief, the Lord prayed earnestly. Three times He cried unto His Father. As Christians, we are not spared life's troubles. But the throne of grace is ever open before us. We can tell our sorrows and cares to our Father in heaven. No matter is too small to bring before Him. He will surely attend to our cries (Ps 57:2).

THOUGHT: *“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.”* (Ps 34:15)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to treasure the privilege of prayer.

JESUS' AGONY IN GETHSEMANE (2)

Our Saviour struggled to face His impending trials. But on all three occasions (Matt 26:39, 42, 44), He cried out to God: “*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*”

Here, the Lord sets a pattern for our prayers for deliverance from temporal evils – in humble submission to the will of God. We must not simply present our prayers before God while following our own will. Our Saviour earnestly desired to do His Father’s will. He knew He would have to endure persecution, humiliation and agony; yet He obeyed without question. Like our Saviour, let us learn not to follow the desires of our own heart. Rather, let us submit to God’s will.

The Lord had requested His three disciples – Peter, James and John – to “*watch with me*” (Matt 26:38). But when He returned after His first prayer, He was disappointed to find them sleeping: “*What, could ye not watch with me one hour?*” (Matt 26:40). Sadly, they did not share the deep anguish of their Master, nor understand the struggles of His soul. Their eyes were heavy, and they fell asleep.

“What had become of us, if Christ had been now as sleepy as His disciples were? It is well for us that our salvation is in the hand of one who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Christ engaged them to watch with Him, as if He expected some succour from them, and yet they slept; surely it was the unkindest thing that could be. His enemies, who watched for Him, were wakeful enough (Mark 14:43); but His disciples, who should have watched with Him were asleep” (Matthew Henry).

Prayer is hard work. It requires of us discipline and diligence. Do we pray? The Lord cautioned His disciples to “*watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*” (Matt 26:41). May we take heed and obey.

THOUGHT: Pray before the world comes knocking at our door.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be faithful in this secret area of my life.

EASTER REFLECTIONS

All four Gospels record the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-14; Luke 24:1-46; John 20:1-31). This certainly reiterates the importance of this doctrinal truth.

What does Christ's resurrection mean to us who believe in Him? It is sure proof that He had paid the debt for our sins, and emerged victorious over sin, death and the grave. This means that we who are His redeemed will also triumph over the grave for God has *“begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”* (1 Pet 1:3). Like the Apostle Paul, we can triumphantly declare: *“Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again ...”* (Rom 8:34).

Thank God that we, like Christ, will have victory over the grave. Let us take comfort that though we may have our earthly struggles and sorrows, we can look forward to that glorious day when *“we shall be like him”* (1 John 3:2).

We also note that the risen Lord had appeared to the women who came to anoint His body (Mark 16:1). Early at the tomb, these faithful women were privileged to be the first to see the risen Lord. These devoted disciples were commissioned to *“go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me”* (v 10). Note that Jesus called His disciples *“my brethren.”* His first concern was for His little scattered flock. The Lord understood their fears and frailties. Although they had forsaken Him in His darkest hours, the Lord still considered them His *“brethren.”* What divine condescension and favour!

We thank God for our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We look forward to the day when we shall see Him face to face.

THOUGHT: “Hell today is vanquished! Heaven is won today!”
(Venantius Fortunatus, trans. by John Ellerton)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that like Christ, I will rise again.

MONDAY, APRIL 6

JOHN 21:1-4

MATTHEW 4:18-25

Jesus is our kind and tender Shepherd.

JESUS' MINISTRY AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS (1)

After His resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself to His disciples on numerous occasions. In John 21:1, we are told that “*Jesus shewed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias.*”

John chapter 21 gives us a detailed account of what exactly took place. It had been a difficult time for the grieving disciples after their Master's departure. They had given up their all to follow the Lord. For the past three years, they had served with Jesus in His public ministry. Now without their Master, they were dejected and perplexed.

Simon Peter told the other disciples, “*I go a fishing.*” He was returning to his previous vocation. The others – including James and John who were formerly fishermen – readily joined in – probably because they needed to support themselves (v 3). While the Lord Jesus was with them, their needs had been supplied by the kindness of the people they ministered to. So all seven of them went fishing at the Sea of Tiberias, but it was a night of fruitless toil, for “*that night they caught nothing*” (v 3).

When morning came, “*Jesus stood on the shore,*” but the disciples did not recognise Him (v 4). He called to them: “*Children, have ye any meat?*” “*Children*” – Jesus spoke to them as unto His sons, with the tenderness of a father. “*Have ye any meat?*” – here the Lord was asking them whether they had caught any fish. Like a kind father, He wanted to meet their needs. The Lord is ever mindful of the temporal needs of His people and has promised them not only grace sufficient, but also food convenient. To this question, the disciples gave a short and abrupt answer – “*No*” – which reflected their disappointment at their fruitless night at sea (v 5).

THOUGHT: What is our response when we are dejected and perplexed?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me grace to trust in Thee in times of disappointment.

TUESDAY, APRIL 7

JOHN 21:1-14

LUKE 5:1-11

*“... for he hath said, I will never
leave thee, nor forsake thee.”*

JESUS' MINISTRY AT THE SEA OF TIBERIAS (2)

Though the disciples “*knew not that it was Jesus,*” they obeyed His command to “*cast the net on the right side of the ship.*” We are told that they “*were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes*” (John 21:4, 6). Despite the remarkable draught of fishes, the disciples were slow to realise that a miracle had been wrought, and that the stranger on the shore was none other than their risen Lord and Master. John was the first to recognise that “*it is the Lord*” (v 7). Peter’s spontaneous response was to put on his fisherman’s coat and “*cast himself into the sea.*” The other disciples came ashore “*dragging the net with fishes*” (v 8). It was a miraculous catch of “*an hundred and fifty and three (fishes) ... yet was not the net broken*” (v 11).

By the shore, Jesus was preparing a breakfast of bread and fish over a fire. He invited them saying, “*Come and dine.*” The sight gave a new meaning to the Lord’s question in John 21:5: “*Children, have ye any meat?*” – the Lord had come to supply their needs, not to take provisions from them. Taken by surprise and probably awed by the sudden appearance of their Master, the disciples were silent and none “*durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing it was the Lord*” (v 12). Jesus sat with them as they ate (v 13).

The Lord knew the disappointment of His disciples. They had toiled all night, but had caught nothing. When they obeyed His command to “*cast the net on the right side of the ship,*” they were blessed with a miraculous draught of fishes. Let us learn to obey the Lord at all times, as there is great blessing in obedience.

Jesus was also sensitive to their needs. Knowing that they felt lost and dejected, He came to comfort and assure them of His presence. How comforting to know our Lord “*came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

THOUGHT: “The Master calleth, Come and dine.”

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for teaching me how to minister through Thy example.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8

JOHN 21:15-17

LUKE 22:54-62

*"But there is forgiveness with thee,
that thou mayest be feared."*

THE RESTORATION OF PETER (1)

After breakfast, Jesus sought Peter's affirmation of his love for Him – not once, but three times. Peter had denied his Master three times (John 18:17, 25, 27). Now, he had to own Him three times as his Lord whom he loved.

All three times the risen Lord committed the care of His flock to Peter: "*Feed my lambs,*" "*Feed my sheep,*" "*Feed my sheep*" (vv 15-17). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Chief Shepherd of the flock which He had redeemed with His precious blood (Acts 20:28).

"In this flock some are lambs, young and tender and weak, others are sheep, grown to some strength and maturity. The Shepherd here takes care of both, and of the lambs first, for upon all occasions he showed a particular tenderness for them. He gathers the lambs in his arms, and carries them in his bosom (Isa. 40:11)" (Matthew Henry).

The Lord gave Peter the charge of nurturing the flock with spiritual food, and of watching over their souls. But why did He give this charge particularly to Peter? The purpose was to restore him to his apostleship and to renew Peter's commission before his brethren. Having forgiven Peter, the Lord was now entrusting him with a most important ministry – that of the care of His flock. It was also intended to quicken him to a diligent and faithful discharge of his ministry as an apostle.

Have we failed the Lord at any time in the past? Turn back to the Lord in repentance. Our tender Lord who restored His impetuous disciple, is waiting to receive us and to restore us to Himself.

THOUGHT: If the Lord were to ask me if I love Him, what will my answer be?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy pardoning grace.

THURSDAY, APRIL 9

JOHN 21:15-25

MARK 8:34-38

“... to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

THE RESTORATION OF PETER (2)

Knowing Peter well – that he was of a rash and impetuous nature – the Lord charged him to feed the flock, and not to lord over the people under his care. Evidently Peter had taken the Lord’s words to heart, for he later wrote: “*Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*” (1 Pet 5:2-3).

Likewise, the Lord has given the oversight of the Church to His ministers. They are to humbly nurture and feed His flock. Let us pray for all our pastors and church leaders, that they be true to their calling and be godly examples to those under their care.

After reinstating His impulsive disciple, and having charged him to feed His sheep, the Lord now bade Peter to expect suffering. Peter had failed miserably when confronted with the possibility of dying for his Master (Matt 26:69-75). Jesus prophesied that Peter would face martyrdom, even death on the cross (John 21:18). According to tradition, Peter was later crucified upside down, as requested by him, because he felt unworthy to die in the same way as his Master.

Immediately following this prophecy, Jesus added the encouraging words: “*Follow me.*” These precious words must have gladdened Peter’s heart, and reminded him of the Lord’s initial call to him to the Gospel ministry (Matt 4:18-20). When severely tried, Peter had betrayed his Master because of his fear of death. Now, faced with the prospect of a violent death, he was commissioned to resume the Master’s work and to follow Him even in suffering. This, Peter did faithfully from that happy day of restoration by his risen Lord. Like Peter, may we be willing to follow our Lord and to endure sufferings for His sake.

THOUGHT: When called upon to suffer like Peter, will I deny my Lord?

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful unto Thee in times of suffering.

FRIDAY, APRIL 10

LUKE 7:11-17

DEUTERONOMY 24:17-22

*“Rejoice with them that do rejoice,
and weep with them that weep.”*

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW’S SON (1)

According to the Gospels, three persons were raised from death to life by the powerful words of Christ – Jairus’ daughter (Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56); Lazarus (John 11:1-45); and the widow’s son, as recorded in our text today.

Jesus was entering Nain with *“many of his disciples ... and much people”* (Luke 7:11). Nain was a small city in Galilee, not far from Capernaum. At about the same time, a large funeral procession was leaving the city for the burial ground. In Jesus’ day, the Jewish burial ground was usually located outside the city. At the city gate, the two parties met (v 12).

Luke described the *“dead man”* as *“the only son of his mother, and she was a widow”* (v 12). It was an inconsolable loss. To heighten the affliction, *“she was a widow.”* In ancient times, widows had to depend on others because they were usually very poor. The Old Testament speaks of God’s special favour upon the widows and the fatherless. The Lord specifically commanded His people to provide for their daily needs (Deut 24:19-21, cf. Ps 68:5). In obedience to God’s Word, the New Testament Church appointed deacons to oversee the distribution of alms to them (Acts 6:1-3).

In the same verse, we are told that *“much people of the city was with her”* (v 12). We can surmise here that she was much loved by the people, for many neighbours came to comfort and support her.

Caring for bereaved families is an important ministry. Always be there to support those who have lost a loved one. Sometimes, no words need to be spoken; our quiet presence is comfort enough.

THOUGHT: Do I *“visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction”* (James 1:27)?

PRAYER: Lord, help me care for my needy brethren, especially the bereaved.

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW’S SON (2)

The Lord Jesus Christ was about to enter the city with His disciples when He met the funeral party at the gate. What lessons can we learn from His response to the disconsolate scene?

1. Christ’s compassion

It was not by chance that the two groups met. Before He entered Nain, the Lord already knew that He would meet with this tragic scene. He had come with a special mission of mercy – to minister to this forlorn mother. Note that the widow did not address the Lord – there was no prayer nor plea for help. Her grief was so great that she could neither speak nor acknowledge Jesus’ presence. But the Lord saw her aching heart and “*had compassion on her.*” Jesus said unto her: “*Weep not*” (Luke 7:13) – because He was about to give her back her son, alive!

2. Christ’s power

Our Lord “*touched the bier*” – as a command for it to stop (v 14). The authority in His action compelled obedience. He commanded the young man to arise. “What mingled majesty and grace shines in this scene! The Resurrection and the Life in human flesh, with a word of command, bringing back life to the dead body; Incarnate Compassion summoning its absolute power to dry a widow’s tears!” (J F Brown Commentary).

“*And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak*” (v 15). This shows that not only life, but health and strength were restored – every faculty was made whole. The Lord finished His work by taking the young man by the hand and presenting him to his mother. No words could express the joy of the bereaved mother who had her son restored to life and personally delivered to her by none other than the Saviour Himself!

THOUGHT: What are Jesus’ other special missions of mercy?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a compassionate heart like Thine.

THE RAISING OF THE WIDOW'S SON (3)

3. The effects of the miracle on the multitude

Jesus proved His deity and power by raising the dead man to life. The issues of life and death rest with God.

The people were both amazed and astonished: *"And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about"* (Luke 7:16-17).

We note that this miracle took place during the early days of Jesus' ministry. A check with the Harmony of the Gospels places it as Jesus' eighth miracle after the healing of the centurion's servant.

The miracle served to authenticate the Lord's ministry and to strengthen the faith of His disciples. Jesus' fame spread throughout the region as the multitudes who witnessed this glorious miracle testified of Christ's power and deity.

What about us today? Have we shown others the same compassion that our Lord bestowed upon the widow and her son? Have we testified of God's gracious dealings with us?

This miracle also reminds us that funerals are sobering occasions. They remind us of life's brevity and uncertainties. King Solomon, the wisest of men, said: *"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart"* (Eccles 7:2). This young son of the widow was cut off in the prime of his life. No one can be sure of tomorrow nor escape the appointment with Death. Let us therefore live with eternity's values in view.

THOUGHT: *"...make your calling and election sure..."* (2 Pet 1:10)

PRAYER: Lord, help me lay this lesson of life's brevity to my heart.

MONDAY, APRIL 13

TITUS 3:1-8

GALATIANS 5:19-26

“...thou art a gracious God...
and of great kindness...”

THE MINISTRY OF KINDNESS (1)

The word “*kindness*” comes from the Greek word “*chrestotes*” which means tender-heartedness, a sweet temper which makes one a blessing and delight to others. It is sometimes translated as “*gentleness*” which is one of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23. Generally, the word is used to indicate the little thoughtful deeds which are done inconspicuously with no desire for attention.

“The ministry of kindness is unceasing. It keeps no Sabbaths. ... In the true home, kindness begins with the first waking moments in the morning, in pleasant greetings, in cheerful good wishes, and then it goes on all day in sweet courtesies, in thoughtful attentions, in patience, in quiet self-denials, in obligingness and helpfulness. Out in the world, kindness goes everywhere with happy cordiality, its gladness of heart, its uplift for those who are discouraged, its strengthening words for those who are weary, its sympathy with sorrow, its interest in lives that are burdened and lonely” (J R Miller).

Kindness is one of God’s attributes. He personally demonstrates before His children this lovely virtue; yea even toward His enemies. In his epistle to Titus, the apostle Paul lists a catalogue of man’s sinful ways: “... *foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another*” (Titus 3:3). Then he proclaims the good news: “*But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost*” (vv 4-5).

Thank God for His kindness to unworthy and sinful people like us. May we respond appropriately in loving obedience by extending His kindness to others.

THOUGHT: “... *thy gentleness hath made me great.*” (Ps 18:35)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to cultivate a spirit of kindness.

TUESDAY, APRIL 14

RUTH 2:1-17

2 SAMUEL 9:1-13

“And be ye kind one to another...”

THE MINISTRY OF KINDNESS (2)

What are some qualities of kindness? How do we show kindness? Kindness stems from a compassionate and sympathetic heart. It has a sincere concern for the needs of another, coupled with a willingness to do something about it. Kind deeds are done not for selfish gain or a desire for reward. Kindness is shown to one and all, regardless of the person's age, race or social status.

Christians, especially, should be kind. We have experienced the lovingkindness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who gave Himself a ransom for our souls (Matt 20:28). Let us express our love for the Lord by being kind to others.

We learn from our reading today of Boaz's kindness to Ruth. He first noticed the poor Moabite widow the day she began gleaning in his barley fields. When told by his servants of her sad situation, he not only gave Ruth the privilege of gleaning after his reapers, but also provided for her personal comfort and protection (Ruth 2:8-9). Overwhelmed by his kindness, Ruth received his favours with humility and gratitude (v 10).

Kindness was also shown by David to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9:1). Saul was David's bitter enemy, yet the latter looked for an opportunity to show kindness to his family. When David became king, he sought out Mephibosheth, the lame son of his good friend, Jonathan, to show him *“kindness for Jonathan's sake.”* The kind king told Mephibosheth: *“Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually”* (v 7).

Let us resolve to touch lives by our kind and loving deeds. May the Lord use us in the ministry of kindness.

THOUGHT: Is there someone around me who needs a kind word, a listening ear or a helping hand?

PRAYER: Lord, fill my life with little deeds of kindness every day.

THE MINISTRY OF KINDNESS (3)

It is easy to be kind to those who are kind to us. But it is not easy to show kindness to those who have provoked or offended us. The story was told of Moody and Sankey who were in a railway coach. A drunk, who had heard Moody preach, began to mimic him. Angry, Moody demanded that the conductor get the drunk out of the coach. The conductor spoke kindly to the man, helped him to a seat, sat beside him and spoke gently to him. Soon, the drunk fell asleep. Reflecting on the incident, Moody was convicted of his rash words and bad testimony. He turned to Sankey, “Last night I preached on the Good Samaritan, and here I find that my feet are in the shoes of the priest and the Levite! I have missed a chance to practise what I preached last night. May God forgive me!”

Do we, like Moody, find it difficult to be kind to the despised? Let us learn from our Lord who extended kindness to two sinful women:

1. The Samaritan woman. She was despised because of her race and immoral lifestyle. But the Lord sought her out. His gentleness led to her salvation and stirred her heart to witness for Him. Her testimony led to her fellow Samaritans’ salvation (John 4:39, 42).
2. The woman taken in adultery. Caught “*in the very act*” (John 8:4), she was set “*in the midst*” (v 3), while her accusers demanded that the Lord pronounce judgment. According to Moses’ law, the adulterous woman should be stoned (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). The Lord, knowing their wicked designs, shamed and silenced them with these words: “*He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her*” (John 8:7). “*Convicted by their own conscience,*” the woman’s accusers “*went out one by one*” (v 9). Turning to the woman, Jesus graciously offered her His pardon and a chance to repent from her sin: “*Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more*” (v 11).

THOUGHT: Do I find it easy to be kind to everyone I meet?

PRAYER: Lord, may I be like Thee in showing kindness to others.

THURSDAY, APRIL 16

LUKE 13:1-5

ROMANS 9:14-26

*“Is there unrighteousness
with God? God forbid.”*

**“EXCEPT YE REPENT,
YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH” (1)**

On 11 March 2011, Japan was hit by the most severe earthquake ever recorded in history. The 9.0 magnitude earthquake off its north-eastern coast spawned a deadly tsunami that caused massive destruction, flattening whole towns and killing thousands of people.

Many comments have been made about the debilitating disaster that befell Japan. What should our response be to this calamity that engulfed the Japanese? Should we condemn them? Do we feel that they deserved the judgment meted out by the divine hand? To answer these questions, let us consider Jesus’ discourse with His hearers in Luke 13:1-5.

In Jesus’ day, there were two prominent sects – the Herodians and the Galileans. Opposing the payment of tribute, the latter group revolted against the Roman government. When these rebels went to offer sacrifices at the Passover, Pilate had them killed and “barbarously mingled their own blood with the blood of the sacrifices which they offered” (William Burkitt). Those who conveyed these dismal tidings to Jesus expected Him to agree that these unfortunate victims deserved such violent deaths because they were greater sinners than the rest. However, Jesus startled them by correcting their erroneous thinking and warning them to repent lest they suffered a similar fate: *“I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3).

No matter what happens, God is just. We should never question nor doubt His sovereignty. Neither should we judge others when they go through life’s calamities.

THOUGHT: Do all great sinners die violent deaths?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to *“judge righteous judgment.”* (John 7:24).

**“EXCEPT YE REPENT,
YE SHALL ALL LIKewise PERISH” (2)**

Jesus’ answer was a reproof to His hearers’ rash judgment of the unfortunate Galileans. To caution them further, the Lord mentioned another incident of the *“eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them”* (Luke 13:4). He asked: *“Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?”* Does this mean that God inflicts the most severe punishment upon the greatest offenders? Again, the Lord directed them to check their own lives: *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”*

Jesus’ audience had been quick to censure the sufferers. They had jumped to their own “righteous” conclusion that the most wicked sinners deserved the most severe punishment. Having examined this discourse, how should we respond to the calamities of others?

As Christians, we may not fully understand the reasons for the disasters which God has allowed. He has His own will and purpose (Deut 29:29; Rom 8:28). We have no right to judge or censure others for life’s calamities. Their sufferings must not be taken as just retribution for their guilt. Job’s three friends thought that he had been severely afflicted because of his sins. Instead of comforting him, they condemned him. But all their “righteous” judgments turned out to be wrong. Ultimately, the Lord vindicated Job, His righteous servant, and in turn rebuked his friends (Job 42:7-8).

Let us understand that an unexpected death or any of life’s bitter adversities may not be a result of God’s punishment in judgment. God rules sovereign. None can question His divine counsel. Rather than making rash judgments, let us thank God for His kind favour. Let us not rejoice at the calamities of others, but be instructed by them to reflect upon our own lives.

THOUGHT: *“It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.”* (Lam 3:22)

PRAYER: Lord, may I repent, lest I *“likewise perish.”*

SATURDAY, APRIL 18

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-13

2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-33

*“But godliness with contentment
is great gain.”*

“HOW TO BE ABASED ... HOW TO ABOUND” (1)

The epistle of Philippians, written by the Apostle Paul, is often referred to as the epistle of joy. One of the key verses is: *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice”* (Phil 4:4). Thus, upon reading the epistle, one might conclude that Paul had lived a problem-free life. But were his circumstances really favourable when he wrote the epistle?

As we well know, Paul’s ministry was marked by great hardships and difficulties. He went through persecutions of every kind (2 Cor 11:23-28). Added to that, he had to contend with *“a thorn in the flesh”* – *“lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations”* (2 Cor 12:7).

The Bible tells us that the Apostle was *“in bonds”* (Phil 1:13-14) – in a Roman prison awaiting trial for his appeal to Caesar. He had lost his freedom. His missionary work had seemingly been curtailed.

When Paul languished behind bars, did he question God? Did he murmur at the sufferings he had to endure for the Gospel’s sake? No! In spite of all his sufferings, God’s faithful servant could triumphantly declare: *“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”* (Phil 4:11-12).

It is evident that Paul’s contentment was not a result of comfortable or favourable circumstances. He had learnt to be content. He knew how to live with plenty, but he did not fret when faced with poverty and want. He was contented despite his afflictions, because he had tasted the sufficiency of God’s grace in every trial (2 Cor 12:9-10).

THOUGHT: The Christian must always be happy. Do I agree?

PRAYER: Lord, may I *“count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Phil 3:8).

"HOW TO BE ABASED ... HOW TO ABOUND" (2)

Contentment is not a passive resignation to one's situation, but a humble acceptance that all which the Lord has given is best. The contented Christian regards God's gifts as sufficient, and rejoices in every trial meted out by His sovereign hand.

In his epistle to the Philippians, the apostle Paul wrote of his response to his seemingly curtailed ministry: *"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel"* (Phil 1:12).

Instead of wallowing in self-pity and resenting his opponents, he saw his imprisonment as a *"furtherance of the gospel"* – *"so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places"* (Phil 1:13). Remarkably, the palace guards were his captive audience when Paul preached the Gospel message; *"and in all other places"* also indicates the probability that the courtyard, where the prisoners had their daily regimen, was the apostle's preaching station.

Though some tried to hurt him by preaching Christ out of impure motives, *"even of envy and strife ...of contention"* (Phil 1:15-16), Paul was unmoved. In fact, he responded in a positive way: *"What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice"* (Phil 1:18). All that mattered to Paul was that Christ was made known.

Instead of feeling dejected, the Apostle was thankful that his imprisonment served to spur *"many of the brethren ... to speak the word without fear"* (Phil 1:14).

THOUGHT: "One of the secrets of happiness is to have a mind satisfied with all the allotments of Providence." (Albert Barnes)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Thou doeth all things well.

MONDAY, APRIL 20

ACTS 2:1-15; 37-47

ACTS 4:32-37

“... freely ye have received, freely give.”

LESSONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (1)

It is interesting to note from Acts 2 that God started the church with a group of seemingly insignificant disciples. Reading the above passage, we cannot help but be encouraged by the way the early church came together under the ministry of the apostolic band in Jerusalem, and how their collective witness of both life and practice became an effective tool to draw many to the Saviour.

One of the blessed fruits of the outpouring on the Day of Pentecost was the Holy Spirit’s mighty influence upon the hearers of the Gospel. In response to the apostle Peter’s preaching on that eventful day, there was a bountiful harvest of souls: *“and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”* (Acts 2:41b). We read of how *“... the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (v 47).

The new believers confessed their faith with their lips and identified themselves with the disciples of Christ through water baptism. Joy, singleness of heart, unity and thankfulness characterised the infant church as the members shared in the love of God and came together to worship and to partake of the means of grace – God’s Word, fellowship, communion, prayer and ministry to one another. *“They continued stedfastly”* in verse 42 speaks of the believers’ perseverance in their faith and devotion to the Lord.

There was mutual love and concern among the brethren. Seeing the many needs around them, they willingly sold their properties and gave *“to all men, as every man had need”* (v 45). Their generosity towards their needy brethren reminds us that it is God who is the Giver of all things (James 1:17). All our possessions belong to the Lord and should be made available for the blessing of His people.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to part with my possessions for my brethren’s sake?

PRAYER: Lord, as Thou hast blessed me, help me to be a blessing to others.

TUESDAY, APRIL 21

ACTS 2:41-47

ROMANS 12:3-18

*“Then they that feared the LORD
spake often one to another...”*

LESSONS FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH (2)

Likeminded in their devotion to the Lord, the early believers loved to be in one another’s company (Acts 2:42). They spent much time with each other in sweet fellowship. Their hearts were knit together in one accord as they served the Lord. This beautiful picture of unity is so different from that in many churches today where there is discord and strife.

“When they withdrew from the untoward generation, they did not turn hermits, but were very intimate with one another, and took all occasions to meet; wherever you saw one disciple, you would see more, like birds of a feather. See how these Christians love one another ... so must we” (Matthew Henry).

The New Testament Church was an infant assembly of believers. Yet they exemplified a faith that was manifested by wholehearted devotion and service to the Lord. In return, the Lord blessed them with “*such as should be saved*” (Acts 2:47). He also favoured them with special tokens of His presence through the “*many wonders and signs*” that “*were done by the apostles*” (v 43b).

What a blessing to share that common bond in the Lord, and to commune one with another as God’s redeemed people. Let us learn precious lessons from these early believers. Cherish opportunities to hear God’s Word. Treasure fellowship with God’s people. Be “*kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love*” (Rom 12:10). Strive to build up the unity of the church. Pray for the church and for our brethren. May each of us do our part to fulfil God’s will and purpose for our lives.

THOUGHT: “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*” (1 John 1:7)

PRAYER: Lord, may I cherish fellowship with Thy people.

“GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS” (1)

Faithfulness is one of God’s glorious attributes. He is true to His every word. He never forgets His promises; He keeps every covenant He has made with man. *“Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations”* (Deut 7:9).

Scripture gives many examples of God’s faithfulness:

1. Sustenance

Day by day, moment by moment, the Almighty God upholds *“all things by the word of his power”* (Heb 1:3). Nothing in all of creation stands or acts independently of the Lord’s will. The stars continue in their courses as ordained by their Creator (Isa 40:26). At the crack of dawn, the sun rises *“to rule the day”* and in the evening, the moon takes over *“to rule the night”* (Gen 1:16). With clockwork precision, our universe ticks on according to God’s ordained counsel.

The psalmist rejoiced over the power and lovingkindness of God in upholding all His creatures (Ps 147:8-9). Men may despise the grass under his feet, but God causes it to grow. The Lord Himself feeds the sparrows. He takes notice of these fledglings and does not suffer them to starve: *“Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”* (Matt 6:26). How comforting to know that we can trust our faithful and gracious Heavenly Father to provide all our needs!

THOUGHT: *“For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”* (Ps 33:9)

PRAYER: I praise Thee, Lord, that Thy *“compassions fail not... great is thy faithfulness”* (Lam 3:22-23).

THURSDAY, APRIL 23

JOHN 10:22-30

HEBREWS 12:1-11

“... those that thou gavest me I have kept,
and none of them is lost...”

“GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS” (2)

2. Preservation

We are weak and frail creatures of dust. Left on our own, we give up easily and yield at the smallest obstacle. However, our faithful Lord has promised that He will preserve us until the very end: “*And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand*” (John 10:28). No one, however powerful or cunning, can ever pluck us out of His hand. Our eternal security is guaranteed because our God is able to keep us.

“We have no ground for confidence in the absolute security of the saints based on the strength of their resolutions or their ability to persevere, but on the veracity of Him that cannot lie” (Herendeen).

3. Chastisement

Chastisement is one way God shows His faithfulness and love for His people, “*for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth*” (Heb 12:6). God hates sin. If His children choose the path of disobedience or waywardness, He will have to afflict them with a smarting, painful rod.

God smites us so that we will return to Him, and to the safety of His fold. Afflictions are necessary to cause us to seek the Lord. Perhaps we have made idols and given our hearts to them, or have allowed earth’s pleasures to seduce and draw us away from God. Perhaps there is coldness in our hearts towards Him. May we resolve to return to the Lord lest we come under His chastening hand.

THOUGHT: “*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).*” (Heb 10:23)

PRAYER: Lord, Thy faithfulness is a comfort to my soul.

FRIDAY, APRIL 24

GENESIS 3:1-19

HEBREWS 12:12-29

*“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful:
he cannot deny himself.”*

“GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS” (3)

4. Threatenings

Our God will make good every threat for He *“is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?”* (Num 23:19).

This attribute is reflected in His dealings with our first parents. The Lord had specifically warned Adam: *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die”* (Gen 2:17). Yielding to Satan’s temptations, Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord’s command and ate of the forbidden fruit. True to His Word, God passed the sentence of death upon the fallen pair. Man became mortal and had to suffer the miseries of sin: *“for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Gen 3:19b; Rom 5:12).

Before the flood, God, through His righteous servant, warned the wicked world about His impending judgment. As foretold, the great flood came and destroyed every living thing. Only Noah and his family were saved (Gen 6-8).

The Apostle James reiterated God’s faithfulness: *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17). We thank God that we can fully trust Him because His Word standeth sure. Let us be reminded, however, that our God is also a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). Though the Lord is kind and merciful, He is also a God of truth and justice. May our knowledge of His faithfulness stir us to live a holy and consecrated life.

THOUGHT: *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (Heb 10:31)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be faithful even as Thou art faithful.

START WITH THE HOME (1)

I was reading a tract “Being a Christian at home” by M Green. She quoted a letter from a Christian mother which reflects the dilemma of many parents today:

“... It seems that our sixteen year old likes to be responsible for either of our two cars but not for washing the dishes or cleaning the tub or setting the table – oh sure if we pay her to clean the house – she will vacuum – (but not very well). She feels she must ‘love our neighbor’, but not her nine-year-old sister. We find she speaks respectfully to those in church, but not to us. ... There seems to be an 11th commandment, ‘Thou shalt work hard every place ... except at home ...’ And I’ve noticed among Christian teens it is a sport to slander their parents’ character, with tales of who’s the most severe, unreasonable and strict ...”

M Green’s struggle with her teenager is a very real one. It is not easy to be a practising Christian at home. Indeed, the hardest testing ground for our faith is right in our own homes – with our parents, our siblings, our spouse and our children. These are the people who observe us at close range and see us as we really are.

M Green aptly commented: “If we can’t prove our Christianity there, we can’t prove it anywhere! If we won’t go the extra mile for those we literally share our lives with, who are we trying to kid when we knock ourselves out by being ‘super spiritual’ at the Bible study?”

We may, by our outward piety, fool our friends in church, but at home, those who know us best see our “double life” – our murmurings, rudeness, stubbornness, self-centredness, and our addiction to television and the internet, etc.

THOUGHT: If my family members were called upon to testify of the reality of my faith, how would they rate me?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love those closest to me.

START WITH THE HOME (2)

1. A word to children

It takes only one discordant life to mar the peace and harmony of the home. Let us examine our hearts to ensure that we are not the cause of family friction. Study the following checklist and consider our relationships with those closest to us. Determine to diligently practise our faith, starting with our own homes.

1. Do we love and respect our parents (Christian or non-Christian)?
2. Do we accept them with all their faults and weaknesses?
3. Do we slander them behind their backs?
4. Do we sulk and argue when we cannot have our way?
5. Do we subject them to our moods? Are we rude or disrespectful?
6. Do we take them for granted? Do we think that because they are our parents, they have to accept our bad behavior?
7. Do we resent having to help out with our younger siblings and household chores? Do we do these duties in a sloppy, half-hearted way?
8. Do we respond to our parents' correction with a proud and scornful heart?
9. Are we a blessing or a bane at home?
10. Do we spend time with the Lord?

Let us repent if we have fallen short of God's calling in our home. Seek God's forgiveness as well as the forgiveness of those whom we have hurt or offended. As new creatures in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), we should "*put off ... the old man*" – the old nature (Eph 4:22), and "*put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Eph 4:24). Be a good witness before our family members, especially if they are unbelievers (Matt 5:16).

THOUGHT: If my words and deeds at home were secretly recorded and shown, would I be ashamed?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be true to Thee by loving my family members.

MONDAY, APRIL 27

1 PETER 3:1-11

EPHESIANS 6:4

Do we live out our faith?

START WITH THE HOME (3)

2. A word to parents

Leading our children to Christ involves much more than just guiding them through a simple prayer. We must be living examples of our faith – showing them what it means to walk with Christ daily. This means practising our faith where it matters most – before our watching children. This means teaching them to view things from God’s perspective, showing mercy, extending forgiveness, asking for forgiveness, encouraging them to love the Lord – in short, living out God’s Word in our daily lives. The following are some relevant questions we should ask ourselves:

Fathers, how do we rule the home? Do we rule with love, patience and kindness, or do we rule like a tyrant? Do we set a godly example for our family? Have we given the Lord first place in our lives? Can our family members see the love and grace of Christ through our daily conduct?

Mothers, do we make a real home for our family? What is our attitude towards our husband? Do we openly defy our husband’s authority, thus teaching our children rebellion and defiance? Have we shown them by our actions and speech what it means to love and obey God?

Husbands and wives, are there unresolved conflicts that have embittered our hearts against each other? Conflicts in the family lead to anger and bitterness in our hearts, which not only hinders our fellowship with God, but also our prayer lives. Actions speak louder than words. Our children can see through our hypocrisy. No amount of teaching can replace the godly example of a parent’s life.

THOUGHT: A godly example carries weight and enhances our teaching.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be a blessing to my family.

TUESDAY, APRIL 28

LUKE 24:1-12

REVELATION 1:9-20

“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...”

“THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK” (1)

It is significant to note that the Bible singles out *“the first day of the week”* as the day of our Lord’s repeated appearances after His resurrection. This phrase – mentioned eight times in the New Testament (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) – was used by all four Gospel writers, including Dr Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Finally, it was also mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians.

The consistent mention of this *“first day of the week,”* particularly by all the four Gospel writers, emphasizes the day of the resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. It also clearly implies their recognition of *“the first day of the week”* for its sanctity.

“The first day of the week” is commonly known as *“the Lord’s day.”* In the New Testament, *“the Lord’s day”* occurs only once – in Revelation 1:10 – when the Lord appeared to the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos: *“I (John) was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.”*

Most commentators believe that *“the Lord’s day”* refers to *“the first day of the week”* which is Sunday. *“The Lord’s day”* reminds us of the day when Jesus Christ conquered sin and death in His resurrection (1 Cor 15:55-57).

The Jewish day of worship has always been the Sabbath day which falls on Saturday, the seventh day. After the resurrection, the Christian church began to worship God on *“the first day of the week”* which is Sunday, to commemorate the day our Lord Jesus arose from the grave. Thank God that we can come together as His redeemed people on *“the first day of the week.”*

THOUGHT: “Day of all the week the best, emblem of eternal rest.”
(John Newton)

PRAYER: Lord, may I treasure the privilege of worshipping Thee on the Lord’s Day.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29

ACTS 20:7-12

1 CORINTHIANS 16:1-9

*“I was glad when they said
unto me, Let us go into
the house of the LORD.”*

“THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK” (2)

According to Rev William Evans, “the Lord’s Day is not the original Sabbath. Who dared change it? For what reason and on what grounds was it changed? Ponder the tenacity with which the Jews held on to their Sabbath given in Eden, and buttressed amid the thunders of Sinai. Recall how Jews would sooner die than fight on the Sabbath day (cf. Titus’ invasion of Jerusalem on the Sabbath). The Jews never celebrated the birthdays of great men; they celebrated events, like the Passover. Yet, in the New Testament times, we find Jews changing their time-honored seventh day to the first day of the week; and, contrary to all precedent, calling that day – the Lord’s Day. Here is an effect, a tremendous effect; what was its cause? We cannot have an effect without a cause. The resurrection of our Lord was the cause for this great change in the day of worship” (“Great Doctrines of the Bible”).

According to Luke, the disciples gathered *“to break bread,”* that is, to celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and to hear the preaching of God’s Word on *“the first day of the week”* (Acts 20:7). This clearly implies that the disciples worshipped the Lord on Sunday. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, the Apostle Paul exhorted the careful setting aside of funds for the Lord’s work on *“the first day of the week”*: *“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”*

As God’s people, let us rejoice in that glorious *“first day of the week”* when our Lord conquered sin and death for us. Let us keep the Lord’s Day holy. Do not let anything or anyone distract or hinder us from the worship of God with His people. Be early in church to seek the Lord. Come with a prepared heart to worship Him *“in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:24), and to joyfully receive His Word.

THOUGHT: “The Lord’s Day ... is to the Christian a joy, a day of rest, of peace, and of thanksgiving.” (C H Spurgeon)

PRAYER: Lord, may I keep the Lord’s Day holy.

PRAY FOR OUR LEADERS

The Bible tells us that the Lord takes notice of a country’s righteousness: “*Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people*” (Prov 14:34).

“A righteous administration of the government, impartial equity between man and man, public countenance given to religion, the general practice and profession of virtue, the protecting and preserving of virtuous men, charity and compassion to strangers (alms are sometimes called righteousness), these exalt a nation; they uphold the throne, elevate the people’s minds, and qualify a nation for the favour of God” (Matthew Henry).

This truth is clearly seen during the reign of David, a God-fearing king. Under his rule, Israel enjoyed many blessings: “*And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel’s sake*” (2 Sam 5:12). On the other hand, under the reign of Israel’s many evil kings, the kingdom was divided and her people suffered much. Civil war broke out between Israel and her sister Judah. Yes, sin has been the cause of many a nation’s downfall. Israel’s history speaks volumes on this issue.

God uses our leaders to fulfil His purposes on earth. It is our duty, as believers, to uphold those in high office: “*I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty*” (1 Tim 2:1-2). Pray for God’s grace and wisdom to be upon our leaders to do that which is beneficial for the people. Pray for courage for them to rule wisely, and to make decisions that will preserve the peace, security, and moral standards of our country.

THOUGHT: “Righteousness is the only foundation of permanent national prosperity.” (Family Bible Notes)

PRAYER: Lord, grant wisdom that our leaders may rule well.

FRIDAY, MAY 1

ROMANS 13:1-7

TITUS 3:1-8

*“Let every soul be subject
unto the higher powers...”*

SUBMIT TO OUR LEADERS

Singapore is just a single dot on the world map. Yet, God has graciously blessed us with a good government, peace, stability, progress and safety. Despite our diminutive size and lack of natural resources, our country has excelled economically, socially and politically. Thank God for His merciful dealings with us as a nation.

As a democratic country, our government is set up through a free and fair electoral system. Our leaders come to power through the people’s choice. As with every authority, their high office is permitted and ordained of God.

Let us be thankful for the authority God has set over us. Submit to our leaders as exhorted by the Word of God (Rom 13:1-2). Our President, Prime Minister and Members of Parliament are, in a sense, *“God’s ministers”* placed in high office according to God’s will and purpose (Rom 13:6). May we *“render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”* (Rom 13:7).

Remember that no earthly government is perfect. They may implement policies or rules that are widely deemed unpopular. But before we level criticism on them, do consider that they have access to a greater store of information than we, the common citizens. Although we may be unaware of the rationale behind their decisions, we should trust that our leaders must have carefully weighed the options before implementing certain critical policies.

Let us appreciate their efforts to protect the interests of our country and the welfare of us, the citizens.

THOUGHT: What is my attitude towards my country’s leaders?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me not to be critical of my leaders but to pray for them.

DEATH AND THE CHRISTIAN (1)

All must die – some in their old age, others in their youth. Death is no respecter of person. It happens to all alike – kings and nobles; the poor beggar on the street; as well as the common working man: *“His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish”* (Ps 146:4).

Natural death is described in Scriptures as:

(1) a yielding up of the breath: *“Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust”* (Ps 104:29);

(2) a return to our original dust: *“for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”* (Gen 3:19; cf. Eccles 12:7).

In 2 Corinthians 5:1, the Apostle Paul used the phrase, *“our earthly house of this tabernacle”* to illustrate our frail, mortal body. He compared the body to an earthly house, *“because such buildings consist of slight and mean materials, they are soon set up, and as soon taken down”* (William Burkitt). Anticipating his death, the Apostle Peter earnestly sought to stimulate his readers to spiritual diligence as he must shortly *“put off this my tabernacle”* (2 Pet 1:14).

Are we fearful of death? How do we feel when we awake each morning? Do we give thanks to the Lord for His preserving hand upon us through the night? We have heard of some who die peacefully in their sleep. We have also heard of those who suffer years of debilitating illness before the final end. No one, however, is exempted from death’s cold clutches. Few there are who do not fear this overshadowing reality of facing death one day.

THOUGHT: *“All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.”* (Eccles 3:20)

PRAYER: Lord, may I live for Thee as long as Thou giveth me life.

DEATH AND THE CHRISTIAN (2)

"Born once, die twice; born twice, die once" is an oft-quoted phrase. The first part of the phrase, "Born once, die twice," is true of the unbeliever. He is once born into the world but has to face death twice. The first is a physical death in the flesh; the departing out of the world of the living. The second death is eternal death in the fires of Hell: *"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire"* (Rev 20:14-15). This judgment of the unbelievers is reiterated in Revelation 21:8: *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*

"Born twice, die once" may seem to be the blessed lot of the believer in Christ. Like everyone else, the Christian is born of earthly parents. That is the first birth. He is born again when he receives Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour. This was what the Lord Jesus meant when he answered Nicodemus: *"... Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3). Note however the words of our Saviour: *"I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life"* (John 6:47). And John 11:26: *"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die..."* Hence, while the Christian breathes his last and his body returns to dust, he merely *"sleepeth"* (John 11:11).

Death is an appointment that unbelievers must keep. For the Christian, his departing from earth is an appointment to enter into a blessed eternity with our Saviour. It holds no fear for those who name the name of the Lord for they have *"everlasting life."*

THOUGHT: *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."* (John 11:25)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for the gift of eternal life.

MONDAY, MAY 4

PSALM 16

LUKE 23:39-43

*“Over the sunset mountains, Jesus
my Saviour I’ll see.”*

DEATH AND THE CHRISTIAN (3)

Though the Old Testament saints did not personally see the Lord Jesus Christ, they professed faith in their ever-living Redeemer and their future resurrection. Daniel clearly understood this blessed hope when he said, “... *many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt*” (Dan 12:2).

Echoing this same sentiment of trust in the Lord, the much-afflicted patriarch Job triumphantly declared that though death consumed his physical body, he would be ushered into the presence of God: “*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me*” (Job 19:25-27).

At death, “the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*).

Surviving loved ones bury their dead in sorrow, but the saved soul is conveyed into the presence of the Lord. The dying thief who repented at the last hour rejoiced to hear the Saviour’s comforting words: “*To day shalt thou be with me in paradise*” (Luke 23:43). What a joy to awake in the glorious presence of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

THOUGHT: “Face to face with Christ, my Saviour, Face to face – what will it be? When with rapture I behold Him, Jesus Christ who died for me!” (Carrie E Breck)

PRAYER: Lord, I look forward to that glorious day when I will see Thee face to face.

TUESDAY, MAY 5

MATTHEW 19:16-26

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

“... if riches increase, set not
your heart upon them.”

“WHO THEN CAN BE SAVED?”

Aspiring to enter Heaven, the rich young ruler enquired of the Lord: “*Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*” (Matt 19:16). Jesus, knowing the young man’s attachment to his riches, instructed him to “*sell that thou hast ... give to the poor ... and come and follow me*” (v 21). We are told that the man “... *went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions*” (v 22). The love of money was his “master-sin.”

In response, Jesus made this strong statement: “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*” (v 24). These words of Christ are recorded in two other Gospels as well (Mark 10:25 and Luke 18:25).

One may ask, “What is ‘*the eye of a needle*’?” I believe that the Lord’s comment is to be taken literally to mean the tiny eye of a sewing needle! Jesus’ proverbial statement implies that it is not only extremely difficult, but almost impossible for those who trust in their wealth to be saved. The heart of the rich young man was inseparably bound to his earthly treasure. He was not willing to part with his wealth for the honour of following Christ and the promise of God’s kingdom.

“*Astonished out of measure*” (Mark 10:26) by their Master’s words, the disciples asked, “*Who then can be saved?*” (Luke 18:26). Today, we wonder with the disciples: Are all rich people condemned to a lost eternity? Jesus provided the answer: “*The things which are impossible with men are possible with God*” (Luke 18:27). Salvation is of the Lord. It is God’s work, not man’s work. It is the Holy Spirit who works grace upon the hearts of man. Salvation by man’s own efforts is impossible, but with God all things are possible!

THOUGHT: Is there something in my life that I will not give up for Christ?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the grace that has drawn me unto Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6

MALACHI 3:16-18

EPHESIANS 5:17-29

“... a crown of glory... and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.”

GOD’S PRECIOUS JEWELS (1)

In Malachi 3:17, the Lord likened His people to “*jewels*.” To look in context, we need to refer to the preceding verse – verse 16. In the midst of spiritual declension in Malachi’s day, those who “*feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name*” spoke often among themselves of the things of God to encourage one another in the faith. It is interesting to note that the Lord valued their godly discourses and kept “*a book of remembrance*.” He called attention to these faithful few; He would make them His very own peculiar treasures.

Why did the Lord liken His people to “*jewels*”? Let us consider the following reasons (gleaned from the writings of Arthur Pink):

1. Because of their infinite value before God

This truth should humble us. How wonderful that the Lord of Glory should look upon us, His redeemed people, as His “*jewels*.” The word “*jewels*” is translated from the original Hebrew word “*segullah*” – which means “*peculiar treasure*.” This same word is used in Exodus 19:5: “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.*”

The value of an item in the eyes of its owner may be gauged by the price he is willing to pay for it. Similarly, when a sportsman wins a trophy, he values it as the ultimate reward for all his hard work and effort. We have often seen champions kissing the trophy they received before their cheering fans. Back at home, these treasured prizes take pride of place, as they are often prominently displayed for all to see and admire. As Christians, we are of much more worth to Christ. So valuable was the Church to Christ that He gave Himself for her (Eph 5:25), shedding His precious blood to redeem her (1 Pet 1:18-19).

THOUGHT: Christians are God’s trophies of grace.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that I am precious in Thy sight.

GOD’S PRECIOUS JEWELS (2)

2. Because of their rarity

In his devotion on “God’s jewels,” Arthur Pink speaks of the rarity of precious gems: “It is this, chiefly, which constitutes the value of precious stones. Were they numerous and common, found in the soil of every man’s garden, they would not be so costly, nor so highly esteemed.”

True believers are born of God: “...*born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*” (John 1:13). It is God’s irresistible grace that draws us unto Him. We should not wonder, therefore, at the few who are saved. Only those called and drawn by the Spirit will call upon the Lord and be saved: “*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*” (1 Cor 1:26).

There may be those who call on the name of Christ and exhibit some semblance of true saving faith. But soon they are proven otherwise. Gradually they return to their old ways and are found no more amongst the children of God. Not many will stay on the strait and narrow way that leads to life: “*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” (Matt 7:13-14). Not many will endure to the very end.

How we thank God for His electing grace upon us undeserving sinners. The Lord will graciously preserve His precious rare gems until the very end (John 10:27-29).

THOUGHT: “*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ...*” (1 Pet 2:9)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for calling us to be Thy “*peculiar people.*”

FRIDAY, MAY 8

MALACHI 3:16-18

1 PETER 2:1-12

“Ye are the light of the world.”

GOD’S PRECIOUS JEWELS (3)

3. Because of their beauty

“The jewel is prized for its lustre. It is the brilliance of the gem which, in a great measure, is the evidence and test of its value. It is said that the colours of jewels are the brightest known, and are the nearest approaches to the rays of the solar spectrum that have yet been discovered. See how the diamond flashes and sparkles! And yet its beauty and brilliance are not so much inherent.

Examine it in a dark room, and it emits no radiance. It is simply a reflector: its glory is borrowed from the light. So it is with the saint: his loveliness is a loveliness which has been placed upon him, imputed to him” (Arthur Pink).

We thank God for the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is He who has *“clothed me with the garments of salvation”* and *“covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels”* (Isa 61:10). This is reiterated in the New Testament by the apostle John: *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:2).

As God’s redeemed, we are called to be the lights in this world of darkness: *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matt 5:16). Testify for the Lord through our daily conduct – in both our words and our deeds. Reflect the light of God’s love and grace so that those in darkness might find the way of light and life everlasting.

THOUGHT: “In this world of darkness we must shine, you in your small corner, and I in mine.” (Susan Warner)

PRAYER: Lord, may the beauty of Christ be seen in me.

SATURDAY, MAY 9
ISAIAH 49:13-17
JOHN 8:31-40

*“When my father and my mother
forsake me, then the
LORD will take me up.”*

“YET WILL I NOT FORGET THEE”

God had raised the prophet Isaiah to warn and admonish His people to return to Him. In response, the people pleaded with Jehovah not to reject them, but to love them upon their return – just as an earthly father would receive his children again: *“Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting”* (Isa 63:16).

It is significant that the people added these words in their plea to God: *“Though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not.”* Why? The Jews had always prided themselves on being the descendants of faithful Abraham. They cherished his name with the deepest respect and affection (Matt 3:9; John 8:39a). The idea here is that even if the patriarch Abraham, the father of faith – one who was much loved and revered – were to disown them, yet God would not forget His paternal relationship and responsibility to them.

We read of a similar expression of God’s steadfast love: *“Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me”* (Isa 49:15-16). The love of a mother for her infant child is the strongest earthly bond. A mother nursing her sucking child cannot but be sensitive to his every need. But the love of our gracious Heavenly Father goes way beyond that – He will never ever forget or forsake us (Ps 27:10). Thus, the people of Isaiah’s day were so sure of God’s loving favour that they cried out: *“Doubtless thou art our father.”*

THOUGHT: How should I respond to my Heavenly Father’s faithful care for me?

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

HONOUR OUR MOTHERS

A mother's presence in the home is a mark of divine blessing. She works uncomplainingly. Though tired and weary, she is always there to attend to our every need. A mother loves with an unconditional love, and gives of herself sacrificially for the happiness of her family. It does not matter if she does not have enough rest or that she has less to eat so long as her family's needs are met. Such is the loving and tender devotion of a mother's heart.

To many, the role of a mother may appear to be a passive one. Yet none can deny that she, as a helpmeet to her husband, plays a vital supportive role in the family. As homemaker, she guides the children in the right path (Titus 2:5). More than just caring for her loved ones, a godly mother can be a powerful influence in the home through her daily testimony and life.

American President Theodore Roosevelt paid this wonderful tribute to all mothers: "When all is said, it is the mother, and the mother only, who is a better citizen than the soldier who fights for his country. The successful mother who does her part in rearing and training aright the boys and girls, who are to be the men and women of the next generation, is of greater use to the community, and occupies, if she only would realise it, a more honourable as well as a more important position than any man in it. The mother is the one supreme asset of the national life. She is more important, by far, than the successful statesman, or businessman, or artist, or scientist."

Let us honour that extraordinary woman in our lives, let us thank God for our mothers. Our lives have been richly blessed because of their sacrificial love and devotion. Our mothers deserve our fullest love, respect and appreciation.

THOUGHT: Do I take my mother's love and care for granted?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for one of Thy best gifts to me – my mother.

MONDAY, MAY 11

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

COLOSSIANS 1:9-22

*“For there is one God, and
one mediator between God
and men, the man Christ Jesus.”*

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (1)

God’s gracious pardon for lost sinners is the central theme of His plan of salvation. This divine favour sets Christianity apart from all other religions. It is only through the mediatorial work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, that we can obtain forgiveness: *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace”* (Eph 1:7).

The Apostle Peter reiterated this theme of forgiveness in his messages to the New Testament Church. Speaking before the Sanhedrin, the Apostle testified of Christ whom *“God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”* (Acts 5:31). The sermons and epistles of the Apostle Paul were also centred on this important aspect of God’s grace (Acts 13:38; Col 1:14).

God gives us His solemn word that He has forgiven us freely and completely – *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Col 2:14). For all who call upon Him as Saviour, their sins – past, present and future – are forgiven.

The psalmist tells us that God not only forgives our sins, He remembers them no more. Our sins have been removed *“as far as the east is from the west”* (Ps 103:12). Does this mean a lapse of memory on the part of our omniscient God? R C Sproul explains: *“When He blots out my transgression, it is not that He actually loses all knowledge of it. Rather, He blots it out of the record book. He treats me as if I had not sinned. He covers my sin with the righteousness of Christ ... When God forgives me of my sin, He doesn’t hold it against me. He bears no grudges. He harbours no lingering hostility. My relationship with Him is totally and completely restored.”*

THOUGHT: “No child of God sins to that degree as to make himself incapable of forgiveness.” (John Bunyan)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy pardoning grace.

TUESDAY, MAY 12

MATTHEW 5:38-48

EPHESIANS 4:20-32

*“Who is a pardoning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”*

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (2)

Through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God extends His pardoning grace to all who would come to Him in repentance. As children of our gracious Heavenly Father who “*sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*” (Matt 5:45), we too, must demonstrate that same spirit of forgiveness. Why should we forgive? How should we forgive? To what extent should we forgive?

Forgiving others is not an option but a command from the Lord: “*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” (Matt 6:14-15). The phrase, “*neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*” is a grim message to all who refuse to forgive others.

Writing to the Ephesian church, the Apostle Paul challenged the Christians to exercise forgiveness: “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you*” (Eph 4:32).

This is not an easy command to obey. Some may say: “I have been grievously hurt. No one will ever know the anguish and pain I’ve suffered. After all that I have gone through, how can I ever forgive?”

We will find it hard to forgive when we continue to nurse the grudge or dwell on the gravity of the offence. These negative feelings embitter our hearts. It is possible that as a result of the offender’s wrongdoing, we suffer losses, even deep humiliation and hurt. But no matter how grievous the wrong, we must still obey God and forgive.

THOUGHT: “*If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?*” (Ps 130:3)

PRAYER: Lord, forbid that I should bear a grudge against another.

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (3)

What does forgiving someone entail? Commentator William Burkitt gives us a clear answer: “Not that we are hereby obliged to take the frequent offender into our bosom, and to make him our intimate; but to lay aside all malice, and all thoughts and desires of revenge, and to stand ready to do him any office of love and friendship.”

1. Forgive without keeping account

Peter asked the Lord: “*Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*” (Matt 18:21). Peter thought that it was a generous gesture to forgive seven times. We too may think that there is a limit to forgiving someone. When offended, we have often reacted negatively especially when it is a repeated injury. Look at Jesus’ response to Peter’s question: “*I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven*” (Matt 18:22). Yes, forgiveness is to be extended again and again. There is no limit to the number of times we must forgive others.

2. Forgive the way God has forgiven us

Jesus illustrated His discourse on forgiveness with the parable of the unforgiving servant. The master had forgiven the servant of his debt of “*ten thousand talents*” (Matt 18:24). But the servant refused to forgive his fellow-servant who owed him “*an hundred pence*” (Matt 18:28). The Lord warned: “*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses*” (Matt 18:35). Since Christians have received forgiveness for great sins committed against God, we must also forgive others for lesser sins committed against us.

THOUGHT: Is there someone whom I need to forgive?

PRAYER: Lord, may I forgive the way Thou hast forgiven me.

THURSDAY, MAY 14

GENESIS 50:15-21

ROMANS 12:14-21

*“Vengeance is mine;
I will repay, saith the Lord.”*

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (4)

When we find it hard to forgive, think of Joseph, the favourite son of the patriarch Jacob. Sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt, Joseph was falsely accused by his master’s wife and imprisoned for a crime he did not commit. He spent the prime years of his young life as a condemned criminal in the prison of a strange land, separated from his family.

Though his brothers had grievously wronged him, Joseph bore no grudge against them. When they sought his pardon after their father’s death, Joseph graciously forgave and even comforted them: *“And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them”* (Gen 50:19-21).

Recognising the providential hand of God in his sufferings, Joseph told his brothers that he was in no position to judge them – *“for am I in the place of God?”*

Let us learn from Joseph’s example. View every offence in the light of God’s sovereignty. It is only with His permission that someone can hurt or offend us.

Like Joseph, we must submit to God’s will and forgive, whether or not we see His divine purpose for our sufferings. Like him, let us also trust in the sovereignty of God. Do not retaliate but leave the injustice to God (Rom 12:19-21). Remember the exhortation to do good to our enemies, to *“overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:21).

THOUGHT: How do I respond when someone offends or hurts me?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to submit to Thy will in times of affliction.

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (5)

The Bible tells us that “*the merciful man doeth good to his own soul*” (Prov 11:17a). One who forgives others is spiritually healthy, for he has peace with God and with man. He is a happy man because he has obeyed God by extending grace to others.

While “*the merciful man doeth good to his own soul,*” the unmerciful man is filled with “self-generated” misery: “*but he that is cruel troubleth his own flesh*” (Prov 11:17b). Angry feelings harboured in the heart will surface again and again to torment our spirit, leading us to bitterness, and stirring us to “get even.” Frequent dwelling on the injury magnifies the offence so that it is constantly kept in focus. Deep within, the unrest grows with each passing day. Resentment, built up over the years, can cause health problems as the gall of bitterness within eats us up.

It is our wrong response to an injury that harms us most. One writer aptly comments: “It is not what other people do to us that harms us – it is our own reaction to that injury. No one can really harm us but ourselves. They may falsely accuse us.... They may even do us bodily harm, but none of these things can really injure us unless we permit them to goad us into growing bitter and resentful, and into an attempt at getting even or at revenge.”

We may not be able to control the words and actions of others against us, but with God’s help, we can control our own reactions. We can choose to love and forgive, or we can choose to be angry and vindictive. If we choose the latter, we make ourselves both bitter and miserable. But when we are willing to forgive, the Lord brings healing to our soul and frees us from a bitter, vengeful spirit. We thus enjoy His comforting presence and peace.

THOUGHT: “By revenge thou canst but satisfy a lust, but by forgiveness thou shalt conquer a lust.” (John Flavel)

PRAYER: Lord, free me from a bitter, vengeful spirit.

SATURDAY, MAY 16

MATTHEW 6:9-15

PSALM 51

“And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any...”

THE GRACE OF FORGIVENESS (6)

As Christians, our lives must be characterised by a spirit of love and forgiveness. To receive richly of God’s pardoning grace, and yet withhold forgiveness from another, reflects a hypocritical and ungracious spirit.

For the child of God, forgiving others is not an option. As God’s people who have been forgiven much, let us forgive all who have wronged us that we might reflect the love and grace of our Saviour through whom we have received the forgiveness of sins.

Let us forgive the way God has forgiven us – without holding anything against the one who has injured or hurt us. Indeed, there is some truth in this wise saying: “There is no point in burying a hatchet if you’re going to put a marker on the site” (www.brainyquote.com). When someone has offended us, let us not “put a marker on the site” and dig up the hatchet to nurse the hurt from time to time. If we do this, we will never be able to truly forgive the offender.

As mentioned earlier, forgiving others does not come naturally to our selfish, depraved hearts. We need to pray for ourselves – to be willing to obey God and to forgive. We also need to pray for those who have done us wrong, and for God to heal the strained relationship. Let us echo the prayer of the psalmist: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me*” (Ps 51:10). Rather than condemn the offender, we must look within our own hearts and pray for a right spirit to relate with God and man.

Remember that the Lord does not issue impossible commands (Phil 4:13). He will surely give us the grace and strength to forgive because that is His will for our lives.

THOUGHT: Forgiving another is hard, but I can do it with God’s help.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to get right with Thee by extending grace to others.

“EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER” (1)

Although the pages of the Old Testament are full of examples of intercessory power, the Apostle James singled out the prophet Elijah as an example of one whose prayer “*availeth much*” (James 5:16). Why did James use him as a pattern for earnest prayer? To find out, let us consider the prophet’s ministry and his two petitions.

Elijah (or Elias in the New Testament) was a ninth century prophet of Israel. His ministry, in the reign of King Ahab and King Ahaziah in the Northern Kingdom, was interspersed with miraculous manifestations of God’s power.

First petition

Elijah “... *prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months*” (James 5:17). Indignant over the idolatry and wickedness of the court and the people as a result of King Ahab’s marriage with the Tyrian princess, Jezebel, Elijah prayed that Jehovah would send a drought upon the land. God heard the prayer of His righteous servant, and closed the windows of heaven for three and a half years – “... *there had been no rain in the land*” (1 Kings 17:7).

Second petition

“*And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit*” (James 5:18). After God’s spectacular answer by fire, and the slaying of Baal’s prophets on Mount Carmel, Elijah wrestled for the fulfilment of God’s promise to send rain. Though the cloud did not appear immediately, he kept on praying. We note his expectancy as he sent his servant seven times to the mountain top to look out for God’s answer (1 Kings 18:42-43). Again God answered and “... *there was great rain*” (1 Kings 18:45).

THOUGHT: “We can pray, believe, and receive, or we can pray, doubt, and do without.” (Knight’s Treasury of Illustrations)

PRAYER: Lord, may I prevail with Thee in prayer.

MONDAY, MAY 18

JAMES 5:13-18

1 KINGS 19:1-8

*“Let us therefore come boldly
unto the throne of grace...”*

“EFFECTUAL FERVENT PRAYER” (2)

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Elijah, a righteous servant of God, prayed intensely, earnestly, believingly. God heard his prayers and answered His servant by sending a drought for three and a half years. God also responded to his second petition by sending rain.

James noted that, despite his eminence, Elijah was *“subject to like passions as we are ...”* (James 5:17). He was a mere man, with the same human weaknesses as others. He also had his secret faults and sinful tendencies.

Along with moments of great triumph, Elijah also experienced periods of fear, doubt and depression. Jezebel’s threat sent him scurrying into the wilderness; he was so fearful that he *“requested for himself that he might die”* (1 Kings 19:4).

“Do not think of Elias as some superhuman being, whose prevalent intercession with God you are forbidden to imitate. He was a fellow-man with you, and a sharer with you of all the infirmities of human nature” (Family Bible Notes).

Despite the prophet’s infirmities, great results followed his prayers. His example of fervent intercessory prayer should encourage us to pray likewise. Though we are men of *“like passions,”* we can still bring our petitions before the throne of grace. God promises to hear and to answer us.

Let us examine ourselves. How is our prayer life? Do we pray often? Do we pray with a believing heart? Do we pray earnestly and fervently? Do we intercede for others?

THOUGHT: What can I do to improve my prayer life?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to pray with an earnest and believing heart.

“BY FAITH ...”

Faith is an unwavering belief that God will fulfil His promises even before there is visible evidence to that effect (Heb 11:1). The Bible records accounts of many faithful saints who took God at His word and responded in obedience.

By faith: Abel offered *“a more excellent sacrifice”* (Heb 11:4); Noah built an ark *“being warned of God of things not seen as yet”* (Heb 11:7); Sarah received *“strength to conceive seed”* (Heb 11:11); Moses chose *“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season”* (Heb 11:25).

When called by God, Abraham obeyed and left his beloved homeland to go into *“a strange country”* (Heb 11:9). To comply with this command, three ties had to be severed – with his country, his kindred and his father’s house. The reasons for God’s call might not have been entirely clear to Abraham. But he trusted God to lead him to the new land. Abraham believed God and was justified before Him on account of his faith (Gen 15:6).

The patriarchs of old took God at His word and responded in obedience. They looked at the promises *“afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Heb 11:13). By faith, these godly saints were willing to endure affliction and suffering, having *“respect unto the recompense of the reward”* (Heb 11:26). They *“looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God”* (Heb 11:10).

THOUGHT: “God makes a promise. Faith believes it. Hope anticipates it. Patience awaits it.” (Knight’s Treasury of Illustrations)

PRAYER: Lord, *“increase our faith”* (Luke 17:5).

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (1)

Discipleship is a much-studied subject in today's churches and Bible groups. However, it is one thing to study the scriptural principles of discipleship, and quite another to apply these teachings in our daily lives.

What does it mean to be a disciple? What are the conditions of discipleship? Is every believer a disciple? Through a series of daily readings, we hope to find some answers to these critical questions.

The word "*disciple(s)*" appears about 260 times in the New Testament. "*Disciple*" ("*mathetes*" in Greek) is literally a "learner" or "pupil." From the Greek word, we get our English word, "mathematics." This means that a disciple progresses in knowledge and understanding "one step at a time" – gradually building up his faith and wisdom in the Holy Scriptures. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, "*For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little*" (Isa 28:10). This spiritual learning process takes time, effort, commitment and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Peter understood what it meant to follow the Lord: "*Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee*" (Mark 10:28). Note also how the other disciples – James and John – responded readily to the Lord's call (Mark 1:19-20).

In deciding to follow Christ, these simple fishermen forsook their vocation, even the security of their homes and families. Without doubt, theirs was a sacrificial, whole-hearted commitment to leave all and to follow the Lord.

THOUGHT: "*The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.*" (Matt 10:24)

PRAYER: Lord, may I be willing to forsake all to follow Thee.

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (2)

Sadly, not all followers are disciples. In Jesus' day, some people followed Him for personal gain: *“those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did,”* tried to *“take him by force, to make him a king”* (John 6:14-15). Examining the context of these verses, we realise that this specific group of people had witnessed, and had benefited from, Jesus' feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. They wanted a king like Jesus who could meet their physical needs. They were also hoping that Jesus might deliver them from Roman bondage.

Not surprisingly, these followers, who sought the Lord for their own selfish ends, left Him when His teachings offended them. We are told that many *“went back, and walked no more with him”* (John 6:66).

Indeed, the way of true discipleship is an unpopular one. This truth was affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 7:13-14: *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

The way to Heaven is narrow and few find it. But the way to death and Hell is broad, and multitudes walk in it. Following their sinful inclinations, many enter the broad highway and head towards eternal damnation. Isaac Watts, the hymn writer, rightly reflected this sentiment:

*Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
But wisdom shows a narrower path,
With here and there a traveller.*

THOUGHT: Can I say with Peter, *“we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God”?* (John 6:69)

PRAYER: Lord, may I follow Thee with a true and loving heart.

CONDITONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (3)

The way Jesus dealt with the fickle and impressionable multitudes is the exact opposite of today’s en masse evangelism. Instead of highlighting the benefits and blessings, the thrills and excitement of being His disciples, Jesus spoke more of the sacrifices, hardships and persecutions they would have to endure. Our Saviour used the strongest terms to tell them of the exacting demands of discipleship:

1. Allegiance

*“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, **he cannot be my disciple**” (Luke 14:26).*

Was Jesus contradicting Himself here? Does not God’s Word command that we should obey, love and honour our parents? (Eph 6:1-3). We may think that “*hate*” as used here sounds harsh. However, the word is used in a relative, not in an absolute, sense. It means simply “to love (less) in terms of priority.” We can be disciples only if we love the Lord more than even those dearest to us (Matt 10:37).

Following Christ may, at times, involve a clash of loyalties. Because of a believer’s faith in Christ, his family may turn against him. Jesus had this in mind when He said; *“Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household”* (Matt 10:34-36). When loved ones challenge our loyalty to Christ, our allegiance must be to the Lord.

THOUGHT: In my heart, is there an unrivalled love for Christ my Saviour?

PRAYER: Lord, may I love Thee with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength.

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (4)

2. Self-denial

The disciple must love Christ even more than his own life: *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, **yea, and his own life also**, he cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:26). *“If any man will come after me, **let him deny himself...**”* (Luke 9:23a).

Self-preservation or self-love is part of human nature. But our love for Christ must triumph over this instinctive self-love. A true disciple must be prepared to *“deny himself.”* We may ask, “Is Jesus demanding too much from me?” Not at all! Think of how much Christ has sacrificed for us. He left the glories of Heaven for this sinful world. Our Saviour was made *“sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”* (2 Cor 5:21). He *“endured the cross, despising the shame”* (Heb 12:2); He submitted to God’s will and *“became obedient unto death”* (Phil 2:8). Through Christ’s redemptive work, we have the blessings of salvation, a glorious inheritance in Heaven and a truly abundant life upon earth.

Self-denial means putting God’s will above our own desires; if what the Lord requires of us clashes with our own will, we say “no” to ourselves and “yes” to Him. We must be willing to forgo comforts, conveniences, things or people we love, for the sake of Christ.

We must also be willing to deal with our depraved nature. The Apostle Paul exhorted the Colossians to *“put off the old man with his deeds”* – our sinful tendencies like anger, malice, evil speaking, lying – and to *“put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him”* – mercies, kindness, humility, patience, love, peace and thankfulness (Col 3:8-17).

THOUGHT: Have I been daily dying to self?

PRAYER: “O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend” (John E Bode).

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (5)

3. Suffering

(a) Persecutions

*"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, **and take up his cross daily, and follow me**" (Luke 9:23).*

What did Jesus mean by taking up "*his cross*"? Whole-hearted commitment to Christ carries with it a high price. In Jesus' day, criminals and rebels were crucified. The people, therefore, understood the significance of Jesus' statements – the cross stood for shame, suffering and even death.

To "*take up his cross daily*" indicates a willingness to bear the scorn and hatred of the world – for the sake of Christ. Did not our Lord tell His disciples to expect persecutions because of their commitment to Him (John 15:18-20)? As His witnesses, we may face situations at home, in our place of work or school where we must uphold our Christian beliefs. Let us not compromise our faith or convictions in any way. Let us determine in our hearts to be true to our Lord even if it means ridicule or rejection by the world.

(b) Hardships

*"So likewise, **whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple**" (Luke 14:33).*

Christ's disciples must be prepared to suffer hardships and to be deprived of life's conveniences and pleasures. Missionaries like William Carey and David Livingstone endured unbelievable hardships to take the Gospel to foreign lands.

THOUGHT: Are we willing to suffer hardships for our Lord who has given His all for us?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to stand firm in my faith.

MONDAY, MAY 25

LUKE 9:57-62

MARK 10:17-31

*“Let the dead bury their
dead: but go thou and
preach the kingdom of God.”*

CONDITIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP (6)

4. Single-mindedness

Someone approached Jesus and said, *“Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house”* (Luke 9:61). With hard words, Jesus answered him: *“No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:62). To keep a straight furrow, the farmer must fix his eyes on the plough. Looking away would result in a marred furrow. Similarly, when we follow Christ, there must be no turning back. Half-heartedness and a divided loyalty make one unfit for discipleship.

We may say, “These terms of discipleship are too demanding. It is too hard for me to renounce the things that are dear to my heart.” When Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all that he had and to give it all to the poor, he *“went away grieved: for he had great possessions”* (Mark 10:22) – he could not part with them.

The rewards of following Christ far outweigh the cost of doing so. Those who remain true to the end will be richly compensated. Read Jesus’ response to His disciples: *“And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life”* (Matt 19:29).

Brethren, let us be faithful disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us resolve to love Him with all our hearts, to deny ourselves, to endure suffering, and to single-mindedly follow Him.

THOUGHT: *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”* (Luke 9:58)

PRAYER: Lord, let nothing deter me from following Thee all the days of my life.

TUESDAY, MAY 26

JOSHUA 9:1-15

PROVERBS 3:5-8

*“Trust in the LORD with all
thine heart; and lean not unto
thine own understanding.”*

LESSONS FROM THE GIBEONITES (1)

At the time of the Israelite invasion of Canaan, Gibeon was an important city, the chief of four towns occupied by the Canaanites (Josh 9:17). The Gibeonites first made their appearance in Joshua chapter 9 when they approached Israel to make a league with them. Alarmed by the tidings of Israel’s recent victories over Jericho and Ai, the Canaanite visitors knew better than to contend directly with Israel who had the Almighty God on their side. Thus, they came “*wilily*” (v 4) to secure a treaty of peace and servitude with Joshua and the elders of Israel.

Claiming that they had come from a distant land, their offer to subjugate themselves to serve Israel was a tempting prospect: “*We are thy servants. ... From a very far country thy servants are come because of the name of the LORD thy God: for we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt*” (vv 8-9). To mislead Israel’s leaders, they produced evidence to support their case. Their bread – freshly-baked at the start of their journey – was now dry and mouldy, while their new wine bottles had become old and broken. Likewise, their garments and shoes, which had once been new, were now worn and torn (vv 11-13). Very craftily, the Gibeonites related the history of Israel’s past victories over the Egyptians and the kings of Heshbon and Bashan (vv 9-10). However, they prudently omitted the Jews’ recent victories over the cities of Jericho and Ai (v 3). That would have given them away.

The Gibeonites’ ingenious plan in seeking a peace treaty caused Israel’s leadership to fall prey to their deception. We are told in verse 14: “*And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the LORD.*” Sadly, “*Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them*” (v 15). The leaders trusted in their own judgment; they had failed to look to the Lord for guidance.

THOUGHT: How would I have reacted in the same situation?

PRAYER: Lord, may I look to Thee to direct me each day.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 27

JOSHUA 9:16-23

JOSHUA 10:1-11

“... *He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.*”

LESSONS FROM THE GIBEONITES (2)

After three days, Israel discovered to their consternation that the Gibeonites had tricked them (Josh 9:16). The people murmured but Israel’s leaders remained true to their word: “*This we will do to them; we will even let them live, lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we swear unto them*” (v 20). For their fraud, Joshua sentenced the Gibeonites to a life of servitude – they would serve as “*bondmen, and hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God*” (v 23). Much wood was needed not only to keep the altar fire burning but also to boil the flesh for the peace offerings, etc. Water had to be drawn for the washings prescribed by the law. These and other servile work which were the duties of the Levites, the Gibeonites were assigned to do.

Grateful that their new masters had spared them, the Gibeonites submitted willingly to the menial service imposed by Joshua: “*And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do*” (v 25).

How do we view the conduct of the Gibeonites? There was a mixture of good and evil in their conduct. Their deception of Israel’s leaders cannot be justified; we must not do evil that good may come.

Joshua and the princes of Israel honoured the oath they had made to the Gibeonites. On their part, the Gibeonites stood true to their league with Israel; they did not recant when they were subsequently attacked by the Amorite kings. Instead, they sought help from Joshua to deliver them from their plight.

As God’s people, let us be faithful to honour our promises and to keep our word.

THOUGHT: “... *but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*” (James 5:12)

PRAYER: Lord, grant me grace to be true to my word.

LESSONS FROM THE GIBEONITES (3)

The work of the Gibeonites as *“hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of ... God”* (Josh 9:23) was mundane and strenuous in nature. However, serving and staying close to the Tabernacle, and later Solomon’s Temple, gave them a small place in the religious life of Israel. It was a privilege none of the other Canaanites or Gentiles ever possessed.

One significant mark which the Gibeonites made upon Israel occurred during the three-year famine in King David’s reign. In response to the king’s enquiry, the Lord answered: *“It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites”* (2 Sam 21:1).

Though not recorded in Scriptures, David’s predecessor, King Saul, must have at some time or other slaughtered the Gibeonites. “The sacred history has not recorded either the time or the reason of this massacre. Some think that they were sufferers in the atrocity perpetrated by Saul at Nob (1 Sam 22:19), where many of them may have resided as attendants of the priests; while others suppose it more probable that the attempt was made afterwards, with a view to regain the popularity he had lost throughout the nation by that execrable outrage” (J F Brown Commentary).

Whatever the reason, Saul had committed a grave act of atrocity. The Gibeonites had been serving the Israelites as perpetual bondmen since the time of Joshua. In their position of servitude, the Gibeonites faithfully carried out their assigned tasks as *“hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of ... God.”* By his murderous deed, Saul had not only shed innocent blood, but also violated the solemn oath which Israel had made to protect the Gibeonites under the peace covenant.

THOUGHT: Am I oppressed? I must trust the Lord to vindicate me.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Thou art my all-knowing and righteous Judge.

LESSONS FROM THE GIBEONITES (4)

Because of Saul’s massacre of the Gibeonites and the violation of the peace covenant with them, God chastised the nation of Israel with a sore famine.

To set things right, King David asked the Gibeonites how he might atone for the wanton slaughter of their people: “*What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?*” (2 Sam 21:3). The Gibeonites gave an honourable answer – they required no monetary compensation: “*neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel*” (v 4). But they requested that “*the man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose*” (vv 5-6).

“*I will give them*” (v 6) – David agreed as it was a reasonable demand based on the simple principle of “lex talionis” under the law of Moses (Exod 21:23-25).

Not only was the demand of the Gibeonites reasonable; it was also fair. They could have applied Moses’ law and grasped the opportunity to be discharged from their servitude in compensation for the wrong done to them: “*And if a man smite the eye of his servant, ... he shall let him go free for his eye’s sake*” (Exod 21:26). But they did not. They required no lives but those of Saul’s family. He had wronged them, and therefore his children would have to pay for his sin. Neither did they impose upon David to do the execution – they would take it upon themselves: “*we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul*” (2 Sam 21:6).

THOUGHT: Am I honourable in all my ways?

PRAYER: Lord, may I be fair and considerate in all my dealings.

SATURDAY, MAY 30

2 SAMUEL 21:1-9

PSALM 37:1-11

*“Fret not thyself
because of evildoers...”*

LESSONS FROM THE GIBEONITES (5)

As agreed, King David delivered seven of Saul’s sons to the Gibeonites to be hanged for the sin of their father – the two sons of Rizpah and the five sons of Michal. David however spared Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan: *“But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD’S oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul”* (2 Sam 21:7).

The Gibeonites hanged all the seven of them *“in the hill before the LORD”* (v 9). Some commentators were of the view that the number seven spelt a perfect or complete sacrifice to atone for Saul’s sin. Thus, Israel was restored unto the Lord.

What further lessons can we learn from the Gibeonites?

Though they suffered grievous injuries at the hand of Saul, the Gibeonites silently bore this wrong until the Lord vindicated them through the three-year famine upon Israel. Patiently and faithfully, they went about their duties. “They had many years remained silent, had not appealed to David, nor given the kingdom any disturbance with their complaints or demands; and now, at length, God speaks for them” (Matthew Henry).

Their demands for compensation were fair, reasonable and considerate. When we are wronged, let us learn to wait upon the Lord who will vindicate His children.

We also learn that God does not take the breaking of an oath lightly. Even the royal blood of Saul’s family had to be shed to atone for the blood of the Gibeonites, though they were but subservient vassals to Israel.

THOUGHT: *“For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be ...”*
(Ps 37:10)

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to wait patiently upon Thee.

PSALM 16: “A GOLDEN PSALM” (1)

Many commentators regard Psalm 16 as a “golden” psalm because it is “a psalm of surpassing excellence, and worthy of being written in letters of gold ... It has been the usual plan of commentators to apply the psalm both to David, to the saints, and to the Lord Jesus, but we will venture to believe that in it ‘Christ is all;’ since in the ninth and tenth verses, like the apostles on the mount, we can see ‘no man but Jesus only’” (Treasury of David).

It is generally believed that David wrote this psalm when he was a fugitive fleeing from the relentless pursuit of King Saul. In verses 1 and 2, David declared his unwavering trust in the Lord alone. Being separated from family and friends, David found comfort and refuge in the Lord – “*for in thee do I put my trust*” (v 1).

1. Do good to the saints

The psalmist acknowledged that even if there were any good in him, “*my goodness extendeth not to thee*” (v 2). In other words, the all-sufficient God does not need our goodness, help or service.

Our “goodness” is to be extended “*to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight*” (v 3), and it is by God’s grace that He enables us to do good. Hence, we must thank the Lord when we are able to do any good.

The communion of saints is one of the means of grace. Let us seek the Lord together as His people with one heart and one mind. Gather often in the name of the Lord to hear His Word, to pray and to fellowship with one another. May we “*do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10).

THOUGHT: “*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ...*” (Rom 12:10)

PRAYER: Lord, may I be a blessing to my brethren.

MONDAY, JUNE 1

PSALM 16

EPHESIANS 5:1-13

*“Thou shalt have
no other gods before me.”*

PSALM 16: “A GOLDEN PSALM” (2)

2. Warnings against idolatry

David warned against hastening “*after another god*” (v 4). This might have reference to King Saul who had consulted the witch of Endor when he was deeply troubled by the invading Philistine hosts. His inquiries of the Lord had brought him no answer (1 Sam 28:5-6). In doing so, Saul had transgressed his own edict against “*those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards*” (1 Sam 28:3).

“Often we hear of Christians who, in moments of desperation, yield to their friends’ suggestion to visit mediums and ‘bomohs.’ The end result is disastrous” [*Meditations from Psalms* by Rev (Dr) Timothy Tow]. In the case of King Saul, he paid with his life for the folly of seeking “*after another god*”: “*So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it*” (1 Chron 10:13).

“*Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god*” (v 4a). Those who worship idols will have their sorrows multiplied, and will bring upon themselves judgment from the true God whom they have forsaken. Their cherished idols will become bitter portions, causing disappointment and sorrow.

Brethren, let us learn from the psalmist. Determine to have no fellowship with idolators: “*Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips*” (Ps 16:4b). Separate from them and “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*” (Eph 5:11).

THOUGHT: Are there idols in my life that I must forsake?

PRAYER: Lord, may I love and worship only Thee.

PSALM 16: “A GOLDEN PSALM” (3)

3. A goodly heritage

Like the Levites, David claimed the Lord to be his inheritance (Deut 10:9). Trusting the Lord as his sufficiency, he had no lack nor desire for anything more. “*My cup*” (v 5) has the idea of comfort, refreshment and happiness which can be found only in the Lord.

The “*lot*” and “*lines*” (vv 5-6) refer to the measuring and delineation of an inheritance. We can, like David, rejoice in the Lord for the “*goodly heritage*” He has bestowed upon us. This not only refers to the rich blessings we enjoy as God’s children here on earth, but also to our heavenly mansion which Christ our Saviour has gone to prepare for us (John 14:2).

We thank God also for the divine counsel from His Word, even “*in the night seasons*” – when our way seems dark and drear (v 7). Small wonder then, that the psalmist reiterated his determination – to “*set the LORD always before me*” so that he would “*not be moved*” (v 8).

4. The hope of the resurrection

The psalm has a Messianic perspective, particularly in verses 8 to 11. The psalmist rejoiced in the Messiah who had conquered the grave, and had given him the hope of the resurrection (vv 9-10). Quoting from this psalm, the Apostle Paul preached on the glorious message of the Messiah’s resurrection: “*that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*” (Acts 13:38-39).

THOUGHT: What will it be like to be in the eternal presence of my Saviour?

PRAYER: O Lord, I thank Thee for the blessed hope of eternity with Thee.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

LUKE 16:19-31

MATTHEW 7:13-23

“...what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER'S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (1)

Many today do not believe in a literal Heaven and Hell. These sceptics believe that there is no life after death, and that the soul is annihilated upon death. Others believe that there is life after death in that one is “re-incarnated” or “reborn,” hopefully, into a better or higher form of life. These views are contrary to Holy Scriptures as God’s Word speaks of both Heaven and Hell. The Lord wants us to know in no uncertain terms that these two eternal destinations exist. They are real, not legendary places or figments of man’s imagination.

The Bible clearly teaches that there are two ways: the broad road that leads to destruction (eternal damnation in Hell) and the strait and narrow way that leads to life (eternal life in Heaven). *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”* (Matt 7:13-14).

Some people think little of the existence of Heaven. They believe “death is the end-all.” However, the Bible teaches that only our physical body perishes at death, but the soul lives on forever.

Consider the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. While they lived, one was a poor but saintly beggar; the other a rich but heartless man. One had faith in God; the other had no eternal concerns. When both died, they went their separate ways. Lazarus was carried by angels into God’s place of rest, while the rich man woke up in Hell. Lazarus was comforted in “*Abraham’s bosom*” while the rich man was tormented in the eternal fires of Hell (Luke 16:19-31).

THOUGHT: “One way God said to get to Heaven, Jesus is the only Way.”

PRAYER: Lord, may I live each day with eternity’s values in view.

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

1 PETER 1:3-9

JOHN 14:1-14

*“For our conversation is in heaven;
from whence also we look for
the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER’S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (2)

Heaven is the eternal abode of the redeemed – those who have been bought by the precious blood of the Saviour. There is no way one can enter Heaven but through Christ alone: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”* (John 14:6). None can save himself by his own merit or good works for *“there is none righteous, no, not one”* (Rom 3:10). None can ever get to Heaven but by the grace of God alone (Eph 2:8-9).

Our hope of Heaven is founded not on speculation or wishful thinking, but on our Saviour’s words of authority. Think of His wonderful promise of preparing a place in Heaven and His return for us: *“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:2-3).

In his epistle, the Apostle Peter assured the suffering brethren that God in *“his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”* (1 Pet 1:3-4).

On our own, we cannot make it safely to Heaven. But our gracious God does not leave us to ourselves. He has given us the Holy Spirit who inclines our hearts heavenward that we may set our affections on things above (Col 3:1-2). The Holy Spirit – *“the earnest of our inheritance”* (Eph 1:14) – has sealed us *“unto the day of redemption”* (Eph 4:30). Our earthly sojourn may be long and hazardous but the Spirit of God sees to our safety till we finally reach our heavenly home.

THOUGHT: “One way to reach those pearly mansions, Jesus is the only Way.”

PRAYER: Lord, lead me safely to my heavenly home.

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER’S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (3)

When we speak about Heaven, we usually refer to the dwelling place of God. The phrase “heaven and earth” generally refers to the whole universe – the world we live in, the world created by God: “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). We are told in Acts 17:24 that “*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.*”

However, there are other notions of the word “Heaven” (adapted from Easton Bible Dictionary).

1. The firmament where the “*fowl of the heaven*” (Gen 7:23 cf. Gen 2:19; 7:3; Ps 8:8) and the “*eagles of the heaven*” fly freely (Lam 4:19).
2. The starry heavens (Deut 17:3; Jer 8:2; Matt 24:29). The word may also refer to the stratosphere or ionosphere – what the astronomers term “the Milky Way” with its galaxy of heavenly bodies (the sun, moon, stars and the other planets) spread across outer space. “*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork*” (Ps 19:1).

The old patriarch Abraham was directed by God to look to the heavens: “*And he (God) brought him (Abraham) forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be*” (Gen 15:5). In the same way, Job was told by his friend Elihu to “*look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou*” (Job 35:5).

THOUGHT: What attributes of God do we see in the heavens?

PRAYER: I praise Thee, O God, that Thou art the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER'S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (4)

3. “*The heaven of heavens*” or “*the third heaven*” (Deut 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Ps 115:16; 148:4; 2 Cor 12:2). This refers to the upper heaven, the invisible realm and abode of God and His angels.

Solomon spoke of Heaven as God’s dwelling: “*Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place*” (1 Kings 8:30). This was the place where Christ ascended to intercede for His people: “*Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*” (Rom 8:34; cf. Heb 8:1; Heb 9:24).

The Apostle Paul referred to “*the third heaven*” or “*paradise*” when he described his experience of being caught up to behold its unspeakable glories (2 Cor 12:2-4).

Heaven admits all who turn to the Lord in repentance. It is the eternal home of the redeemed. Heaven is a glorious city that is “*incorruptible ... undefiled ... fadeth not away*” (1 Pet 1:4). It is not subject to change or decay.

Abraham saw Heaven as “*a better country*” (Heb 11:16) and looked “*for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:10). Let us, like the patriarch, see ourselves as “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 11:13). May we not love this world with all its earthly pursuits and pleasures. By faith, let us live each day for the Lord and look towards our future glorious inheritance laid up for us in Heaven.

THOUGHT: “*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*” (1 Cor 2:9)

PRAYER: Lord, help me set my affections on things above.

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER'S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (5)

We have often heard stories of the mysteries of Heaven. But until we get there, we will never fully understand the glories and wonders of our eternal Home. What we know is only what God has chosen to reveal to us (Deut 29:29). Though we know little about Heaven, we who are God's redeemed can "*rejoice, because your names are written in heaven*" (Luke 10:20). Let us therefore set our "*affection on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Col 3:2).

Many songs have been written about Heaven, our glorious eternal home. One popular chorus goes like this:

*"Heaven is a wonderful place,
Filled with glory and grace.
I want to see my Saviour's face,
Heaven is a wonderful place."*

What is so wonderful about Heaven?

1. Heaven shines with the glory of God

There is no darkness in Heaven, for God's glory will illumine it: "*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*" (Rev 21:23).

John the apostle was given a glimpse of Heaven's unsurpassed beauty and unspeakable glories when he was carried "*in the spirit to a great and high mountain*" and shown "*that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal*" (Rev 21:10-11).

THOUGHT: "*...God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*" (1 John 1:5b)

PRAYER: Lord, I await the day when I shall see Thee face to face.

MONDAY, JUNE 8

HEBREWS 9:24-28

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

“Where Jesus is,
‘tis Heaven there.”

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER’S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (6)

2. We will be in the presence of the Lord

In Heaven, Jesus sits enthroned at “*the right hand of the Majesty on high*” (Heb 1:3). “*For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Heb 9:24).

Labouring under the burdens of the ministry, the apostle Paul yearned to find rest in the Lord’s presence – to be “*present with the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:8). He expressed this same heart’s desire in his epistle to the Philippian Christians: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better*” (Phil 1:21, 23).

“Those who know the value of Christ and heaven will readily acknowledge it far better to be in heaven than to be in this world, to be with Christ than to be with any creature; for in this world we are compassed about with sin, born to trouble, born again to it; but, if we come to be with Christ, farewell sin and temptation, farewell sorrow and death, for ever” (Matthew Henry).

“*Soon will the Lord, my life appear;
Soon shall I end my trials here,
Leave sin and sorrow, death and pain,
To live is Christ – to die is gain*”

(Daily Remembrancer)

Like the Apostle Paul, we all have our struggles in life. Do we sometimes grow weary and long for our heavenly home? Do we wish that we could be “*present with the Lord*”?

THOUGHT: May the thought of heaven brighten my pilgrim way.

PRAYER: Lord, I look forward to being in the presence of my Saviour.

HEAVEN: THE BELIEVER'S GLORIOUS INHERITANCE (7)

3. We will enjoy a new and blessed state in Heaven

Since man's fall into sin, there has not been a single moment when the world has been free from sin, sorrow or strife. Many are the sources of heartaches and tears here on earth – ill health, job or financial losses, bereavements, disappointments. But in Heaven, God our tender Father will wipe away all the tears of His children. The sorrows and corruptions of earth will be forever left behind – *“for the former things are passed away”* (Rev 21:4).

There will be no more debilitating illnesses which cause pain and suffering. There will be no more death. Elaborating on this, Albert Barnes made some pertinent comments: “In all that future world of glory, not one shall ever die; not a grave shall ever be dug! What a view do we begin to get of heaven, when we are told there shall be no ‘death’ there! How different from earth, where death is so common; where it spares no one; where our best friends die; where the wise, the good, the useful, the lovely die; where fathers, mothers, wives, husbands, sons, daughters, all die; where we habitually feel that we must die. . . . They will never follow a friend to the tomb, nor fear that an absent friend is dead. The slow funeral procession will never be witnessed there; nor will the soil ever open its bosom to furnish a grave.”

We conclude with a stanza from the meaningful hymn “Is my name written there?” by Mary Kidder:

*“O that beautiful City with its mansions of light,
With its glorified beings in pure garments of white;
Where no evil thing cometh to despoil what is fair,
Where the angels are watching – yes, my name’s written there.”*

THOUGHT: Heaven – Is my name written there?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that my inheritance is *“reserved in heaven”* (1 Pet 1:4).

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

LUKE 7:1-10

MATTHEW 8:5-13

*“Put on therefore, as the elect
of God, holy and beloved,
bowels of mercies, kindness...”*

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION’S SERVANT (1)

This particular miracle – which is also recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 – is unique in that the Lord restored a dying man to full health without even meeting or touching him. We note that the centurion sent the Jewish elders to plead on his behalf before the Lord. Perhaps, as a Gentile, the centurion felt that the Jewish elders might have more influence with the Lord Jesus.

What lessons can we glean from this miraculous healing of the centurion’s servant? In particular, what can we learn from the character and conduct of the centurion?

1. His kindness

We note a close relationship between the master and his servant. Obviously, the centurion had other servants to attend to him and his family. Yet this dying servant was *“dear unto him”* (Luke 7:2). We read that the centurion was so concerned for his servant’s recovery that he *“sent unto him (Jesus) the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant”* (v 3).

The centurion’s kindness is also reflected in his treatment of the Jews. As a Roman military officer who had one hundred men under his command, the centurion occupied a high position among the people. Yet he did not despise his Jewish subjects.

The elders who came to Jesus testified of the centurion’s love for their nation. When they needed a place of worship in Capernaum, he built them a synagogue (vv 4-5).

Like the centurion, let us show love, kindness and respect to our fellow men, even to those of low estate.

THOUGHT: Be ready always to offer help and to do good.

PRAYER: Lord, help me be Thy effective witness by my kind and loving deeds.

THE HEALING OF THE CENTURION’S SERVANT (2)

2. His humility

Having heard the Jewish elders’ plea, “*Jesus went with them*” (v 6). Word must have reached the centurion that Jesus had acceded to his request and was on His way to heal his sick servant. But the centurion considered himself unworthy of the honour of having Jesus come under his roof (Luke 7:6-8). His expressions of unworthiness are a sharp contrast to the language used by the Jewish elders who pleaded on his behalf: “*he was worthy for whom he should do this*” (v 4). Though a well-respected leader who was “*worthy*” in the eyes of the Jews, the centurion possessed a humble spirit.

3. His faith

The centurion’s faith is beautifully illustrated in his simple request to the Lord: “*but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed*” (v 7b). Knowing the Lord as one who had miraculous power over diseases, he felt it unnecessary for Jesus to come personally to heal his servant. Being a man of authority himself, the Roman centurion knew that those under him would carry out his every instruction without question (v 8). Likewise, just a word of command from Jesus – even from a distance – would suffice to restore his dying servant to full health. So great was his faith in the power of Christ!

The centurion’s faith won the commendation of the Lord who “ *marvelled at him*” before the crowd: “*I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*” (v 9). His faith was even more remarkable when compared to the Jews’ who were God’s chosen people and had been given more light and means of grace (Rom 9:4-5). Jesus honoured the centurion’s faith and healed his servant (v 10).

THOUGHT: “*Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matt 5:3)

PRAYER: Lord, help me follow the example of the centurion in his humility and faith.

THERE IS HOPE WHEN GOD CHASTENETH (1)

One way God teaches His children is through the rod of discipline, for our good. As our Heavenly Father, He desires to make us earnest in our pursuit of holiness; to make our consciences tender, and our hearts sensitive to sin. His designs are to show us our corruptions and to sanctify us. Some portions of this series of meditations are gleaned from the book “When God’s children suffer” by Horatius Bonar.

God’s chastisements may cause pain and grief but they work together for our temporal and eternal good: “*Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby*” (Heb 12:11).

Bonar elaborates: “God knows exactly what we need and how to supply it. He knows what evils are to be found in us, and how these may be best removed. His training is no random work. It is carried on with exquisite skill. The time and the way and the instrument are all according to the perfect wisdom of God. The fittest time is chosen, just the very moment when discipline is called for, and when it would be most profitable. ... The instrument which will be surest yet safest, most effectual yet least painful, is brought into operation. For all is wisdom in the discipline of God.”

We thank God that He deals with us in mercy, even when applying the rod (Hab 3:2). On our part, let us examine our lives. Have ease and prosperity dulled our spiritual senses? Have we become cold, careless and complacent? Perhaps we have not submitted to the will of God, or have clung too tightly to the things we love. Perhaps we have gone our own wilful way. Let us get right with the Lord lest He apply the rod of correction to turn us back to Him.

THOUGHT: “God is correcting you in love – not smiting in wrath.”
(Arthur Pink)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Thy discipline is for my profit and instruction.

THERE IS HOPE WHEN GOD CHASTENETH (2)

Let us consider some biblical examples of responses to God’s discipline. What lessons can we learn from them?

1. The Lord allowed Israel to face hardships in the wilderness: “*And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee*” (Deut 8:2, 5).

When thus tested, the Israelites murmured against God. They began to question: “Is He our loving God? Why has He thus afflicted us?”

2. The Apostle Paul, however, reflected a submissive spirit; he humbly accepted the “*thorn in the flesh*” from the Lord’s hand as a guard against spiritual pride. “*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure*” (2 Cor 12:7). We do not know what the affliction was. We are told, however, that the Apostle besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from him (2 Cor 12:8). But the Lord answered His suffering servant: “*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness*” (2 Cor 12:9).

When smitten by our loving Heavenly Father, let us look beyond the rod to the all-wise and gracious Hand that wields it.

THOUGHT: Look upon afflictions as proofs of God’s paternal love.

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn precious lessons from Thy rod of discipline.

THERE IS HOPE WHEN GOD CHASTENETH (3)

How should we respond to God's discipline?

1. *"Despise not ... nor faint"*

We are not to harbour a haughty spirit that mocks at the rod or a stubborn will that refuses to bow down. *"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him"* (Heb 12:5).

Let us not sink into despondency but bear up patiently under the chastising hand of God. "The smitten one concludes that it is more than he can possibly endure. His heart fails him; darkness swallows him up; the sun of hope is eclipsed, and the voice of thanksgiving is silent" (Arthur Pink). Like David, let us look to the Lord (Ps 42:5) in times of affliction.

2. Repent of our sins

Whenever God's hand is laid upon us, ask the Lord to show us how we have sinned. Search our depraved hearts for areas of disobedience or rebellion. Like Job, let us pray: *"cause me to understand wherein I have erred... shew me wherefore thou contendest with me"* (Job 6:24; 10:2). Be open to receive God's instructions through our afflictions. Repent of our sins and seek the Lord's forgiveness (Ps 130:3-4).

When we are rebuked, we need to view God not only as a Father but as a Teacher. We can learn many precious lessons from God's chastisements if we cultivate a teachable spirit.

THOUGHT: How do I respond to God's chastising hand?

PRAYER: Lord, may I humbly accept and appreciate Thy correction.

THERE IS HOPE WHEN GOD CHASTENETH (4)

3. Submit to the Lord

Our sovereign God has a purpose for smiting His children. He does it for our well-being.

To His suffering children, God’s rod may seem to speak of His frown or anger, but “there is not a glance of vengeance in the Chastener’s eye, for He chastens in love for our own good. It is a correcting rod, not a destroying one. Its object is not to punish but to correct; not to hurt but to bless” (Horatius Bonar).

Let us therefore humbly submit to His correction, and allow the Lord to mould us through life’s afflictions (Rom 5:3-4).

How much we profit from the discipline of our Heavenly Father depends on the spirit in which we receive His rebukes. Those who are “*exercised*” under the divine rod are made “*partakers of his holiness*” (Heb 12:10) and bring forth “*the peaceable fruit of righteousness*” (Heb 12:11). Others who receive chastisement negatively, who murmur and lament, become despondent and disappointed.

Let us therefore take divine chastisement with a thankful heart. Like Eli, let us humbly respond: “*It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good*” (1 Sam 3:18).

May we learn to kiss the rod of correction. Pray for an obedient and teachable heart that our lives may be moulded for the glory of God and the blessing of our souls.

THOUGHT: Receive divine chastisement with a thankful heart.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to cultivate a submissive and teachable spirit.

TUESDAY, JUNE 16

GENESIS 6:1-12

GENESIS 5:21-32

*“But by the grace of God
I am what I am...”*

“NOAH WALKED WITH GOD” (1)

The tenth in descent from Adam, Noah was the son of Lamech and grandson of Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived (969 years old). Nothing is recorded of Noah till he was 500 years old when his first son was born (Gen 5:32). His three sons were Shem, Ham and Japheth. He was 600 years old when the flood came and he died at the age of 950 (Gen 7:6; 9:28-29).

Noah was born in a morally degenerative time and age. We are told three times in Genesis 6:11-12 that the earth had become very corrupt: *“The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.”*

His father Lamech named him “Noah” meaning “rest” – probably in the hope that he would be a blessing to his generation: *“This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed”* (Gen 5:29).

In describing his godly character, the Bible tells us that *“Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD”* (Gen 6:8). While his generation was corrupt, Noah maintained his integrity. He was upright in heart. God was displeased with the rest of the world, but He showed special favour to Noah. This truth “magnifies his grace towards Noah that he was made a vessel of God’s mercy when all mankind besides had become the generation of his wrath: ... Probably Noah did not find favour in the eyes of men; they hated and persecuted him, because both by his life and preaching he condemned the world. But he found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and this was honour and comfort enough” (Matthew Henry).

THOUGHT: How do I maintain my integrity in this corrupt world?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for sustaining my faith in this wicked and perverse generation.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17

GENESIS 6:5-14

ACTS 16:12-34

“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

“NOAH WALKED WITH GOD” (2)

Let us observe further the character of this godly man Noah. We are told that *“Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God”* (Gen 6:9). He was a *“just man and perfect,”* meaning he was upright before God and man. Like Enoch, Noah *“walked with God.”* He lived in close communion with the Lord. He strived to conform himself to God’s will, to please Him in every way and to be approved of Him.

Like the old patriarch, we live in a wicked and perverse generation. Do we maintain a clear Christian witness before the unbelieving world? Are we just and perfect in all our ways? Do we keep a close walk with the Lord? Do we seek to please the Lord and to do His will?

In contrast to Noah, the rest of the earth was corrupt and *“filled with violence”* (Gen 6:11). Their grievous corruption displeased God and He revealed to Noah His intent to destroy the earth (Gen 6:13).

To fulfil His purpose, God gave Noah precise instructions for the building of the ark which would be a sanctuary for his family and the thousands of animals during the Flood. The deluge would totally *“destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven”* (Gen 6:17 cf. 2 Pet 3:6). Every creature that had *“the breath of life”* would perish, but the Lord would preserve Noah and his family (Gen 7:1). We note an important biblical principle here. While God bestows His saving grace upon individuals, He is concerned for the salvation of their families as well. Examples of household salvation recorded in the New Testament are: Zacchaeus, Lydia, the Philippian jailor and their families (Luke 19:9; Acts 16:15; 16:34). This principle is aptly summarised in Acts 16:31: *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”*

THOUGHT: God is concerned for the salvation of my loved ones. Do I pray for them?

PRAYER: Lord, may I be like Noah, in character and conduct.

THURSDAY, JUNE 18

HEBREWS 11:1-7

MATTHEW 24:32-39

“But without faith it is impossible to please him ...”

“NOAH WALKED WITH GOD” (3)

Despite the ungodly influences around him, Noah stood firm in his faith. Like a shining beacon in his day, his faith is even more commendable because he walked faithfully with God in the midst of a corrupt and perverse world.

What were the days of Noah like? The Lord Jesus alluded to the days of Noah when He spoke of His second coming: *“But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be”* (Matt 24:37-39).

Noah was accounted righteous before the Lord. God, who sees the hearts of men, marked Noah out as one of the heroes of faith: *“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith”* (Heb 11:7).

What lessons of faith can we learn from this godly patriarch?

1. Noah believed God

God had warned Noah *“of things not seen as yet”* – that He would send a flood to destroy the whole earth. This warning was given a hundred and twenty years before the deluge, long before there were any natural signs of its occurrence. Taking God at His Word, Noah prepared an enormous sea-going vessel when there was as yet no water to float it. He obeyed God because he believed that the Lord would make good His Word.

THOUGHT: “God said it, that settles it, I believe it!”

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a believing heart even *“of things not seen as yet.”*

“NOAH WALKED WITH GOD” (4)

2. Noah stood alone in his faith

Except for his wife, and his three sons and their wives, there were no other believers. His friends and neighbours were sceptical when he warned them to turn away from their sins.

Despite their ridicule and rejection, Noah was undeterred. He did not allow the difficulty of the task, nor the length of time, nor the sneers of the unbelieving world to weaken his hands or discourage his heart from doing God's work. He continued to preach faithfully for one hundred and twenty years, calling upon his generation to repent and turn to God while there was yet time.

The Apostle Peter rightly called Noah “*a preacher of righteousness*” (2 Pet 2:5). But the faith of the “*preacher of righteousness*” was severely tested. For one hundred and twenty years, nothing happened! The deluge which God had promised did not come. “If a little flood had happened and moved his ark a little, he would have had some evidence for his faith; but there was no flood at all; and his ark lay high and dry for a century and a quarter!” (C H Spurgeon).

Noah's righteous life was a constant testimony and rebuke to his unbelieving neighbours. But sadly, at the end of it, not one of them entered the ark with him. We are told that only eight were saved – Noah and his family. The rest of the world perished in the flood!

Have we ever been rejected or ridiculed for our faith? Let us learn from Noah who stood faithful and undaunted amongst the scorners of his day.

THOUGHT: “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*” (Matt 5:11)

PRAYER: Lord, may I not fear the revilings of men for the Gospel's sake.

“NOAH WALKED WITH GOD” (5)

3. Noah obeyed God

God told Noah that the deluge would totally “*destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven*” (Gen 6:17). To provide a safe sanctuary for his family and the thousands of animals during the flood, God told Noah to build an ark according to His specific instructions.

God also told Noah to lead into the finished ark, animals of every kind: “*Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth*” (Gen 7:2-3). Noah fulfilled every order that God had issued him. We are told over and over again that he “*did according unto all that the LORD commanded him*” (Gen 7:5; see also Gen 6:22; 7:9, 16).

What was the result of Noah’s absolute obedience? He and his household were saved. God kept to His word, and honoured the faith and obedience of His godly servant (Gen 8:1).

Beloved, let us be like Noah in faith and obedience. Be conscious of our testimony before an unbelieving world. Though we live in a wicked and perverse generation, let us stand steadfast in our faith. Warn our fellowmen “*of things not seen as yet*” – the certainty of God’s wrath upon those who reject Him. Persuade them to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ – to enter the “Ark” while the door is yet open. May the Lord help us to be a shining light in this dark and wicked world.

THOUGHT: In what ways can I testify for the Lord at home and at work?

PRAYER: Lord, may I bear a good witness for Thee where Thou hast placed me.

ABRAHAM: A GODLY FATHER (1)

The Lord delights in a godly family that loves and honours Him. Let us consider the life of the patriarch Abraham. May we learn some precious lessons from the fine example of this godly father.

1. He was a faithful head of the home

Genesis 18:19 tells us that Abraham was faithful to his calling as a father and spiritual leader of the home: *“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”* The words that are used to describe Abraham reveal the man's very character. Indeed, he was a man of faith, aptly acknowledged both by the Jews and the Christian world as the “Father of faith.” A God-fearing man, Abraham treasured God's ways and directives.

Whilst man looks on the outside, God looked at Abraham's heart. God knew His servant as one who would *“command his children and his household after him.”* Note that Abraham not only catechised his children but his servants as well. Here we learn that masters of families must instruct and nurture those under their roof. Even the lowest servants have precious souls that must be cared for. As a man under divine authority, the patriarch was careful to pray for and with his family, to teach and rule them well. It was his great concern to preserve the godly heritage within his family even after he had passed on.

THOUGHT: How have I fulfilled my responsibilities as head of the home?

PRAYER: Lord, guide me to make my home one where Thou art feared, honoured and obeyed.

ABRAHAM: A GODLY FATHER (2)

2. He was a responsible father

Abraham became a father at the ripe old age of 85 when Ishmael was born. Fifteen years later, his second son, Isaac was born. Solemnly and faithfully he fulfilled his God-given responsibilities. He taught them to “*keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment*” (Gen 18:19). He taught his children obedience and godly fear as well as the importance of maintaining the same covenant relationship with the Lord (Gen 26:24-25).

3. He passed the test of faith

The incident on Mount Moriah reveals much about Abraham’s faith and devotion to God. In response to his son’s question about the sacrifice, Abraham replied that God would “*provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering*” (Gen 22:8). When Abraham “*laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood*” (Gen 22:9), Isaac did not resist nor argue with his father. As an obedient son, he willingly yielded himself to be the sacrifice. Evidently, Abraham had taught his son about obeying the Lord, even to the point of death. But God graciously provided a ram for a burnt offering, thus sparing Isaac’s life (Gen 22:13-14).

Abraham’s faith was severely tried but he passed the test with flying colours. By his willingness to sacrifice his “*only son*” (Gen 22:2, 12, 16), he showed that he loved the Lord more than he loved Isaac. Up on Mount Moriah, the faithful patriarch taught his young son the most precious lesson of all – that of absolute obedience to the Lord.

THOUGHT: If given a similar test of my faith, will I pass it?

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to obey Thee in all areas of my life.

ABRAHAM: A GODLY FATHER (3)

What further lessons can we learn from Abraham’s godly example as a father?

1. The blessings of obedience

The way of obedience is always the way of blessing, peace and happiness – *“that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him”* (Gen 18:19). God had made several promises to Abraham: *“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; ... Unto thy seed will I give this land”* (Gen 12:2, 7). All these were fulfilled as Abraham faithfully discharged his calling to guide his household in the ways of the Lord.

2. The importance of godly instruction and example

It is the responsibility of fathers to teach by godly example. Children pattern their lives after their fathers’. Do we practise what we preach? Or do they see in our lives hypocrisy, sinful indulgences and a neglect of the things of God?

God’s truths must be taught at home firmly and lovingly. Like young Isaac, a child watched and prayed over, instructed and disciplined, shall in the Lord’s best time, choose the path of righteousness and in turn be a blessing to gladden his father’s heart (Prov 22:6).

Do we have this stirring concern in our hearts, anxiously looking out for the first dawn of light upon our children’s souls? Do we pray for them? May the Lord help us to be God-fearing Christian parents who order our household according to His Holy Word.

THOUGHT: I must instruct my children not just with my lips, but with my life.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be a blessing to my family.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING HEZEKIAH (1)

Hezekiah ascended the throne when his father, Ahaz, died (2 Kings 18:1; 2 Chron 29:1). During his twenty-nine-year reign, the Lord God blessed the monarch with many tokens of divine grace. What qualities characterised the life of this godly king?

1. Obedience

Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, was one of the most wicked kings of Judah (2 Kings 16:2-4). However, Hezekiah did not follow in the footsteps of his ungodly father to do evil. On the contrary, *“he trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him”* (2 Kings 18:5). We are further told that *“he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done”* (2 Chron 29:2). This tribute is paid to only two other kings of Judah: Asa (1 Kings 15:11) and Josiah (2 Kings 22:2).

Despite his negative family background, Hezekiah became one of the most God-fearing kings of Judah. Some of us, like Hezekiah, may have been brought up in unfavourable circumstances or have come under ungodly influences. Like Hezekiah, let us not be deterred, but do that which is *“right in the sight of the LORD.”*

2. Dependence

When the king received a letter from Assyria threatening to invade the land, he *“went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD”* (2 Kings 19:14-19). The king wisely entrusted the kingdom’s affairs into the Lord’s hands. Subsequently, when the king was *“sick unto death,”* the Lord again heard his prayers and graciously added another *“fifteen years”* to his life (2 Kings 20:1-11).

THOUGHT: Am I like Hezekiah in godly obedience and dependence?

PRAYER: Lord, help me do that which is right in Thy sight.

THURSDAY, JUNE 25

2 CHRONICLES 29:3-36

2 CHRONICLES 28:24-25

“ ... he is a rewarder of them
that diligently seek him.”

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING HEZEKIAH (2)

3. Religious zeal

Concerned that “*the wrath of the LORD was upon Judah and Jerusalem*” because “*our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs*” (2 Chron 29:8, 6), Hezekiah set out to make atonement for the sins committed during his father’s reign.

As soon as he ascended the throne, the young king lost no time in restoring the worship of Jehovah and cleansing the temple. He abolished the idolatry which his wicked father had set up (2 Kings 18:3-4). Thus did Hezekiah purge Judah of all her idols, including the brazen serpent Moses made which the children of Israel had brought with them to Jerusalem, and which had become an object of idolatrous worship (cf. Num 21:9).

4. Prosperity

During his twenty-nine-year reign, Hezekiah faced overwhelming odds and intimidating foes which were a constant threat to his kingdom (2 Kings 18:17-35). But the Lord prospered and blessed him because of his faith and obedience.

One of Hezekiah’s most formidable enemies was the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, who constantly sent messengers to insult and threaten him. In response to the prayers of His faithful servants (King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah), the Lord sent an angel to “*cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he (Sennacherib) returned with shame of face to his own land*” (2 Chron 32:21).

THOUGHT: Have I been disobedient to the Lord? If so, let me turn away from sin and turn to the Lord in repentance.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a zealous and devoted heart.

LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING HEZEKIAH (3)

Despite all that King Hezekiah had done for Judah, he was still a depraved man. When the king of Babylon sent an ambassador to him “to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land” (2 Chron 32: 31), the latter responded by proudly showing the ambassadors the kingdom’s treasures which the Lord had graciously bestowed upon him (Isa 39:2).

The Bible tells us that the Lord allowed the visit to try Hezekiah but he fell because his “heart was lifted up” in pride: “Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart ... But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chron 32:31, 25).

For flaunting his wealth, Hezekiah paid a high price. God’s judgment came swiftly through the prophet Isaiah. All that the king had proudly displayed before his heathen guests would be carried to Babylon. Moreover, his sons would be eunuchs in the courts of Babylon (Isa 39:6-7).

Let us take a look at our own lives. Do we seek self-glory? Do we crave the praises of men? Do we esteem ourselves better than others? These are all manifestations of a proud heart.

God will not tolerate a haughty spirit; He resists and abases the proud: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). May we guard our hearts against this abominable sin of pride.

THOUGHT: My gifts, abilities, possessions and every blessing come from the Lord’s gracious hand.

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to walk humbly before Thee.

SATURDAY, JUNE 27

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27

HEBREWS 10:19-25

*“And let us consider
one another to provoke
unto love and to good works.”*

WHY GO TO CHURCH?

Why should we go to church? Why must we commit ourselves to attend church services? Why must we put away all other things in order to be found in the Lord’s house on the Lord’s Day? In short, why must the worship of God be a priority in the Christian’s life?

We go to church to be with the Lord’s people, to honour and worship God in the beauty of His holiness. We gather as a corporate body on the Lord’s Day to praise and thank God for His grace, goodness and love towards us. As His redeemed people, we *“should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy”* (1 Pet 2:9-10). It is also a time for God’s people to observe the ordinances: the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Why should so much of a Christian’s time be taken up in worship, either public, private or in the family? Pastor Maurice Roberts puts it well: “Because the Christian is in this life preparing for eternity, where all will be worship and adoration of God. How else can we fulfil the inward aim of our existence except by making our life as believers one long service of devotion and praise to God?”

The communion of saints is one of the means of grace. By coming together as a church, we enjoy the love, help and mutual support of fellow believers (Heb 10:23-25). At our weekly prayer meetings, we gather to collectively pray for one another (James 5:16) and the work of the ministry. We are encouraged when we hear of testimonies of God’s blessings upon our brethren. In this way, we develop a kindred spirit that binds us as one in the Lord (1 Cor 12:12-13).

THOUGHT: My presence in church is an encouragement to my pastor and my brethren.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be faithful in my church attendance.

THE UNFATHOMABLE WAYS OF GOD

We are all familiar with the hymn, “God moves in a mysterious way.” The author of the hymn, William Cowper, said it well:

*“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.”*

God works in ways which we finite beings cannot fathom. One Christian writer told a true story of a couple who happily set up home after their wedding. When their daughter was born a year later, they welcomed her with great joy. However, the little one had a serious physical ailment. Doctors who examined her told the sad parents that her condition was incurable. What words of comfort can one offer to this dejected mother? It is so hard to look upon a suffering child and to recall the doctor's words: “Hopeless! She will never recover.”

The writer continues: “Can this mother say that God is leading her in the path of life? Is this experience of suffering, part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle of this mother? Does He know what the doctor said? Yes – He knows all. Has He then no power to do anything? Yes – He has all power. Why, then, does He not cure this child?”

We do not know the answer. Neither do we know God's purposes for allowing such suffering to come upon the child and the family. Perhaps the Lord wanted the parents to grow in patience and dependence upon Him. Perhaps He was preparing them to minister to other suffering ones (2 Cor 1:3-5). As God's children, we must always trust in His sovereignty for He knows what is best for us.

THOUGHT: *“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”* (2 Cor 4:16)

PRAYER: Lord, may I trust Thee to work Thy sovereign will upon my life.

MONDAY, JUNE 29

PSALM 42

PSALM 77:1-10

*“I commune with mine own heart:
and my spirit made diligent search.”*

“HOPE THOU IN GOD” (1)

Many attribute Psalm 42 to David who might have penned it at a time when he was almost overwhelmed by his afflictions. Deeply distressed by the unrelenting persecutions of Saul who hunted him like “*a partridge in the mountains*” (1 Sam 26:20), the treacherous betrayal of his trusted counsellor Ahithophel and his own rebellious son Absalom, and the recollection of his own sins, the psalmist’s heart was heavy within him.

Though in deep gloom, the psalmist did not give way to despair. He did not murmur nor repine; he did not allow himself to wallow in the “Slough of Despond.” “He did not lie down like a stricken beast and do nothing but fill the air with his howling ... Fretting and wringing our hands bring no relief either temporarily or spiritually. There needs to be self-interrogation, self-examination, self-condemnation” (Arthur Pink).

With this mindset, the psalmist made diligent inquiry and communed with his own heart for the cause of his dejection: “*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?*” (Ps 42:5). He had hoped that a strict scrutiny into the grounds and reasons – “*Why am I cast down?*” – would help clear his despondency.

Is any among us “*cast down*”? Is there a cause? Like David, let us check our lives. Do our own hearts chide us? Are we “*cast down*” because of our unbelief, our sinful follies, our wilfulness, our yielding to the flesh? Check our own hearts, and if we have sinned, let us confess before the Lord for “*he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy*” (Prov 28:13).

THOUGHT: “To search out the cause of our sorrow is often the best surgery for grief.” (Treasury of David)

PRAYER: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” (Ps 139:23-24)

TUESDAY, JUNE 30

PSALM 42

PSALM 4

*Man may fail us but
God will never
leave us nor forsake us.*

“HOPE THOU IN GOD” (2)

Whatever our sorrows, trusting in God and His sovereignty is the antidote against dejection and despair. The psalmist not only did not wallow in his troubles but preached to himself: *“Hope thou in God.”* We should direct our hearts to hope in the Lord. Nothing else will bring us comfort or relief.

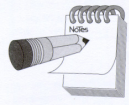
“But, dear friend, there is a cure for despondency even when so occasioned. He who declares ‘the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine,’ still lives and reigns! Can He who fed two million Israelites in the wilderness for forty years – not minister to you and your family? Can He who sustained Elijah in the time of famine – not keep you from starving?” (Arthur Pink).

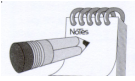
In his darkest hours, the psalmist turned to God and prayed *“unto the God of my life”* (v 8c). The psalmist’s confidence in the faithful, Almighty God not only kept him from sinking deep in the mire of despondency but enabled him to praise God in the midst of adversities. Twice (in verses 5 and 11), he sang his praises to God: *“... for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance”*; *“for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God”* (Ps 42:5, 11).

Are we feeling despondent? We should hope in God who is sovereign and faithful. Let us thank God for the trials He sends our way that we may learn to depend upon Him. May the Lord graciously attend to us and sanctify our present distress for the blessing of our souls.

THOUGHT: *“For thou art my hope, O Lord GOD: thou art my trust from my youth.”* (Ps 71:5)

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that Thou art our *“refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Ps 46:1).





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