
BLESSED NEW YEAR!

Blessed New Year to you! It is always wonderful to start the New Year with a lesson from the bible and today we read three verses from Psalm 90. Moses was the one who wrote this psalm and he wrote it during the 40 years the Israelites were in the Sinai Wilderness. This was the time between their leaving Egypt and reaching the Promised Land.

During this period, Moses led about 2 million Israelites as they wandered through the desolate landscape of the wilderness. It was a very tough time. It was a time when many Israelites died. And these words do not seem like the usual happy messages one may read of on the first day of the year!

But these are words of wisdom. Moses reminds us that life is short, we must trust in God. The “days of our years are threescore years and ten” means that on average, lifespan of a typical person is about 70 years. It is longer in Singapore and many parts of the world, but it is not much longer.

As we start the new year, it is wise to remind ourselves we are to number our days (verse 12). What does that mean? It is NOT to literally count the days in a week or month as we progress in the year. It is to live a life that will please God in terms of obeying Him. It is to be a wise child. It is not to continue the mistakes you have made last year. It is to apologize for any wrongs you’ve done last year. It is to be more kind to classmates, perhaps. It is to be more grateful to parents. It is to be more giving to siblings or friends. In short, it is to apply our hearts unto wisdom (verse 12b).



Thought: Start the year right. Start the year with God!

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank You for giving me another year. As I start this year, may I be given the wisdom to live a godly life for you. Please grant strength and endurance, for I know I am weak. This I ask in Jesus’ name, amen.

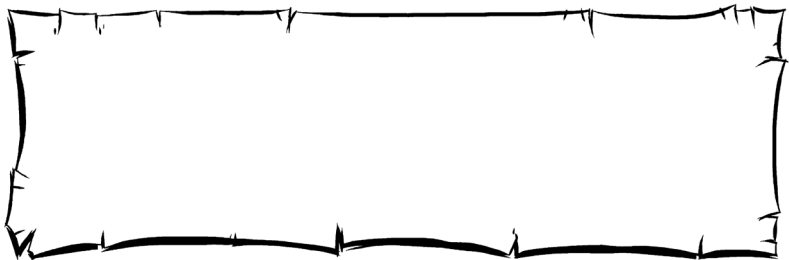
CHRIST EXISTED FROM ETERNITY PAST

It's the second day of the New Year, but nonetheless, Blessed New Year! As we start the year, may we start it right with a focus on our wonderful Lord Jesus. Jesus is the Word or the Revelation of God. God has not only spoken in written form but also through a person - that person was Jesus Christ. There is a written Word - the bible. And there is also the living Word - Jesus Christ. Just as the Bible tells us clearly who God is, Jesus as the living Word tells us clearly who God is.

Jesus, being God, was with God the Father in the beginning. As God the Father existed from eternity, so Jesus existed in eternity, even before He was born as a baby in Bethlehem. It is wrong to think that Jesus only existed when He was born into this earth. Jesus Christ was with God the Father when He made the world, bringing life and light.

Not only did Jesus exist from eternity, He knew us from eternity. Is it not amazing - that He knew about us way before we were born? In fact, He knew that we would be born way before Adam & Eve were created!

Memorize John 1:1 and then write it down below:



Thought: It is so blessed to have a Saviour who knows us before we were born.

Prayer: Lord of heaven and earth, we praise You that Jesus existed from everlasting to everlasting, and also that You know and love us before we were born. Help me to return a portion of that love by being a good Christian - In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN'S BIRTH (I)

Before Jesus Christ was born, his cousin was born to be His messenger and point man. This man was John the Baptist, the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth. The birth of John was an unlikely one, because his parents were old. What happened was this: An angel announced his birth to his father, a priest, while he was performing duties in the temple. But Zacharias was full of fear and unbelief and was struck dumb till his son was born.

True enough, Elisabeth his wife became pregnant! In those days, women who could not conceive were despised, and so Elisabeth thanked the Lord greatly for taking away her shame and blessing her with a child. Elizabeth must have prayed to the Lord for a child for years, and finally, God answered her prayer.

I'd like you to focus on verse 15 – it tells us that John would be great in the sight of God. You may know that John lived a life that was very different from others. He wore camel's hair and leather; he ate locusts and wild honey. One can't say he would be well-dressed or had great taste for yummy food. He was a simple man, even rough, in the eyes of men. And he did not have any great education or was not rich. It was not mentioned in the bible that he was handsome or athletic; neither was he "cool" in any sense of the word. So why was he great? He was great because he would live a life of obedience to God. And John had such a great privilege – to announce to the world the coming of Jesus Christ!

Dear child, do you know we have the same privilege of announcing to the world about Jesus? Of course, it is not about His First Coming. He has come to die for our sins and is now in Heaven. But we may be able to tell others of His Second Coming! Jesus will come back one day, in glory and power!

Some of us may prefer to be "great" in the eyes of men. We may like classmates to like us, to invite us to birthday parties... And some children do wrong things to draw attention to themselves. Dear child, aim to be great in the eyes of God, not men.

Thought: Aim to be great in the sight of God, not man.

Prayer: Mighty God, our Father in heaven, thank you for the precious example of John that he was great for he was obedient to You and was able to tell the world of Jesus. May I also do so. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOHN'S BIRTH (II)

It is almost strange that after praying for a long time for a child, Zacharias didn't have the faith to believe that his wife would be pregnant. That caused the angel to remind Zacharias who he was. He was Gabriel. And the words in verse 19 are powerful – "I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God"! The name Gabriel means "strong man of God".

Gabriel was not some low-ranking or ordinary angel – he was an archangel. What is an archangel? It is an angel of the highest rank. He was God's direct messenger and we know that every time Gabriel appears, a great announcement would take place. In the New Testament, we read of Gabriel here and soon, we would read of the same angel appearing to Mary to tell her she has been selected to be the vessel through whom Jesus would be born.

When Gabriel saw that Zacharias was not convinced, he showed him a sign. And it was a painful one for Zacharias, for the sign was such that he would be struck dumb from then until John would be born. That would be at least 9 months long! That's a long time for anyone who could speak normally to not be able to talk. Imagine you can't talk for 9 waking hours. That's a long time, isn't it, especially for those of you who like to talk! But Zacharias was struck with dumbness for at least 9 long months!

Dear child, do not doubt the Word of God. In today's reading, we learn that Zacharias was struck dumb not because he didn't believe the Word of the Gabriel, but that he didn't believe the power of God, that his wife would be pregnant. May we learn to have more faith in God from this incident!

Thought: Dear Lord, increase my faith!

Prayer: Heavenly Creator, thank you for the reminder to always have faith in You. In this world that encourages us to have faith in ourselves or only in things we can see or touch, I confess it is sometimes not easy to have faith in a God I can't see with my eyes. But Father, please teach me to be able to see with eyes of faith, that I continue to be a good Christian boy or girl. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS' BIRTH (I)

God sent the angel Gabriel to announce the special birth of Jesus to Mary. Who was Mary? She was a devout girl. She was betrothed to Joseph and a betrothal in those days was like someone today getting engaged to be married. But the commitment to marry is stronger.

Some of you may know Roman Catholic friends and they put Mary on par with Jesus, giving her respect and honour we do not find in the bible. From today's reading, we would learn a few things about Mary that would tell us she was a wonderful girl. For God to select her from among all other Jewish girls, she must be special. But like us, she was a sinner.

In verse 28, we read that she was blessed by God, not that she was blessing others. Because she had found favor with God, she enjoyed the wonderful blessing of being chosen to be the human vessel through whom Jesus would be born. And verse 30 tells us the angel told her the name of Jesus, which means Saviour. Every time she calls Jesus, she is reminded that she, too, needs Him as Saviour. And in verse 46, we read that Mary was grateful to God and calls Him Lord, meaning she was to serve Him and clearly not His equal. And finally, verse 47 shows that she regarded God as her Saviour, a reaffirmation of verse 31.

Roman Catholics believe they should pray to Mary and that Mary can intercede on their behalf with God. Some of them also believe we pray to holy men who have died. These they call saints. However, we find none of these practices taught or even practiced in the bible.

Dear child, Jesus is the only Saviour of the world. He has taught in many passages that only through Him can we find salvation. Let's just consider one verse – John 14:6, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”

Thought: Only Jesus, Always Jesus

Prayer: Lord God, thank You for today's reminder that only Jesus saves. I humbly ask that You would help me learn more about Jesus as this month's reading would focus on my precious Saviour. In the wonderful name of Jesus I pray – amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS' BIRTH (II)

God sent Gabriel to announce the special birth of Jesus to Mary and Joseph on separate occasions. Mary was living in the city of Nazareth and was told she would conceive the Son of God – Jesus – which means Saviour. This was possible only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Imagine this – she would be pregnant although she would remain a virgin throughout her entire pregnancy! For this supernatural conception and birth, we thank God.

Soon Joseph, who was betrothed to Mary, knew about her pregnancy. He thought that Mary was unfaithful and wanted to break the relationship. But God intervened and spoke to him in a dream to take Mary as his wife as the baby in her womb was no ordinary child.

How did God prepare Mary and Joseph regarding the birth of Jesus?

1. God sent the angel _____ to Nazareth where Mary lived to speak to her.
2. God caused _____, a virgin, to have a baby.
3. God spoke to _____ so that he will understand and accept Mary.

Some people don't believe God can bring about a virgin to give birth. They say it is humanly impossible. Of course, these people forget that God is God, and not human! That which is humanly impossible is not impossible with God, should He want to do it!

Thought: Nothing is too hard for God.

Prayer: Lord God, give me faith to believe you that you can do anything. You know I may have some problems in my school or home, and these problems hurt me. So God, please help to bear these problems, and to always go to you for help. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JESUS' BIRTH (III)

Joseph was a kind and godly man. He did not question or doubt the words of the angel. Although he would suffer shame and disrepute since his wife-to-be was pregnant, he continued to trust God. He believed that such a thing could happen for God is the God of the impossible.

Jesus became man because God has planned from eternity that he shall save his people from their sins. Only Jesus, 100% God and 100% Man, can save because that is the only perfect sacrifice needed. And he fulfilled that when He died on the cross for us.

Can you imagine that – God was willing to be born as a helpless baby in order that he may experience the pains and troubles of man, so that he can then die for man? Think about the sacrifices he made when he forsook the glory and power of heaven to be born, and to be the son of a poor carpenter. What an amazing Saviour we have!

God worked a supernatural work when the birth of Jesus was announced. In saving you, God also worked a supernatural work, for he gave you salvation when you believed in God.

Try these questions:

1. When did God love you – before or after you were born?

2. Is God able to predict what you will be when you grow up?

3. If God knows our future – should we not place more trust in Him?

Thought: We have a God who knows our past and future.

Prayer: Lord, may I be learn to trust in You, for I am weak but You are strong. And it gives me so much comfort that You know what will happen to me and my loved ones tomorrow, and even years from now! So gracious Father, may I really stay close to You. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ANGELS APPEARED TO THE SHEPHERDS

The same night that Jesus was born was also the night that the angel appeared to the shepherds. The shepherds were sitting in the field, keeping watch over their flock of sheep. Before the angel appeared, it was probably another usual night. They could have been admiring the fantastic array of stars in the night sky. Or perhaps they were exchanging stories or accounts of how they fought against predators which wanted to attack their flocks.

Suddenly an angel appeared, shining with a bright light. The shepherds were afraid, but the angel brought them the wonderful news from heaven, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

This was immediately followed by a great company of angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14). Then the angels were gone and the shepherds decided to go to Bethlehem to visit and worship Jesus.

There is a wonderful repetition of the idea of “great” in these few verses. One can see the progression from great fear (verse 9) to great joy (verse 10) to great host of angels (verse 13) singing a great song of praise to God (verse 14). What great news it is to have the King of kings born to man so that man may live forever more!

There are famous carols (see below) that tell us of that wondrous account of the birth of Jesus. Which is your favourite?

Write the number in the cloud!

1. Silent Night! Holy Night!
2. Away in a Manger
3. Joy to the World
4. Angels We Have Heard on High



Thought: What a wonderful account that reminds us of blessed Christmas.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for bringing the good news of Jesus' birth. May I learn to appreciate his birth and to understand that without the birth of Jesus, I would not have experienced spiritual birth myself. In His precious name, amen.

WORSHIPED BY THE SHEPHERDS

The shepherds finally found the manger where Jesus was born. With the song of the angels ringing in their ears and the joy of hearing that a Saviour was born, they fell on their knees to worship Jesus. Filled with great joy, they will remember this night long after the visit.

When they returned home, they did not keep quiet, but burst out telling everyone of the wonderful news of the Saviour's birth! Moreover, they have seen the baby Jesus – and what a great privilege that must have been! These shepherds, having experienced Jesus, just had to share about Jesus. How about you? Do you want to share about Jesus?

Imagine you have discovered the most wonderful game or toy that you know would benefit your loved ones and friends. Would you not want to share that with them? Of course! What more if you know such a great Lord as Jesus!

If you were saved, you would have done some of these things. Put a tick if you have.

- You have told someone that you are a Christian.
- You have invited someone to church or VBS.
- You pray everyday or almost everyday.
- You enjoy reading/listening to the Bible.
- You like to sing/play/listen to hymns.
- You share tracts with friends or others.

Thought: Blessed are those who believe in Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me courage and great joy in telling others about Jesus. Sometimes it is not easy, and I am afraid people may laugh at me. But give me courage O Lord, then I will be brave enough to share this good news with people you have placed in my life. For this I ask in His precious name, amen.

THANKSGIVING OF SIMEON

Simeon was a godly old man who lived in the time of Christ. God, through the Holy Spirit, had promised him that before he died he would see Christ. God then moved him to go to the temple, revealing to him that the child in Mary's arms was the Messiah or Christ.

He was so happy and excited that he took him out of his mother's arms into his own. He held baby Jesus lovingly and respectfully. He blessed God and praised him and gave glory to Him, for his great goodness in sending the promised Messiah. This was to be the greatest act of love and sacrifice the world has ever seen for Jesus will be the Saviour of all people – both Jews and Gentiles.

It is not surprising that Simeon was blessed for he lived a holy life. Do you live a holy life? Do you seek to please God as best you can? If you do, God will surely bless you!

It is easy to start on the right footing; it is tough to end on a right footing for many of us waver and do not remain faithful to the end. The remarkable account of Simeon is that although he was already an old man, the bible tells us he was "just and devout".

Perhaps many people then would have poured scorn on the baby Jesus for a woman who was not married gave birth to him. It



must have been such a shame and many would not want to be associated with Mary or Jesus. But not Simeon. He who was faithful from earlier days remained faithful to the end and he knew this was the Promised Son of God. Despite very possibly the contempt and ridicule of others around, he had faith the baby was God born in human form.

Thought: Those who walk closely with God will be blessed.

Prayer: Almighty Lord, may I walk close to you for I want to be blessed by you and your presence. May I learn from the wise old man Simeon to dare to be different if that is what Your Holy Bible teaches. This I ask in the name of my dear redeemer's name – amen.

VISIT OF THE WISE MEN

Who were these wise men from the East? We will never know for sure. They could be Persian priests skilled in the study of the stars (cf Dan 1:20). If they lived in Persia, how could they come to know about the “King of the Jews”? It is possible Jews taken captives during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity preached to the Persians the coming of the Messiah.

The supernatural appearance of an extraordinary star led them to conclude that the time was auspicious. The Holy Spirit guided them in their understanding concerning the birth of the “King of the Jews” who would come to save his people. It also gave them the determination to travel that long journey to Jerusalem to worship the long-awaited Messiah.

For the Lord, these wise men traveled far along dangerous routes. Remember these were times when there were no paved roads, safely-lit stops, hotels, rest-points and the like. Further, there were many bandits or robbers and it was not safe to travel long distances, especially at night. But for the Lord, these men were willing to suffer not just inconveniences, but grave danger.

How about you? What would you be willing to do for Jesus? Would you be willing to share a treasured toy with a friend? Or a limited amount of a favorite food of yours? Would you be willing to help others with school work even if it means you have to give up watching that television show you have waited whole week for?

Dear child, if you are a Christian, your life **MUST** be different from what it was. If no one can see you are different, chances are, you may not be saved. that means you may not be a real Christian. If you are a real believer, you must be willing to change for the better, and others should be able to see the new you!

Thought: May I really be a “new me” so others can see Jesus in me!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving me the example of the wise men. May I learn to be willing to suffer or accept inconveniences for Thee. I pray I'd be a real Christian so that others can see my Lord in my good behavior. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

ESCAPE TO EGYPT

As the evil king Herod was intent on killing the infant King, Joseph was instructed by the Lord to escort little Jesus and Mary to Egypt for safety. Herod was afraid this child will threaten the position he and his son have when he grows up to become King of the Jews. Of course, Jesus would not want to vie to be an earthly king, but Herod was selfish and wanted to kill the baby at all costs.

When Joseph woke up from his dream, he obeyed, and took both mother and child by night for Egypt. We can take heart that God will protect his own. Even the powerful king could not take the life of a baby, because God intervened. Let us remember that God is not just our God who controls our lives, but He controls the lives and circumstances of even non-believers.

Do you have worries or problems? Probably none of them would be as serious as the one Joseph had! Still, Joseph trusted God and followed His will. May you do so too, and likewise be blessed.

Sometimes we are worried or discouraged as troubles come our way. Perhaps your parents are constantly quarrelling? Or father has lost his job? Or sister was hurt in an accident? Or your school results are not as good as you'd like them to be? Dear child, pray to God. He does not promise He'd solve all your problems. But God does promise He'd give you the strength to continue to have faith in Him.



Thought: When God says He will take care of us, we can trust fully in that.

Prayer: Lord, give me the assurance that come what may, You will always be with me. I commit to you the fears and insecurities that I have and ask that You will help me with them. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

RETURN TO NAZARETH

Joseph's family departed just in time. Soon Herod became exceedingly angry and had all Jewish children two years and under killed. Hoping baby Jesus would be killed in that mass murder, Herod did not know Jesus had escaped to Egypt where he was under the care of God almighty.

As with even the greatest of kings, Herod died. In fact, Herod was not even any great king for he was placed as king by the Roman empire to help rule over the Jews. In any case, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed Joseph to return to the land of Israel as it was now safe.

God always protects His own. We see in this passage how He guided and guarded Joseph. As He guarded Joseph, so will He help you in your troubles. This reminds me of the story of "Footprints in the Sand". Have you heard this?

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one only.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints, so I said to the Lord, "You promised me Lord, that if I followed you, you would walk with me always. But I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has only been one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I needed you most, have you not been there for me?"

*The Lord replied,
"The years when you have seen only one set of
footprints, my child, is when I carried you."*

Thought: God is a shelter in the time of storm.

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank You for this wonderful reminder that You will never leave or forsake me. I know that if I keep close to you, you will protect me and keep me. In Jesus' name, amen.



JESUS – THE MODEL CHILD

Not much is recorded in the bible of the childhood of Jesus. However, we know that when Jesus was twelve, he accompanied Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem for the yearly feast of the Passover. The Passover is an important festival in the Jewish calendar when they commemorate the “passing over” of angel of death when God slew the first born of all Egypt (Exodus 12:11-28).

In that visit, Jesus was left behind by Mary & Joseph; you know how adults are sometimes! When they discovered that he was missing, they returned for him and were astonished to find him discussing deep truths with the learned rabbis.

Although Jesus was God, He was also fully human. He also did not cheat. Imagine what he could do in tests in schools he may have attended or any games he may have participated in! He would be topping every test and competition since He was God Almighty! And Jesus was a good child. He was obedient, humble, and followed instructions of parents. He was also willing to learn from God, and that is perhaps why the last verse in this chapter states “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”.

Are you like that? Are you an obedient child who is courteous and helpful? Are you a polite child, knowing that being polite instills and demonstrates grace in us? Are you helpful to weaker students? Do you take time to orientate new students or newcomers to Sunday school? Do you share willingly your pencils and other writing instruments?

Also, do you show a growing understanding of God’s Word? You are to do the Junior RPG everyday. The abbreviation “RPG” stands for “Read, Pray, Grow”. Do you spend time praying over what you read? Most importantly, do you see growth in your Christian life? Do your parents see that you are a better child, perhaps more patient, more kind, more helpful?

Thought: May I be more like the child Jesus

Prayer: Lord, you know I need help in becoming a better person. I am so glad I have an example in Jesus and so Lord, please help me to follow Him to be a child whom others may see and praise God for. In Jesus’ name, amen.

MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

During the time of the rule of the Roman emperor Tiberius Caesar, in the year AD 26, John the forerunner or herald of the Messiah began to preach the baptism of repentance in order for sins to be forgiven. This was exactly what was promised in Isaiah 40:3-4 that the Lord's first coming would be preceded by His forerunner, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

The people went out to him from "Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about." He did not have to go to the people; the people went to him. Even the Pharisees and Sadducees went to see and hear John. His strong message about those who were not bringing "forth good fruit" and God's judgment upon them did not stop them from coming to hear God's Word.

Do you try to talk to people about God? Do you dare to share the gospel with friends? At your age, you may not know a lot about doctrines or profound teachings of the bible, but that's fine! Just share with friends, or family members, why you believe in God, and what changes He has made in your life. And if you are truly saved and changed, they would be able to see that you have turned a new leaf and that is the power of Christ seen in your personal example. That would be one of the most powerful testimonies for God!

The message of John the Baptist was a strong one. What was it?

He courageously condemned the people of their _____.

He asked them to _____ for God is angry with them.

They must _____ by their life that they have truly repented.

If not, they will be like the _____ that does not have _____ fruit and will be _____ down.

(Helping words: good, chopped, show, tree, repent, sins, bad, axe, wrath)

Thought: The truth will set the people free.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to understand that the love of God deals strongly and boldly against sin in our lives. Help to know that having sin in my life makes You displeased, and so Father, help me to examine my life and purify myself. And if I change, others can see these changes in me too! This I ask in the name of the Redeemer, amen.

BAPTISM OF JESUS

Why does Jesus, who is God, need to be baptized? John's baptism was a baptism for those who repented of their sins and wanted to be forgiven. Jesus was sinless. There was nothing, no sins, for Him to repent of. John himself was puzzled as to why the Lord would seek baptism from him.

The Lord Jesus told John the reason why He had to be baptized. Jesus said that He needed to be baptized in order "to fulfil all righteousness." As 100% Man, Jesus wanted to offer His Father full obedience. God the Son obeyed God the Father and humbly submitted Himself to do His will. Can you imagine, the Eternal God willing to be baptized by a mortal man? Such humility and love, no one can give except the Lord Jesus. In the end, we are not surprised to hear the Father's commendation, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

God is three persons in one God. We can see the three persons of the Godhead in this baptism scene of Jesus. Who did the following:

1. Who commanded Jesus to be baptized?

2. Who was baptized?

3. Who descended like a dove on Jesus as He was baptized?

Thought: Jesus is our perfect representative.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Jesus' full obedience to be the perfect sacrifice for my sins for without that, we will not have salvation. May I learn from His humility and have that in my life. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

SATAN TEMPTS JESUS (I)

There was a documentary on National Geographic I saw about a French cave explorer who fell into a deep maze of caves while exploring them alone. Guess how many days that man went without food? 35 days. At the end of the ordeal, he was absolutely without any energy, lying almost dead when rescuers found him; a real miracle he survived. Yes, he lost about 40 pounds of fat and muscles, but his mind was still alert. How hungry and thirsty do you think a man like that would be?

From today's text, we learn that Jesus was without food for an even longer period: 40 days! At Jesus' weakest, Satan tempted. Satan knew the first thing on the mind of Jesus would be material replenishment; thus he tempted Jesus with the idea of turning stones into bread. Was it wrong for Jesus to eat bread? No, of course not! However, Jesus wanted to be like any other human - to be totally helpless in the physical sense. Thus He went through the 40-day fast voluntarily. It would have been wrong for Jesus to turn stones to bread as He would then be using His powers to solve His human problems. He would not have been living with the weaknesses of being "fully Man"! Thank God that Jesus went through those temptations, for He was better able to understand the weaknesses of man after having been physically weak himself.

Do you at times wonder whether Jesus understands your problem? Maybe you are bullied in school? Maybe you feel stressed with your mountain of homework? Maybe you have few friends? Remember that Jesus can understand your problems fully. Even if mummy or daddy may not be able to fully know the extent of your worries, Jesus does. So go to God in prayer and seek His strength to solve your problem.

Thought: What a wonderful and understanding Saviour in Jesus!

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that Jesus is such a wonderful Saviour who understands my every need and weakness. As I come to you now, you know I have problems and that sometimes, no one else knows them. So God, to you I commit these problems of (...share your problems here). This is my prayer, in Jesus' name, amen.

SATAN TEMPTS JESUS (II)

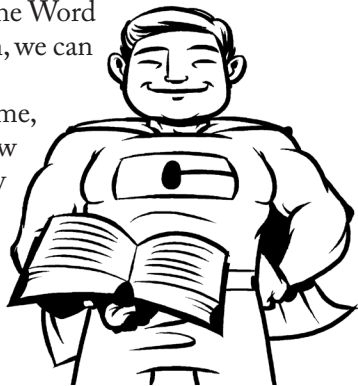
Following up on yesterday's lesson, another lesson we learn from this passage is that Satan is very smart; he attacked Jesus when he was weakest. Child, remember this: Satan will attack or tempt you when you are weakest, when you are most likely to fall into his trap.

When was the last time you fell into sin? It could be a burst of anger, or a rude reply to parents, or pushing a schoolmate, or being lazy to do your quiet time. It could be so many other possibilities. But you know, before each of these sins happened, you were weak. You felt irritated, or tired, or moody. And Satan knows that. You guess how many years of experience Satan has in tempting Christians? Yes, thousands of years! He has successfully tempted many boys and girls, and you are no different.

It is always a moment of weakness. But this one moment is enough to cause us to fall. Therefore, we must always keep close to God so that Satan will not have the opportunity to win.

How did Jesus fight Satan? Jesus was weak and hungry, but he resisted the turning of stones to bread, quoting scriptures. In fact, Jesus also resisted the other 2 temptations using God's Word. This is a clear teaching for us: we must use the Word of God to fight Satan, for on our own, we can do nothing.

How consistent is your quiet time, or reading of the Junior RPG? How often and seriously do you pray? How much do you rely on God on a daily basis? If you keep close to Him, read His Word, rely on Him, you will be like Jesus; you will have victory over Satan!



Thought: Victory over Satan is ours, if we use Word of God!

Prayer: Lord, help me to be close to you and your Word so that I can fight against the tricks and temptations of Satan! In the victorious name of Jesus I pray, amen.

FIRST CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

The first cleansing of the temple by Jesus took place on the feast of Passover. You will recall this is a national religious feast of Jews, commemorating how the Angel of the Lord “passed over” homes that had blood on their door-posts during the last night the Jews were slaves in Egypt.

When Jesus visited the temple, what he saw angered him. Greedy and evil men selling animal sacrifices at high profits, money-changers overcharging people – these were not what was supposed to happen in the temple! Jesus was filled with righteous anger at the filth that had invaded His Father’s house. He made a whip and chased all the evil doers.

Was Jesus too violent? Did Jesus sin in his anger? The answer to these 2 questions is “No!” You will learn that in the things of God, we have to take a stand against evil. Jesus took a tough stand against clearly what was wrong – business people trying to make a profit from the ordinary folks who were trying to worship God. turning the temple of worship into a temple of sin, these people have no right to be in the temple, and thus Jesus had to drive them away.

We, too, must learn what is righteous anger. It is anger arising from a righteous spirit. It is a godly response to the sin that we see around us, and sometimes, we have to take action. If we see someone bullying a kitten, go stop that bullying. If we hear bad language on the TV or evil images, switch the channel or turn the TV off. Learn to be like Jesus – He was quick to act. You, too, learn how to have righteous anger at ungodly things, and act on them.

However, let us face it: most of the times we are angry for the wrong reasons. When was the last time you were angry for the wrong reason? Perhaps it was anger when you thought someone was rude to you? Or some classmates did not include you when they played a game? Or you thought parents love your sister or brother more than you? Being angry for the wrong reason is a sin!

Thought: Don’t be angry for wrong reason!

Prayer: Lord, may I learn not to be angry for wrong reasons but to be more like Jesus – to be angry only for righteous reasons. Help me to dare to stand up for the helpless, to dare to stand up for God. This I pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

BIBLE’S MOST FAMOUS VERSE

In today’s reading passage is found perhaps the bible’s most famous verse, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” To whom did Jesus say those immortal words? They were given to Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a teacher of the Jewish law.

Nicodemus had mistakenly thought that salvation came by way of keeping the law and doing good works, but Jesus told him otherwise. Nicodemus should have known what Jesus meant when He said, “Ye must be born again.” To become a citizen of heaven, one must be reborn spiritually, by repenting of one’s sins and believing in Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Although Nicodemus was a learned teacher of the Jewish law, he did not know the ultimate truth. There will be many in your life who may teach you things: your school teachers, your tuition teacher, your tennis instructor. However, the greatest truth is the fact that God loves us, and that we must accept Jesus to go to heaven.

Do you know this greatest truth – that God loves you and sent His precious only Son Jesus to die for you? And have you accepted Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour?

If you have the salvation of the Lord, you are born again.
 Do you know whether you are born again? How do you know?

Thought: It is so good to trust in Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for giving me salvation and I ask that you will help me to be sure of my salvation and to live out my life such that my new life in Christ is seen. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

JESUS MUST INCREASE, WE MUST DECREASE

John the Baptist did a wonderful ministry ushering in the ministry of Jesus, and often he was mistaken to be the Christ. However, he was not one to be taken by pride, and John's timeless words are in verse 30, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

What does it mean that Jesus must increase and we must decrease? As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit in us, but also remaining in us is still the same old self that can be selfish, proud, complaining, and disobedient. You know that, do you not? How many times have you been selfish, perhaps not wishing to share a favourite food or possession with another? Or times when you were a champion in complaining – this is not good or that is not nice? The phrase "Jesus must increase, but I must decrease" means we must control our old self, for our old self is selfish! This also means we must reduce what old desires and bad habits we had or have. Instead, if there is anything that will help us be more like Jesus – in His kindness, patience, love – those must be increased!

The next time you feel angry, or impatient, or selfish, think of how you can CONTROL yourself. Remember today's lesson: how you must decrease these past desires and inclinations and allow the Holy Spirit to control your life. It will not be easy to reduce oneself as that is natural. However, we are not told just to decrease our self, but at the same time, to increase in being more and more like Jesus.

There is a hymn with words that make this idea very clear...

*While passing thro' this world of sin, and others your life shall view,
Be clean and pure without, within; Let others see Jesus in you.*

Chorus

*Let others see Jesus in you, Let others see Jesus in you.
Keep telling the story, be faithful and true; Let others see Jesus in you.*

*Your life's a book before their eyes, They're reading it thro' and thro'
Say, does it point them to the skies, Do others see Jesus in you?*

Thought: Jesus must increase; I must decrease.

Prayer: Lord, may I learn to be like John the Baptist, to decrease more and more of myself, but to increase more and more of Jesus in my life. I know it is not easy so heavenly Father, please help me along the way. This I pray in Jesus' name, amen.

WORSHIP GOD IN SPIRIT & TRUTH

At Jacob's well, Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman and asked her for water. She was initially reluctant to offer a drink to Jesus: a Jew, a man, and a stranger. But Jesus told her that if she knew who He was, she would have asked for the living water which only He could provide, and He would have given her that water willingly and freely. By and by, she realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah especially when He revealed, "I that speak unto thee am he."

Besides learning that Jesus is God, this woman also learned another truth: That God is a spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth. What does "worship God in spirit and in truth" mean?

It means so many things: that God looks at your heart and your attitude, that God requires true doctrines to be learned and practiced by us, that God must be worshipped and His Word followed not just in church, but at home, in your bus, in school, in the football field or playground.

It can also mean when you do your quiet time at home, God is with you, watching over you lovingly. When you go to church, have a short prayer before you start worship service. Or when you are in the children's program, singing or listening to a teacher, you can worship God through your actions.

However at the same time, remember you can dishonour God through your action. Are you cooperative during singing sessions; do you talk when you are supposed to sing and keep quiet when you are supposed to answer questions? To "worship God in truth" would clearly mean we cannot worship God in error. Some of you may be in Christian schools that teach doctrines different to our faith. They may teach that speaking in tongues is correct, that using rock music in worship services is acceptable...

In doubt, ask your Sunday school or Christian parent about what your schools teach, and they should be able to point you to the right way.

Thought: We must worship God in spirit and in truth.

Prayer: Lord, please teach me to learn how to worship in the right way, in spirit and in truth and not in error. Teach me also to be a true Christian, not only in church or when I'm with Christians, but anywhere and anytime. In Jesus' name I ask, amen.

SAMARITAN WOMAN BECAME WITNESS!

Convinced that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Samaritan woman became evangelistic! She went straight to the city center and told the people about Jesus. What was the result? Many of the Samaritans were saved. In fact, the Samaritans pleaded with Jesus to stay longer and Jesus obliged for 2 days. During this time, many more believed.

The Samaritan woman was a big-time sinner before she met Jesus. Why do we say she was a “big-time” sinner? John 4:18 tells us she was living with a man who was not her husband, and she had 5 husbands in the past. Such a woman would be despised today. And in those more conservative times of the past, she certainly would be frowned upon in the time of Jesus. But Jesus was compassionate and knew that the woman, like all of us, need God’s love and forgiveness.

What we can learn from this woman was she accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord readily, witnessed for Him, and would have changed her life in the light of her conversion.

From this passage, we learn from the Samaritan woman:

1. She wanted to know more about the _____ water that Jesus gives. We should be interested too in what Jesus says.
2. She listened carefully and believed what Jesus said, including that He was the _____. Believing in Jesus, she had simple _____.
3. She quickly went to tell people about Jesus, showing that she was a good _____ for the Lord.

(Helping words: witness, listener, living, Messiah, faith, love, joy)

Thought: Share the good news of salvation!

Prayer: Lord, keep me active and zealous to bring the good news of salvation to my friends too. I may not have done it in the past as I have been shy or afraid of not knowing what to say. Teach me to know that if I am faithful in my life as a Christian, that would be the best message for them! I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

BELIEVING IS SEEING

In Cana, a wealthy man was desperate. His power and wealth could not achieve what he wanted: recovery for his very sick son. Knowing that Jesus could work miracles, he sought help from our Saviour.

Initially, Jesus rebuked the man for wanting to see only signs and wonders; he would believe only if Jesus could miraculously raise his son. The man humbly accepted the Lord's rebuke and did not argue. Instead, he begged Jesus to see and heal his child before he dies. Instead of going to see the child, Jesus gave him a test – and told him his son would be healed even without seeing him. The man passed the test because he believed Jesus, he no longer needed to see to believe. For him, believing is seeing. For most people, even for us today, very often it is seeing is believing. For us Christians, it should be the reverse: , believing is seeing.

Answer these statements with a T for True or F for False.

1. Jesus healed the man's daughter. ()
2. Jesus healed the son by going to see him. ()
3. Jesus healed the son with His word. ()
4. Because he was wealthy, the man was proud. ()
5. The man had faith to believe that Jesus will heal his son. ()

Thought: Faith sees what you believe.

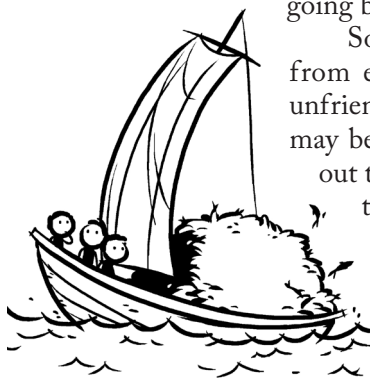
Prayer: Lord, please grant me that simple faith of believing your every word which is contained in the Bible. Help to realize that with faith, I can do what others cannot: see what I believe. So help me to see how your grace and mercy has been demonstrated in my life. This I ask in Jesus' name, amen.

THE BEST FISHERMAN!

Jesus, the creator of the world, demonstrated his control over the animal world in this encounter with his future disciples. Peter, James, and John were out fishing the whole night. To their disappointment and surprise, they caught nothing at all. With no fish to show for their overnight toil, they were perhaps resigned to take a break, washing their nets before they returned home. Then Jesus called them. It was a strange request, for Jesus wanted them to launch out into what appeared to be a fishless sea. Nevertheless, they obeyed.

What they next experienced shocked them! The men caught so many fishes so quickly that their net broke! Getting a neighbouring ship to help load the fishes, the abundance of fishes was so much both ships began to sink! The rest is history: the first few disciples were called and they left all to follow Jesus.

God is able to do much more than what we can imagine or hope for. The fishermen and their experience told them there was no point going back to the waters, but they obeyed.



Sometimes, life is like that. We know from experience someone is selfish and unfriendly, so we avoid him. But the Lord may be impressing on your heart to reach out to this child. Or your father has been too strict in the past, and you are now very afraid of him. Maybe he has just been converted to Christianity, and is trying to change. Would you forgive him and give him a chance to do so?

Thought: God can do more than what we imagine or hope for.

Prayer: Lord, remind me that you are indeed the Lord, and that you can do way above what we think or imagine. Sometimes when my troubles surround me, they distract me and make me worried or discouraged. Help me to trust in You and to look to You for help – in prayer. This is my humble cry in Jesus' name, amen.

DELIVERANCE OF THE DEMON-POSSESSED MAN

Have you ever seen Chinese mediums or Hindu devotees with spears pierced into their bodies, prancing around in trances? They apparently feel no pain; how can that be possible? Clearly these people have been empowered by a power stronger than themselves, and unfortunately they have been empowered by demons.

The passage tells us that when Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, he encountered a demon-possessed man. If you read verse 24 carefully, you will know that there was more than one demon in the man! These demons were very afraid of Jesus for they knew who he was, and the power he had; Jesus is God! Thank God it was a happy ending for that man; the demons left him.

This miracle highlights to us that we must be serious in our faith. Christianity can be fun; we play games and sing happy songs. But Christianity is *not only* fun and games. We live in a spiritual world, and the forces of darkness war against us. So dear child, do remember to be close to God that He may protect and guide you.

Write “YES” or “NO” against the sentences.

1. Jesus has power over the demons. ()
2. Jesus has power over all things. ()
3. Christianity is only fun and games. ()
4. We must be serious about our faith. ()
5. The demons know Jesus. ()

Thought: Jesus is much more powerful than Satan and all his demons combined.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for Your victory over Satan through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Remind me I am your child, and that nothing can harm me. Even if I may have nightmares, I pray you will give me the courage and to always pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

HEALING OF THE LEPER

Leprosy is a terrible disease; it was incurable in Bible times. Lepers usually hide themselves and cover their whole body because the disease eats into victims. Because it is a disease that causes decay in the flesh, a leprosy victim would smell bad. His flesh is literally rotting. It was a terrible ailment and since the disease is infectious, no one would dare live near anyone with leprosy. The victims have to live by themselves, far away from family, friends and society. When they go out into the streets, they would have to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn others of their condition, as an Old Testament book: Leviticus tells us (Lev 13 & 14).

A leper came to Jesus and begged Him for healing. Jesus did not shun him or shoo him away. In fact, Jesus did what most would not do: touch him. Would you do that? Almost all of us would run away the moment we see a leper. But our precious Lord is different. When Jesus saw the leper kneel and asking for help, He was moved with compassion. He touched the leper and answered his request with these healing words, "I will; be thou clean." With these words and that kind touch, restoration was given to the leper; he was instantly cured and cleansed! That man would never forget those words of power and instant cure.

Does God heal today? Of course! Does He heal in the same way as He did then? No. God has given us modern medicine, and great advances in medical technology, and there is no need to heal in the way Jesus did.

You may hear of "Healing Rallies" by certain Christian groups, but is the healing we read of in the bible? The healings in Bible times were complete and immediate. The entire leprosy of this man was gone. And the healing took place straight away, with absolutely no delay. What we may hear in such rallies today are "improvements, gradual advances", not what we read about in the bible. Instead, God heals us spiritually, mentally. If we are hurt, God can soothe our sorrows. When we are lonely, we can always go to Him for comfort. When we need guidance, He is waiting to show us the way. What a wonderful God we have!

Thought: Jesus, our kind and heavenly Doctor

Prayer: Gracious Lord, thank you that we have in Jesus such a wonderful Saviour and healer. May I learn to trust him more, and to commit my problems to him. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

HEALING OF THE PARALYZED MAN

Due to his growing ministry, we are not surprised Jesus attracted crowds wherever he went. In this bible passage, masses gathered to hear him such that houses or buildings he preached from were packed full.

In today's reading, we learn of one such instance. There was a paralyzed man whose buddies wanted to bring to Jesus. However, the house was jam-packed and try as they may, they could not get in! They then had a good though dangerous idea. Since they could not get in through the doors, get in through the roof! Climbing up to the roof was a risky matter as they had to carry their paralyzed friend. Clearly, their determination revealed they believed in Jesus and His power to save. Lowering the friend through an opening or hole must have been spectacular: the masses must have gasped in amazement when they saw the lowering of the paralyzed.

When Jesus saw the man, He could see the faith in him. Satisfied that the man had repented, Jesus forgave the man of his sins. That was more important than physical healing, but Jesus was gracious enough to also heal the man physically. As the former paralyzed man was instantly and completely healed, and took up his mattress-bed and walked off, the crowds were astonished!



Here is a picture of the house where the four friends lowered the paralyzed man down from the roof.

Join the dots for the staircase by which the four friends carried the man up to the roof.

Thought: Without faith it is impossible to please God.

Prayer: Lord, ever more give me that precious faith that believe every Word of the Bible. Thank you for this example of great faith. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

GIVING YOUR ALL TO JESUS

In this familiar passage, we read of a huge group of people following Jesus. Jesus saw that the people were hungry and wanted to provide for them. In those days, it was not common to have food stalls or restaurants. They certainly do not have the food centers we have in Singapore where one may buy food at a relatively low price for a large group of people.

Further, although some of the people may have brought their own lunch, many did not. So what did they do? They found a boy with a small lunch, probably enough only for himself or at most for a small group of people: 5 loaves of bread and two fishes. And we know with that, Jesus performed a miracle in providing lunch for all of the people. And after all have eaten their fill, the fragments that filled 12 baskets! What a wonderful God Jesus is!

Today, we focus on that boy, for he was willing to share his food. Although it was not very much, it was his all. And although it would not have been able to feed many people in the hands of anyone else, it was able to feed thousands in the hands of Jesus.



Dear child, learn to serve God. You may not have much in terms of time or talent, but give of your all or your best to God. Service to God is not just doing things in church. It includes that but it covers so many more things. Service to God would mean you want to be a good Christian to be a good example to others. Service to God could mean being an obedient child to your parents, or a kind friend who gives in to others. As the boy in today's passage gave all of his 5 loaves and 2 fishes, let us learn to give all to Jesus too!

Thought: Give of your all or best to the Master.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank You for the wonderful example of this boy. May I learn to be like him, that others may be able to learn positive things from me as I serve You. This I ask in Jesus' name, amen.

SHOULD WE STUDY ON THE SABBATH?

According to the Pharisees, the Sabbath law was broken when the disciples plucked and rubbed the grains in their hands as that meant working on the Sabbath. Jesus was deemed guilty because He did not stop His disciples from “breaking the Sabbath.” His disciples were hungry and plucked some wheat grains to eat. Was Jesus wrong not to stop them?

Jesus and His disciples clearly did not break any Sabbath law. What they went against were the wrong interpretations of the Pharisees. Jesus rebutted the accusations of the Pharisees by citing the example of David who ate of the bread in the temple that only the priests were allowed to eat; David and his men needed to survive and so had to eat! The higher law of necessity overrides the lower law of ceremony.

Today, we keep the Lord’s Day (Sunday) as a replacement of the Sabbath (Saturday), in line with the practice seen in the New Testament church.

All of you are students; should students study or have tuition on Sundays? Should adults work on Sundays? Preferably not, unless the services they provide are essential – like doctors or bus-drivers. God has given us students 7 days in one week, and other than Sunday, there are 6 other days we could have done our tuition or study. Sundays should be spent literally resting from our daily work, reading more of God’s Word and Christian books etc. However, if you forgotten to do your homework and need it Monday morning, then do it – the Lord will understand. It should however not be a regular event.

We are told to keep our Sabbaths but in reality, the Sabbath keeps us. It keeps us in balance, reminding us there is much more to life than studies and doing well. We often say we want to learn to trust God. Trust Him also in this issue – honour God by studying hard on 6 days and on Sunday, spend it for Him.

Thought: God has made the Sabbath a delight for His children.

Prayer: Gracious Lord, help us to honour thee in the way we observe the Christian Sabbath, not doing our own selfish pleasures. I know I am to keep the Sabbath Day Holy and so please help me to do it. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ALWAYS FOCUS ON JESUS !

It is a frightening thing to be caught in a stormy sea. Many of us won't know what it is like but if you were in a ship or boat in the midst of a big storm, you'd agree it is not a fun thing at all! In today's reading, we know the disciples were caught in such a situation. When they saw Jesus, they were initially frightened as they thought they saw a ghost! When Jesus comforted and assured them, they were settled. Then Peter wanted to walk on water and Jesus gave him power to do so. However, what happened soon after?

Look at verse 30 again. When Peter saw that the winds and waves were boisterous – meaning they were powerful and noisy – he began to sink. And when he began to sink, he got even more frightened! It was good he then did the right thing – call out to Jesus for help.

All of us will continue to have problems in life. You're now in Primary School, and you'd have to face exams, perhaps other problems at home as well. As you grow older, more problems will come. As Christians, how are we to respond? God does not promise we would have no trouble or problems. So what do we do? Look at Jesus, not our trouble or problems. Had Peter focused on Jesus and not on the waves and howling winds, he may have been able to continue walking on water. What a fantastic feat – to be able to walk on water! Although Peter was initially able to do it with God's help, he failed later.

In a way, it is the same for us. With God's help, we can do a lot. We may be able to do our daily Quiet Time and be faithful to God. We may be able to trust God despite difficulties. But if we lose our focus on God and the bible but instead focus on the problems and difficulties, they will seem too big for us.

Thought: Look to Jesus!

Prayer: O God, help me never to forget to turn my eyes on Jesus and to remember He is my source of strength. In His wonderful name I pray, amen.

ENCOURAGE A MISSIONARY / TEACHER?

Jamie chewed the end of her pencil as she tried to think of something to write next. “What are you doing?” asked her brother, Joshua. “Is that your homework?”

Jamie shook her head. “No, I’m writing a letter to Brother Lee,” she said. “You know... he’s the missionary who came and spoke at our church last month.”

“He probably doesn’t even remember you,” said Joshua.

“I know,” replied Jamie, “but I thought he might like to get a letter since he’s not married and works all alone in that village.”

Some days later, a missionary sighed as he sat down at a table. It was sweltering hot, and he was tired and discouraged. The work progressed so slowly, and sometimes he felt like he might just as well give up his missionary work and go back home. He looked at the mail in his hand. Letters were scarce, and he especially wondered about the long envelope addressed in a child’s unfamiliar handwriting.

He smoothed out the letter and began to read. “Dear Brother Lee,” it said, “I just wanted to tell you we’re all thinking of you and praying for you. I liked it when you came to our church last month. I hope you’re having a good time there.” The missionary smiled as he continued reading. “I remember the things you told us about having faith in God. I will try to have more faith. Because of you, I think I would like to be a missionary some day. Thank you for your help. Love, Jamie.”

Brother Lee sat for a few moments, and then he breathed a prayer of thanks for the encouragement of that simple letter. Perhaps this is God’s way of letting me know He intends to use my ministry here, he thought. Maybe I need more faith, too.

He smiled as he looked out the window at the village children playing in the sand. Then he took out a piece of paper. He had to write a thank-you letter to a very important person.

Thought: Have you thought about ways you could encourage the missionaries you know? Or the teachers in your Sunday School class? Your pastor or other church leader? Even a child can write a simple letter to encourage. You may never know just how much it means to someone; why not write a letter this week?

Prayer: O Lord, teach me to encourage someone this week. Could be my teacher or a missionary I know, just help me to pluck up my courage to write a short letter to that special someone! In Jesus’ precious name I pray – amen.

NOW IS THE APPOINTED TIME!

Charlie pulled a brightly colored paper from his pocket. “What’s this?”, he thought. “Oh-h-h! It’s my coupon for a free candy bar. I forgot all about it!” He had cut the coupon out of the newspaper several days earlier. Eager now to get the candy, he hurried to the store.

After carefully considering what he should get, Charlie picked up a candy bar, and handed the coupon to the sales clerk.

The clerk smiled at Charlie and looked at the coupon. “Oh, I’m sorry, but this coupon isn’t good any more,” she said. “It’s expired, past the date printed on it.” She showed him the expiration date. Disappointed, he put the candy back.

On the way home, Charlie stopped at his grandmother’s house and told her about the expired coupon. “Too bad you didn’t cash it in before,” sympathized Grandma, “but why don’t you sit down and have some ice-cream with me?” As she handed him a scoop, she said, “Your experience reminds me of a story I read called ‘Now Is the Time.’ It’s about a young man who often heard an invitation to be saved, but he always put off making a decision. At first he said he was too young, then he was too busy... and then he died in an accident. As far as anyone knows, he never did receive Christ as his Savior.”

“That’s sad,” said Charlie.

“It certainly is,” Grandma agreed solemnly. She looked intently at her grandson. “What about you, Charlie?” she asked. “You waited too long to cash in the coupon for a free candy bar. What have you done about cashing in on God’s offer for salvation?”

“Well, I...I...” Charlie suddenly realized that, just like the young man in the story, he had been putting off the decision to accept Jesus, and he didn’t know when God’s offer might “expire” for him. That afternoon, as he and Grandma knelt beside the sofa, he asked Jesus to be his Savior.

Thought: Have you been putting off your decision for Christ? There’s no guarantee you’ll be able to receive Him later. Accept God’s gift of salvation before the opportunity “expires” –before it’s too late. Receive Jesus today.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for giving me so much time to consider your gift of salvation. I know I have put off my decision to accept Jesus for too long and today, I want to humble myself before you and acknowledge that without Jesus, I will lost for eternity. So God, I now accept Jesus to come into my life and accept Him as my personal Lord and Saviour. Please forgive me for all my sins and I ask that I will try to live a life for Jesus from today. This I humbly ask in Jesus’ name. Amen!

KNOW YOUR BIBLE WELL!

“Well, Alex, what’s on your schedule for tomorrow?” asked Dad as he sat down in an easy chair.

Alex snapped off the TV and picked up the paper. “Oh,” he said, “tomorrow afternoon we have a birthday party.” He quickly read through the comic page while his dad took off his shoes. Then, handing Dad the newspaper, Alex added, “We’re having a Bible quiz at the beginning of the party. Maybe I’ll just go late.”

“Oh? Why is that?” asked Dad. “You used to enjoy quizzes. Why don’t you like them now?” Alex leafed through a sports magazine. “Because Joel always wins, that’s why. They’re no fun anymore.” “I see,” murmured Dad. “Maybe you should do a little studying. Do you know what chapters the quiz will cover?”

“Yes,” replied Alex, “but it doesn’t matter what chapters they are. Joel will know everything in them. That guy really knows his Bible! The other day in science class, Joel and our teacher got into quite a discussion about creation, and Joel did really good. He quoted verses from the Bible and talked about why he believed it was true. He really knew what he was talking about.” “Good for Joel!” cheered Dad.

“Yeah,” agreed Alex reluctantly. “I’ve heard him do the same kind of thing in history class. I wish I knew the Bible like that.” He sighed and began reading an article in his magazine.

Dad watched Alex for a moment, then he asked, “How do you suppose Joel learned so much?” Alex shrugged. “Well,” said Dad, “I don’t think it came from reading magazines or newspapers or watching TV. If you want to know the Bible, you have to study the Bible.”

Alex looked at Dad thoughtfully. He looked down at his magazine. Then, putting it down, he got to his feet. “Excuse me, please.” He grinned at his dad. “I have to go study a couple of chapters in my Bible. Joel’s going to have some competition tomorrow!”

Thought: Do you wish you had as much Bible knowledge as your pastor, your Sunday school teacher, or even a friend? It’s available to you, too, but it won’t come automatically. Listen carefully when God’s Word is taught in church and Sunday school. Study it by yourself, too. That’s the way to learn.

Prayer: Our heavenly Father, may I remember the lesson and verse for today, that I may indeed study to show myself approved unto God. That though young, I may be a workman who needs not to be ashamed, that I may divide the word of truth in the right way. This I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD FOR WHO?

Jon propped his chin in his hand as he watched his grandmother mix shortening and sugar. “I’m making your favorite cake-chocolate,” she said. As Jon smiled faintly, Grandma added, “Why so quiet? Is something wrong, Jon?”

Jon grunted. “Everything’s wrong!” he complained. “Failed my Chinese test, badly. Mom says I can’t have the remote-control plane I wanted. And doctor says I have to wear a brace on my leg for 2 years. How can I ever make new friends wearing a metal monster? If God loved me, He wouldn’t let all this happen to me.” Jon slammed his fist on the table. “It’s not fair!”

Grandma murmured sympathetically, then handed Jon a spoonful of cocoa. “Here, have a taste,” she said. “Yuk!” Jon drew back. “Then how about this?” Grandma dipped a spoon into the oil and sugar mixture. Jon frowned. “No way am I going to taste that!” he declared.

Grandma raised her eyebrows. “Then how about some flour?” she suggested. “Or maybe you’d like a little baking soda... or this egg?” Jon grinned. “Aw-w-w, Grandma,” he said, “you’re teasing me.”

Grandma smiled. “I am teasing you a little,” she agreed, “but I wanted you to understand something. Cocoa and raw eggs aren’t good alone, but when I mix all the ingredients together...” “Yum-m-m, yum-m-m, good!” exclaimed Jon.

“It’s like that in life, too,” said Grandma as she sifted flour into the bowl. “I know you’ve learned the Bible verse that says all things work together for good in the life of a Christian. It doesn’t say all things are good. But when God gets through mixing a Christian’s experiences together—the bitter, the sweet, the happy, the sad—life comes out good. Moving and wearing a brace are bitter experiences for you, but trust God, Jon. He’ll add some ‘sugar’ and some ‘flavoring’, and in the end it will be good.” Grandma laughed. “Even better than my cake.”

“Maybe so,” Jon agreed. Then he grinned. “Grandma, may I lick the beater?”

Thought: Have you had to “swallow” bitter experiences lately? Be patient. All the ingredients of your life are not in yet, but God is making something special out of you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for today’s lesson that everything will work for good, if we love you. So help me to examine myself to see whether I really do love you. And if I do, I will be absolutely sure whatever things that happen to me, even if they are difficult and bitter, are there to strengthen me. But please give me strength to bear these difficulties, for I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

LOVE IS NOT JEALOUSY

Judy put her hands over her ears and intently read the bulletin on her lap. She didn't want to hear her friend, Laura, play the piano solo. After church everyone would talk about how Laura had mastered the piano, and Judy didn't want to hear that, either. She was jealous. That was all there was to it! She wished she could play in church.

That week, the annual all-school track meet was held at Judy's school. All the classes were competing in running events, and Judy had been chosen to run the cross-country race. She had always been the fastest runner in her class, and she waited confidently on the sidelines.

"You running the last event?" Hearing the question, Judy turned to see Laura standing next to her. "Probably," muttered Judy. "I wish I could run as fast as you do," said Laura. She sighed. "I probably wouldn't even beat a turtle."

Judy looked at Laura in surprise. After a moment, she laughed. "That's funny," she said. "I always wish I could play the piano as well as you do, and at the same time you wish you could run as fast as me."

Laura grinned. "I guess we're both pretty silly." "I even tried not to listen to you play last Sunday," confessed Judy, "but I heard you anyway. You did a great job."

"Thanks," said Laura, just as Judy's teacher came to get her for the next race. "Hope you win your race."

When Judy got home that afternoon, she told her mother about her conversation with Laura. Mother smiled. "Our job is to use the abilities God gave us the best way we know how," she said. "We shouldn't waste our time wishing we could do something someone else is doing. I think you and Laura both learned an important lesson."

Thought: Have you ever wished you could write, play an instrument, or draw as well as someone else could? Have you even disliked someone because of his or her abilities? Today's Scripture gives an example of terrible sin that resulted from envy. Remember, God made each person unique and gave each one different abilities. Don't be envious of someone else's talent or the attention they may be getting. Instead, be happy with the talent God gave you, and remember, serve Him.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for today's lesson. Sometimes I do get jealous of others; it could be someone I love or someone I do not. But help me to show real Christian love to all, and understand that love, or charity, will not get jealous. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

YOU ARE THE TEMPLE OF GOD

“Let’s stop for some ice cream,” suggested Kathy as she and her friend Jenny walked home from school.

Jenny shook her head as she looked at her chubby friend. “I thought you said your doctor wanted you to cut out sweet stuff,” she said.

“Well, I’m hungry,” said Kathy as she waved Jenny on and turned to go into the ice cream store. But she felt a bit guilty as she ordered a banana split. The doctor had said she should lose weight, and she knew she didn’t eat properly. As she ate, she told herself the fruit was good for her.

When Kathy arrived home, her mother had good news. “I’ve decided to quit smoking, Kathy,” she said. “I went to a Bible study at church this morning, and the group discussed how our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. I guess He must be tired of living in a smoke-filled residence!”

Kathy was delighted. Her mother had been a Christian only a short time, and Kathy had been praying that she would give up smoking before it harmed her permanently. “Great, Mom,” cheered Kathy. “I’ll help you all I can.”

“Good” Mother smiled. “Will you go for a walk with me every day?” Inwardly, Kathy groaned. It sounded like such a lot of effort! “One of my excuses for smoking has always been that it kept me from gaining weight,” Mother continued, “so I’m going to eat a well-balanced diet and get lots of exercise.” She paused a moment before adding, “After all, having a proper temple not only involves ridding it of smoke, but also of excess weight, I should think.”

Kathy sighed. “All right. I can take a hint. I’ll walk with you and try to improve my diet, too. But don’t expect any miracles,” she warned. “We’ll do our best,” said Mother, “and we’ll let Jesus handle the miracles.”

Thought: Do you take good care of your body? Do you eat properly? Get enough rest? Exercise? Maintaining a proper temple for the Holy Spirit means doing the right things as well as staying away from things that harm you (such as tattoos, cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, too much food). Ask the Lord to help you take proper care of His temple.

Prayer: O Lord, I am so privileged that as a believer, the Holy Spirit dwells in me and I am the temple of God. Help me to take care of it, and at the same time, not sin with my body. This I ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.

GOD WILL FORGIVE

Christopher buried his face deep into his pillow and cried softly. He did not hear someone slip quietly into his room, but a gentle touch caused him to look up from his bed. His mom was looking down at him. “What’s the matter, Christopher?” she asked as she sat down beside him. “Is there some problem I can help you with?”

Christopher felt a warm blush color his face. He didn’t really want to tell his mother what was bothering him. “Something happened at school,” he stammered finally. “I... lied to Aaron, and now he won’t talk to me. He knows I lied.”

“Why did you do that?” Mom asked gently. “I... I don’t know,” mumbled Christopher. He sniffed. “I told him I was sorry, but I don’t think he believes me. I don’t blame him.”

“Are you really sorry?” asked Mom. Christopher nodded. “Then give your friend time to learn to trust you again,” advised Mom. “I don’t think he’ll ever believe me again,” said Christopher sadly.

“Christopher, do you remember when your Dad and I used to give you piggyback rides?” asked Mom. Christopher nodded, wondering why Mom had brought that up. “You thought it was so much fun until you slipped off one day and hit your head on a chair,” said Mom. “After that it took you a while to trust us enough to try it again.”

“But I finally did!” Christopher said. He thought he knew what Mom was getting at. “Yes, and I’m sure Aaron will trust you again, too,” said Mom. She patted Christopher’s back. “It takes time for people to trust one another again,” she said, “but let me tell you something wonderful.” She smiled. “When you’re truly sorry for the wrong you’ve done and confess it to God, He forgives you right away. There may still be sad consequences for what you’ve done—like a friend who won’t speak to you for a while. But you need to believe God when He says He forgives you. He wants you to be a good friend to Aaron again. Do you think you can do that?”

Christopher nodded. “I’ll be a great friend!” he promised.

Thought: Have you ever done anything that made you feel you might never be forgiven? If your heart is right, God knows you are really sorry. He will forgive you right away and help you to make things right with others, too. Trust Him.

Prayer: O Lord, do forgive me for the times when I have sinned. You know I am sorry. Help me to break away from the sin that can trap me. Please help me to be strong against sin, and I know I will be if I rely on your strength. In the precious name of my Saviour I pray, amen.

BE CONTENTED!

Meng Leng and Matt sat together with their mother and studied a new catalog. Meng Leng pointed to a picture. “Mom,” she whined, “I want an outfit like this one. All my friends would just love it!”

“And I want one of these talking robots,” said Matt, turning several pages. “See? It’s voice-activated and everything! Couldn’t you get one for me? It’s not all that expensive!”

Just then, they heard a noise coming from the window. “Meow-r-r!” whined Fluffy, their cat.

“Look at him!” Meng Leng laughed. “He’s watching those birds out in the front yard again.”

“That dumb cat,” said Matt. “By this time he ought to know that he can’t get them through the window.”

Mother looked at Fluffy. The cat’s tail was twitching in frustration as he stared intently at the birds he couldn’t reach. “Fluffy is silly, isn’t he,” she agreed. “Almost as silly as two children I know.”

“Us?” asked Matt. “What do you mean?”

“Fluffy is making himself miserable by longing for something he can’t have,” explained Mother. “You and Meng Leng have the same problem. You both know we’re not going to be buying anything new right now, yet you persist in thinking about the things you can’t have instead of enjoying all the things God has allowed you to have. I’d say you were at least as silly as Fluffy.”

The children were silent for a moment. Then Matt put the catalog down. “Sorry, Mom,” he said. “Come on, Meng Leng. Let’s go play that new game we got for Christmas.”

Thought: Are there things you would like, but you know you can’t have them right now? Don’t allow your mind to dwell on those things. Instead, enjoy and be content with what God gives you. Be a grateful child for the things you already have.

Prayer: Almighty God, help me to know that you have been so kind to me already with all that I have been given. Help me also to be contented with what I have, and to be grateful to you, to my parents and my care-givers. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ACCEPT & HELP ONE ANOTHER!

Li Ann winced when her friends made cutting remarks about Michelle, another classmate. Michelle's clothes were often dirty and mismatched. Her skin and hair didn't look clean, either. Many of the girls at school teased her, but Li Ann had never joined in. She was a Christian and she knew God wouldn't be pleased with that.

After school, Li Ann told her mother about Michelle. "I've prayed about it – I've asked God to make the teasing stop, but it doesn't seem to do any good," said Li Ann. "I feel so sorry for Michelle."

"Well, maybe you need to put 'legs' on your prayers," suggested Mother. "Are you willing to be her friend?" Li Ann thought about it and then nodded slowly. She would do it.

Li Ann began by saying a few friendly words to Michelle whenever they met in the hall. Next, she invited Michelle to sit with her at lunch time. A few weeks later, Li Ann asked her friends, including Michelle, to have a gathering at her house.

Li Ann was glad to see that Michelle was wearing a clean shirt when she arrived at her home. During the evening the girls talked about hair styles, choosing suitable clothes, cleanliness, and other good grooming habits. Michelle listened intently. After a bit, she asked, "Will you help me fix my hair so it looks better?" Soon the girls were all giggling together as they tried fixing Michelle's hair different ways.

After that evening, Michelle's appearance slowly improved. She was clean and neat, and as the others teased her less, she lost some of her shyness. She also went to Sunday school with Li Ann.

Li Ann was delighted. God had answered her prayer—using Li Ann herself to bring about the changes. She was glad she had pleased the Lord and brought glory to Him by being kind to Michelle.

Thought: Do you refuse to join in teasing others? That's good, but sometimes there's even more you can do. Are you willing to help someone who has a problem? Start out with just a friendly word or two. As time goes by, you may have a chance to do other things. Be ready to help in any way God shows you.

Prayer: Although it is easy to just follow the majority and tease someone different, God, help me to have the strength to say "No!" Help me to dare to stand up and be different. As Jesus has accepted me, help me to accept others who may be different from me. And to help them should such opportunities arise. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

OBEY INSTRUCTIONS & WARNINGS!

Rain splashed hard against the windshield. Gina sat back in her seat and watched the windshield wipers slapping the raindrops away. Soon the car slowed to a stop. Dad eased his window down just enough to talk with a man standing in the road, waving a flashlight. “The bridge ahead is washed out,” shouted the man above the roar of the rain. “You’ll need to take a different route.” He showed Dad where he could turn around.

Dad thanked the man and closed the window. “Well,” he said with a sigh, “we won’t be home quite as soon as we hoped, but it shouldn’t take too much longer.” He carefully turned the car around, and headed in the other direction.

“Dad,” Gina said the next morning at breakfast, “I just heard on the news that some people were hurt last night during the storm. They didn’t know the bridge was washed out and drove right off a big drop-off into the river.”

Dad placed a box of cereal on the table. “I heard the news, too,” he said. “I’m sure glad that man was there to warn us of danger ahead.” He smiled. “You know,” she added, “God often warns us when danger is ahead, too, and tells us to turn around.” “What do you mean?” Gina asked curiously.

“Well, we often face choices in life—who to be close friends with, whether or not to cheat on a test in school, whether or not to tell a lie—things like that. When we’re tempted to make the wrong choice, God always warns us to turn around. Sometimes He shows us something in the Bible to warn us of danger. Sometimes He uses parents or other Christians. If we obey Him, we’ll be kept safe. If we ignore his warning, we’ll end up hurt or in trouble.”

Gina sat at the table and looked out the kitchen window. Finally she said, “So instead of getting mad that we can’t do something the way we want to, we should be glad when we’re warned about it, right?”

“Right!” agreed Dad. “That’s exactly right!”

Thought: Do you pay attention when parents warn you against doing something wrong? Do you listen to warnings given by pastor, teachers, or Christian friends? Sometimes they may tell you things you don’t want to hear, but God has given them to you to help and protect you. He also uses the Bible, to instruct you and show you what things please Him. Read and obey what He says.

Prayer: O God, thank you for the reminder today that I must obey instruction and warnings. Sometimes I get stubborn so do please help me to realize not to obey is foolishness. In His precious name I pray, amen.

GOD, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

“I hope you don’t get upset with me, Dad,” said Teck Leong, “but... well, I really like my science teacher, and he believes what Darwin says about evolution. Sometimes it sounds pretty logical.”

Dad smiled. “I’m not at all upset with you, son,” he said. “I gave that a lot of thought when I was young, too.” As he talked, he walked over to the bookshelves and pulled out a book. “Most kids your age don’t get to see this book,” he said as he held it out to Teck Leong. “It’s about evolution, and it’s pretty hard to understand. But, I’d like you to look through it and see how many times you can find such words as ‘let us assume,’ ‘perhaps,’ or ‘probably’—words indicating uncertainty. I’ll come back in about ten minutes to see what you’ve found.”

Teck Leong opened the book as he sat down in a nearby chair. Soon he was busily reading. He looked up as his dad walked into the room some time later. “Nine times so far, Dad,” Teck Leong said, even before his dad could ask a question. “Nine times in ten minutes.”

Dad took the book. “Imagine how often you’d find such words if you read this from cover to cover,” he said. “To ‘assume’ means to think or suppose that something is true. Teck Leong, wouldn’t you rather know?” Dad handed him another book. “Here’s the world’s best textbook, the Bible! It tells how the world was created and how we can know our Creator. We can know where we came from and where we’re going. Doesn’t that sound a lot better?”

Thought: Do you know the God who created you? You can learn about Him through His book, the Bible. It proves itself true through fulfilled prophecy and changed lives. It has stood the test of time. It tells how you can have a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Help me gracious Father to know that out of nothing, you created heaven and earth. It has been clearly and faithfully recorded in Genesis 1 and 2, and I thank you for it. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

CONTROL YOUR TONGUE

“Oh, how I love Jesus,” sang Raymond. “Oh, how I love... Stop it! Leave him alone. He’s my pet, not yours!” Raymond stopped singing to yell at his little sister. She was wriggling her fingers around in the chameleon’s home. Raymond reached over to pull Tara’s chubby hand from the bowl. “Don’t ever play with my chameleon again, you hear?” Then... CRASH! The bowl plunged to the floor. “Now look what you’ve done!” yelled Raymond hatefully. “Tara, you are so clumsy! Why do I have to have such a stupid sister?” Dad, who saw and heard what happened, spoke sternly to Raymond, but Tara ran toward her bedroom, sobbing.

That afternoon, Raymond’s friend Josef came to play. Raymond proudly showed Josef his new chameleon. “He eats bugs,” said Raymond, dropping a few into the bowl. Josef watched. “Hey!” he said after a few minutes. “Where did those bugs go? One minute I saw them, and the next... they’re gone!” “He’s probably eaten them,” said Raymond. “Really? I didn’t see him,” Josef replied. “I was watching, too.”

“Dad says a chameleon’s tongue is as fast as lightning,” explained Raymond. “Photographers use slow motion cameras to watch their eating habits.”

Just then Dad entered the room. “That’s right,” he said. “A chameleon’s tongue is longer than its body, shaped like a tube, and is sticky on the end. God made their tongues like weapons so they could easily lash out and capture their prey.” “Tara is still upset about the way you yelled at her this morning.” He pointed to the chameleon. “Your tongue attacked your sister like your chameleon’s tongue attacks his lunch. His tongue sticks to the bugs, and I’m afraid your hateful words have stuck to Tara like glue. One minute you were singing about how you love Jesus and the next you were spitting out hateful words. How do you think Jesus feels about that? If you really love Him, don’t you think it should show in your speech?”

Raymond lowered his eyes. “I... I’m sorry,” he said. “I’ll... I’ll go apologize.”

Thought: Do you say hurtful things to others? Do you call your brother, sister, or friends names? What we say does hurt others—sometimes for a long time. Be careful to always speak kindly to others. Be careful to say things God is pleased to hear.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to control my tongue, otherwise it may control me. Help me to tame it, for it can be like fire, hurting others around me. For those times when I have sinned with my tongue, forgive me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

TALK TO AND TRUST IN HIM

When Jared slammed his bedroom door so hard that the walls shook, Mother knew something was wrong. She found him sitting on the edge of his bed crying. “What’s the trouble, son?” she asked gently as she sat down beside him.

Jared sniffed. “Well... I had a rotten day,” he told her. “I got a ‘D’ on my English test—the one I spent an hour studying for. And I could not make it to the school basketball team. Not even the reserve!”

“Well, honey, I’m sorry you’ve had a tough time,” said Mother putting her hand on his shoulder. “Tell you what... I’ll help you study for your next test. English was my favorite subject, so we’ll see if we can bring that grade up. As for your basketball, you practise hard and try your best again the next time.”

As Mother sat there, Jared told her about other problems he was having at school, especially in gym class. “I’m just not good at that stuff,” he said. Mother encouraged him to do his best, and he felt better after talking with her.

Before climbing into bed, Jared began to say the little rhyme prayer he had learned when he was small, but it seemed so empty—he was too big for that. But what should I say instead? he wondered. As he thought over the events of the day, he remembered his mother’s concern for him. She really loved him and was interested in what went on, and she had reminded him that God cared for him, too. I guess I can talk to God just like I talk to Mom! thought Jared.

Before he knew it, Jared was talking to God—telling Him about the day. He told God about his bad grade, the basketball, and the guys in gym. He asked God to help him do better in basketball and with his schoolwork. He thanked God for parents who loved and cared for him, and he thanked God for His care, too. After Jared finished praying, he felt much better. He decided to talk with God more often!

Thought: Are there times when you’re not sure what to pray about? Do you ever feel as though praying won’t help anything? Just remember that God cares for you, and you can talk to Him as you would to your parents or to your closest friend. God has the power to help you in all areas of your life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn to speak to you more often, and to trust in you at all times. As I pour out my heart before you, you will hear and deliver. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

HOW PRECIOUS IS THY WORD!

“Oh, Mom, what smells so good?” asked Christy as she put her school books on the kitchen table.

Mother smiled. “You’re right, Christy. A friend at work gave me a bottle of perfume for my birthday. It’s called Lilac Love. Her husband works at the cosmetic company where it’s made, so she gets perfume at a discount.”

Christy picked up the bottle. “Can I try some?”

“Sure,” agreed Mother.

Every now and then during the next few weeks, Christy would smell lilacs and know her mother had been using the new perfume. It really did have a pleasing fragrance.

One day Christy and her mother were at a department store, looking for a new dress for Christy. “Mom, look.” Christy pulled on her mother’s sleeve as they were passing the perfume counter. “There’s a bottle of Lilac Love.”

“Sure enough!” Mother stopped to look at the display.

“Look at this!” Christy exclaimed. “It’s expensive! I bet you didn’t know it cost this much.”

“Wow, I certainly didn’t!” exclaimed Mother in dismay. “Here I’ve been using it just about every day, and it’s almost gone! If I had known how expensive it was, I would have saved it for special occasions.”

Christy smiled. “It’s just like my Sunday school teacher said about the Bible,” she said. “Most people have a Bible, but they don’t understand how valuable it is.”

“You’re so right, Christy,” agreed Mother. “The Bible is even more valuable than a bottle of expensive perfume! But the wonderful thing about the Bible is that even though we can—and should—use it every day, we’ll never run out of its treasure!”

Thought: Do you realize how valuable the Bible is? Do you realize that it explains how you can have eternal life? Do you know that it gives you guidelines for living your life? Some people have a Bible just because they think it’s a good book. They don’t know it’s the inspired Word of God. Thank the Lord for giving you the Bible. Study it and find the hidden treasures inside.

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank you so much for thy word. May I learn more of it bit by bit that I may be able to appreciate how wonderful and true the Bible is. And may I indeed follow the formula for the RPG – Read, Pray and Grow! In Jesus’ name, amen.

DO YOU GIVE THANKS FOR YOUR FOOD?

Chris was very nervous. It was his very first day at the new school, and he didn't know anyone! "Lord, help me make a friend!" he prayed silently as he walked down the unfamiliar hallway to his class.

Some of the boys and girls in Chris' class smiled at him, but hardly anyone said anything. By recess time, he was very discouraged. The teacher showed him where to pay for his food and pointed out the section of tables reserved for students his age. Chris sat down and looked around at the other boys and girls. They all seemed to know one another. Laughing and talking went on all around him.

Then Chris noticed something. One boy was praying! Right there in the cafeteria, he had bowed his head and closed his eyes and was praying. He must be a Christian, thought Chris. Getting up, he took his tray and went to sit next to the other boy. "Hi. I'm Chris," he said. "I... ah... I'm new here, but I thought maybe... ah... were you praying just now?"

The boy nodded. "Yes, I was," he said. He looked at Chris, then added hesitantly, "I was giving thanks for my food. I'm a Christian."

"So am I!" exclaimed Chris. "We just moved to town, and I don't really know any kids yet. I... I've been praying that the Lord would help me meet a new friend."

"Wow! That's great!" The boy grinned at Chris. "My name is Jason, and there are some other Christian kids around, too. You'll like it here."

Silently, Chris prayed, "Thank You, Lord. Thank You for helping me meet Jason."

Thought: Are you sometimes ashamed to talk to the Lord in front of your friends? You don't need to feel that way. Talking to God is a very special privilege a Christian has. Dare to pray in public, as Daniel did. It will be a testimony to those who are unsaved. It's also an encouragement to other Christians. Sometimes it's easier if two or more pray together. Do you know another Christian in your school? If so, why not talk about this with him or her, and talk about eating—and praying—together.

Prayer: God, you know that sometimes I am shy about giving thanks for my food in public places. Help me not to be shy about it and give me the strength to overcome it for I want to dare to let others know I am a Christian. I know it will not be easy, but with your help, it can be done. in Jesus' name I pray, amen.

THE LORD SHALL PROTECT YOU AGAINST TEMPTATIONS!

Courtney hurried to tie her sneakers. It was a Saturday morning, and she was going to go with Dad on his morning walk.

Dad smiled as Courtney skipped along beside him. "I enjoy having you along when I go for a walk," said Dad. "Why don't you come with me more often?"

"I think I will," agreed Courtney. "Maybe not every Saturday." She grinned. "I have to sleep in once in a while, you know. But I do like to come with you, too. I like to look at all the flowers blooming in the yards and..." Courtney broke off her sentence as two large dogs ran barking toward her across their fenced backyard. She shrank against Dad.

Father smiled down at her. "Don't worry. That's a strong fence," said Mom. "I walk this way every morning, and I've never seen those dogs get out."

Courtney shuddered as she hurried past the dogs. "I don't like dogs." "I know," said Dad, "but you can trust the fence to hold them."

That evening, Courtney's friend Sara called. After hanging up the phone, Courtney talked with Dad. "Sara wanted me to go with her to a movie that I knew I shouldn't see, but I said no," she reported.

"Good," said Father, giving her a hug. "As you get older, honey, you'll face many temptations. You need to build strong fences to keep from giving in to things you shouldn't do."

Courtney looked puzzled, and Dad explained. "There are several things we can do to build fences that hold back temptation," he said. "Paying attention in church and Sunday school, reading the Bible and obeying it, talking to God in prayer, and spending time with Christian friends are all ways to help strengthen our fences of resistance. Then, even though temptation can come at us like those dogs you saw today, all it can do is bark at the fence. If you build a strong fence, it will be sure to hold."

Thought: There are many temptations that are hard to resist. Are you building "fences" against them? You need to do that now so that you don't give in, even to the strongest temptation.

Prayer: Thank you, gracious Lord, that in the time of trouble, I can run to thee. Help me to indeed run to thee for I need thy help. And may I also run to thy Word to understand more of thy will for me. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, amen.

DO NOT LET SIN CONTROL YOU!

Cindy tried to slow her bike when one of the neighborhood kids turned right in front of her, but her front wheel skidded and she toppled onto the hard gravel. After a moment of stunned fright, she stood up and inspected the damage. Her bike was okay, but her right knee was not. Small pieces of gravel had pierced her skin and were imbedded in the cut. Slowly, she wheeled her bike home and parked it in the garage.

She found her mother in the kitchen. “Look at my knee, Mom,” said Cindy. “It hurts! That Jason makes me so mad! He cut right in front of me, and I fell.”

“I’m sure he didn’t mean to make you fall,” said Mom as she examined Cindy’s knee. “I’m afraid we’ll have to do more than wash this. We’ll have to get all the bits of gravel out of the cut. Otherwise it may fester, and the sore spot might get infected.”

Mom sterilized some tweezers and carefully dislodged each tiny piece of gravel. Cindy winced and felt her eyes fill with tears, but she clenched her teeth and didn’t complain. She was glad when Mom finished and the cut was bandaged.

“Your knee may be sore for a few days,” said Mom, “but it should heal just fine.” Cindy studied her bandaged knee. “Well, I’m never going to play with Jason again,” she declared. “It’s all his fault.” “Whoa!” cautioned Mom. “Be careful! Don’t let anger or bitterness fester in your heart. They’re like gravel.” “Like gravel? What do you mean?” asked Cindy.

“Sins such as bitterness and anger—even so-called little sins—are like the gravel in your cut,” Mom told her. “If we don’t do anything about our sin, it can lead to more sin... like germs lead to an infection. So when you sin, what should you do about it?”

“Ask God for forgiveness,” said Cindy promptly. “We should also ask forgiveness of anyone who’s been hurt by our sin.” She looked thoughtful. “Last Saturday, I... ah... I said I felt sick because I didn’t feel like helping Dad wash his car,” she confessed. “I wasn’t really sick, and it’s bothered me all week.”

“How can you get rid of that ‘gravel?’” Mom asked gently. “Well... I did tell God I was sorry, and I guess... oh, I know! I’ll tell Dad I’m sorry for not helping,” said Cindy. “And first thing Saturday morning, I’ll go help him.”

Thought: Have you checked for sin in your life that needs attention? It may be painful to examine your sin and ask for forgiveness, but if you ignore, it will be even more painful later. Get rid of sin quickly before it causes an “infection.”

Prayer: My King in heaven, there have been times when I have been angry and bitter about people. And perhaps times when I have sinned against you, in small ways, but I know they are still sins. O Lord, please forgive me and help me never to commit them again. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

KEEP TRYING AND WORKING HARD!

David's mom came into his room to check on his homework. "How's your report coming?" she asked.

"It's not good," grumbled David, "and I don't want to do it anyway."

"You sound upset, David. Are you still fretting about yesterday?" asked Mom.

David's eyes got misty. "I wanted to be class reporter for the school paper so bad," he said. "And what did Mrs. Lim say? 'You have a good imagination, but you don't check facts. A reporter must be accurate. Work on it, David. Maybe you can be a reporter next year.'"

"I know you're disappointed, David, but don't give up," encouraged Mom. "Now – what school report are you working on?"

"I have to write about some famous person," David muttered. "It can be anybody."

"What about John Calvin, the French theologian who was used by God as the main figure behind the wonderful Christian theology called Calvinism. He was not perfect, but he kept trying and trusting God and working hard!" "Yes, that could work!" exclaimed David.

"That's right." Mom nodded. "But he's remembered for his successes, not for his failures. Often it's easy to give up when we fail, but that doesn't help us grow. It's not what God would have us do, either. He wants us to learn from our experiences and try harder the next time. We must learn to depend on Him to help us turn failure into success."

David gave his mom a big hug. "Thanks, Mom," he said. "I see what you've been trying to tell me. I won't give up. I'll make this report so accurate that even Mrs. Lim would be proud of it."

Thought: What happens when you fail at something? Do you give up and quit trying? Don't get discouraged. Learn from your mistakes and realize that it takes time to learn to do things well. Depend on God to help you.

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for the lesson today. I have not well in certain things, sometimes in my studies, sometimes in other duties. Help me to learn that even when I fail, I must pick myself up and try even harder! O lord, especially when I am weak, may I learn to be strong by thy strength. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

BE A “HOME” MISSIONARY

“The missionary speaker we had in Sunday school today was so interesting!” Cheryl told her mother as they arrived home from church one Sunday. “I think missionaries have such an exciting life - traveling far away and seeing new places and different people. And they get to tell the Gospel to people who’ve never heard it before. That would be special! Maybe I’ll be a missionary some day. I hope God calls me to Brazil.” Mom smiled and went to answer the phone.

After a moment, Mom returned. “Cheryl,” she said, holding her hand over the mouthpiece, “Aunty Peck Suan would like you to go with her tomorrow afternoon to visit the new girl who just moved to our block last month.” “Tomorrow? Do I have to?” asked Cheryl with a frown. “Ella and I want to go roller-blading tomorrow. Besides, I wouldn’t know what to say to the new girl.”

Mom spoke into the phone. “Cheryl will call you later, Aunty Peck Suan,” she said. After hanging up the phone, she turned to her daughter. “Do you remember what the optometrist said when you had your eye examination a week ago?” “Sure.” Cheryl nodded, wondering why Mom was asking about that. “He said I have 20/20 vision, and that means I have perfect eyesight. At twenty feet I can see exactly what our eyes are supposed to see from that distance.”

“Right,” said Mom, “and I’m glad you have 20/20 vision in your eyes. But when it comes to your ‘missionary vision,’ it seems to me that you’re quite longsighted. A person whose eyes are longsighted can see things in the distance, but they can’t see objects up close very well. You’re apparently excited at the idea of going far away to tell people about Jesus, but you don’t seem to be interested in the girl nearby. If you don’t want to witness here, what makes you think you’d want to witness if you went far away?”

Cheryl was startled. “I... I... You’re right,” she admitted. “I should go with Aunty Peck Suan to see the new girl. I’ll call her right now.”

Thought: Are you interested in taking the Gospel to a far away place someday? That’s great! Are you also concerned about the people nearby—people all around you who are facing an eternity in hell if they don’t accept Jesus as Savior? Ask God to open your spiritual eyes to see those you should reach here and now. Get a 20/20 missionary vision.

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me to be a “home” missionary, that I can be a good witness to people you have put in my life. They could be classmates, neighbours, relatives. Help me not to be afraid to say a word for Jesus, knowing that He died on the cross for me. In His name I pray, amen.

GOD CARES FOR YOU!

As Becky nibbled at her breakfast, she thought about the big maths test she would be taking later that day. Even though she had studied hard, there were butterflies in her stomach! Tests made her nervous! “Not hungry this morning, dear?” asked Mother as she noticed Becky’s nearly full cereal bowl.

“I keep thinking about that horrible maths test,” Becky replied with a worried look.

“But you seemed to know how to work all of the problems when you were studying last night,” said Mother.

“Yes, but it’s different when I have to do them on a test,” said Becky with sigh. “I’m comfortable when I’m at home with you and Daddy, but I get scared at school, and everything seems to get jumbled up in my mind.”

Mother sat down next to Becky and gently reached for her hands. “You know, Daddy and I can’t be with you at school, but your heavenly Father will be with you all through your test,” she said reassuringly. “He doesn’t want you to worry. He tells us to give all of our worries and anxieties to Him, because He cares for us so very much.”

“I know.” Becky sighed. “But I still get so nervous,” she said.

Mother smiled understandingly. “Why don’t you tell God how you feel,” she suggested, “and really give Him your worries by believing He will help you. He wants to give you His peace in place of the worries that are there. Shall we pray about it together?”

Slowly Becky nodded and bowed her head. Mother prayed first, and then Becky prayed, too. “Dear Heavenly Father,” she said, “I’m really nervous about my test today. Please give me Your peace so I can think clearly on my test. If I start to worry today, remind me that You are with me. Thank You so much. In Jesus’ Name, amen.”

“Amen,” said Mother as she gave Becky a hug. “Now how about eating some of your breakfast? It’s hard to take a test on an empty stomach.”

Thought: Is there something in particular that makes you nervous? Do you get “butterflies in your stomach” when you have to take a test or finish an assignment? God wants you to give your worries to Him. Let Him give you His peace.

Prayer: God my provider, you know as students in Singapore, we have quite a few assessments and tests. Sometimes I feel nervous and worried, but please remind me that You care so much for me. Help me also to cast all my cares on you and let you take care of them. This I pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

NEVER DESPISE GOD'S BLESSINGS

I sure wish Dad could come to my basketball game night, complained Beng Teck to his older brother, Beng Lee. "Last year I sat on the bench all the time, and he never missed a game. But this year I've started every game, and he's had to work every Friday night. It's not fair!" Beng Lee tried to cheer him. "Mom and I have been there, Beng Teck, and you've been doing great!" "But it's not the same," Beng Teck replied. "Before you were in junior college, Dad came to all your games." Just then Mother called them to dinner, and the discussion ended.

"Mmmmm – these dishes are delicious!" exclaimed Beng Lee. "Remember how often we wished for nice full meals when Dad was out of work?" "I sure do," replied Mother, "and I'm glad you reminded me. I've been grumbling lately about Dad working the second shift, and I'm afraid I forgot that no work means potential problems." She glanced at Beng Teck, but he refused to smile. All evening he remained gloomy, even after he scored the winning two points at the basketball game.

The next evening, the family lingered over dinner, glad to have Dad with them. "Since I'm only here on Saturday and Sunday evenings," said Dad, "I really miss our family devotions. Beng Lee, you were going to choose something for tonight, weren't you?" Beng Lee grinned as he replied, "I've got it all planned, Dad, and I think we all need it." He took the Bible and read from the book of Exodus and the book of Numbers. Then he looked up and grinned. "Today is sort of an anniversary," he announced. "Anybody know what for?" "I do," responded Dad promptly. "It's just three months ago that I got called back to work."

"Oh, that's right!" said Mom. "I remember how thrilled we were." She paused, then exclaimed, "Oh, I see your point, Beng Lee! We've been like the Israelites. At first they were thrilled with manna, just like we were with Dad's job. But then they began to loathe it. I'm afraid we did that, too, and I confess that I was probably the first to complain. I hope you'll all forgive me. May God forgive us, too!"

Beng Teck smiled in spite of himself; he realized that Mom was right.

Thought: Is there some wonderful blessing in your life that you've begun to despise? Perhaps you prayed for a brother or sister, but now that you have one, you sometimes secretly wish you didn't. Or maybe you prayed that your Sunday school class would grow, and now that it has, you don't like it because a new member does better than you. Be careful; never despise God's blessings.

Prayer: O Lord, help me never to despise thy blessings. Sometimes we have sinned in that aspect, so please forgive us – in Jesus' name I pray, amen.

GOD WILL PROVIDE!

Alex never forgot the day his new baby sister, Allison, came home from the hospital. Dad and Mother had told him that her spinal cord was damaged before she was born, and she would never be able to walk. Todd couldn't quite believe it. Maybe if we all take real good care of Allison, her legs will become well, he thought.

When Alex mentioned this to Mother, she shook her head sadly. "No, the doctor said that unless God performs a miracle, her legs will never work," she said gently. "We don't understand why God has allowed this to happen, but we need to accept the fact that it's part of His plan for Allison and our family. We need to trust Him because He knows what's best."

Mother put down the potato peeler, wiped her hands on her apron, and sat down next to Alex at the table. "Allison is going to need special care because her legs have no feeling," she said. "She won't know whether they're hot or cold, or whether they have been cut or bruised."

"No feeling at all?" Alex blurted out. "She could really hurt herself, and not even know it!" Mother nodded. "That's where you and I fit into God's plan for her," she said. "It's going to take time and love to protect her from getting hurt, and to help her learn about her handicap as she grows up."

"Oh," murmured Alex thoughtfully. "Will you be part of God's plan for our family by helping us care for Allison?" asked Mother.

Alex was quiet for a long time before answering. "I'm still going to pray that Allison will walk someday," he said finally, "but whether she walks or not, I want to help her as much as I can."

"Great!" said Mother. "God knew Allison would need a big brother like you. Remember, God's plan is always the best."

Thought: Do you have a brother or sister who is handicapped or disadvantaged in any way? God has placed that person in your family as part of His plan for you. Or perhaps someone in church or school needs special attention and constant care. As you show love and encouragement, God is using you to be a blessing. It will help both of you to grow in Him. Or perhaps you have a handicap yourself. You may not realize it, but God wants to use you, too – to be a blessing to other members of your family. Cheerfully accept God's plan for you.

Prayer: God, I want to believe that your way is perfect. I may not be able to understand why you allow certain things to happen in my life but Father, I want to trust in you that this is thy will, and thy will is always the best for me. Please give me the faith to believe, and I ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

GOD CARES FOR YOU

Scott came into the living room, carrying his white kitten, Snowflake, who purred and snuggled comfortably in his arms. "I'm so glad you let me keep this kitten, even though we already had two cats," he told his parents. "Snowflake is the only one that will let me pick her up and carry her anywhere I go." He sat down on the sofa, and Snowflake curled beside him. "See, she'll just peacefully rest here beside me as long as I want her to."

Mom smiled at them. "Well, Scott, you've been so gentle with her ever since she was tiny," she said.

"I know," answered Scott, "but I'm just the same with Jemimah, and she howls and cries the whole time I hold her. She's so nervous and jittery. She just waits for a chance to run off." Dad nodded. "She's that way with all of us," he said.

"Maybe that's because she had a deprived 'kittenhood' before we got her," suggested Mother. "We've taken good care of her for all these years, and yet she's never learned to trust us completely."

"And that Tangerine!" added Scott. "I never even try to pick him up, because I don't want to be scratched!"

Dad put his newspaper down. "These three cats remind me of the ways people react to God's 'picking them up' and placing them where He wants them," he said slowly. "Think about it—which one do you think you're like?"

Scott looked at Snowflake, still lying peacefully beside him, and grinned. "I hope I'm like Snowflake," he decided, "content to be wherever God puts me."

Mother nodded. "But I'm afraid that, once in a while, we're more like Jemimah—nervous about everything that happens, or like Tangerine—too full of our own plans."

"We can all pray for grace to be content where God has placed us," said Dad with a smile. "We're happy as we trust Him."

Thought: Has God placed you in a difficult spot—such as a broken home, a tough school, or a class you don't enjoy? Don't be nervous and jittery about your circumstances, waiting for a chance to go a different way. And don't be so full of your own plans that you can't trust God, content in His plan. God loves you, and He knows best. Trust Him.

Prayer: Lord, if I do not have faith in you, I would be wasting my time planning for my own things to happen. You have promised that I can rest in you and trust in you. Help me to go on believing in you and to cast my cares on you. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS...

Danny spoke into the telephone. "We're still at the shopping mall, Mom," he said. "The car won't start, and a serviceman from a garage across the street is working on it now. Dad says to tell you we'll be there as soon as we can, but it'll be a while. He says to tell you the 'show must go on.' I don't know what he means by that."

Mother knew what Dad meant. He was talking about the surprise birthday party they had planned for Danny. Dad had taken Danny shopping just to get him out of the house while his mother got things ready. The guests were in the living room now, waiting for him to come home. Mother knew that Dad was telling her to go ahead with the games and last minute planning.

When Danny finally burst into the house, he was greeted with cries of "Surprise! Surprise!" His friends were wearing party hats and licking the last bit of frosting from their lips. He was surprised indeed!

"About time you got here," teased one of the children. "We were about to take the gifts and give them to somebody else."

"Uh-uh!" Danny's sister, Kelly, slipped her little hand into her big brother's. "They're Danny's. It's his birthday." Amid a lot of laughing and teasing, Danny opened the gifts his friends had brought.

Soon it was time for the children to leave. "Glad you finally made it," some told Denny as they went out the door. "Your birthday party just wasn't right without you."

After all his guests were gone, Danny sat down to eat another piece of his birthday cake. "I wish I hadn't missed the games," he said, "but at least the car was fixed in time for me to see all the kids and open my presents. I'm glad of that!"

"I'm glad, too," said Mother. "As Kelly says, it's your 'birthday,' and a birthday party without the birthday person just isn't worth much."

Thought: Did you know that Christmas is celebrated in honor of Jesus' birthday? Do you remember this as you celebrate Christmas, even though this may not be the Christmas season? Does your behavior show that Jesus is with you? Also, think about what you will want to give Jesus for his birthday. He does not need anything physical gifts; He wishes you will give Him your heart.

Prayer: O Father and Creator, as I remember the great event of Christmas, open up my heart to give my life to Him, for he gave his all to me to die on the cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

GIVING OURSELVES TO JESUS

Imagine this situation: very early on Christmas morning, Mark jumped out of bed, slipped on some clothes, and went out into the hall where he tapped lightly on his sister's door. Betsy quickly opened it, took a huge decorated cardboard box from her closet, and together they went down the stairs. "Are you sure this isn't a dumb idea?" whispered Mark as they went out the front door.

"Mom and Dad will love it," Betsy assured him. She lifted the cover off the box, and Mark stepped inside. Then Betsy handed him an assortment of signs. "I'm your errand boy," read one. "I'll clean Timmy's room this month besides my own," read another. "I'll clean the kitchen," read a third. Mark put these, with several others, in a corner of the box. Betsy put the cover on the box, and she put a large red bow on the top.

"Sure hope the neighbors aren't up yet." Mark's muffled voice came through the air holes as Betsy rang the doorbell. He heard the loud, persistent ring as she pushed the button again and again. Then he heard the door close as Betsy disappeared inside the house.

Soon the door opened again, and Mark heard Dad's surprised voice. "Well! What have we here? Mother!" he called. "Come quickly! I believe a present has arrived for us." In no time, Mother was there and the box was opened.

"Here I am... Blessed Christmas!" called Mark when they saw him. He handed them the signs. "I... ah... well, I decided to give you myself this Christmas," he said. "These are just some of the things I can do for you. I... I hope you like your present."

There were tears in Mother's eyes as she hugged him. Dad spoke for them both. "We love it!" he said. "We really, really love it."

Thought: Do you think about the fact that God gave His very best for you? What have you given Him in return? What He wants most of all is the gift of yourself. Will you give that gift to Him? Only then can He use your talents, time and service.

Prayer: O Lord in heaven, even though it is not Christmas now, I thank You for it; without Christmas, we would not have salvation; without Christmas, we would not be what we are today. In the name of Him who came that first Christmas day – Jesus my Lord, amen.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU GAVE THANKS TO GOD?

Jared sighed as he pushed the door open, pulled the key out, and put it in his pocket. He swung the door shut and turned the lock. “Tony’s lucky—his mom is home baking cookies, but I have to cook my own Maggi noodles,” he said out loud. He talked to himself a lot when he was alone. That way the apartment didn’t seem so empty. “I wish I had a pet.”

Jared continued to mumble as he did his chores. Soon he heard his mother at the door. “Hi, honey, how was school?” she asked as she entered the room. “Okay.” Jared didn’t look up. “Thanks for getting the noodles done. It smells good, and I guess you must have added eggs and chicken slices.” There was no reply from Jared. She looked at Jared closely. “Is something wrong?” she asked. Jared shook his head. “Are you sure?” asked Mom. She paused on her way toward the stove. “I can tell something’s bothering you. Let’s talk about it, okay?” She put down a dish and hugged Jared.

Soon Jared was telling Mom all his troubles—especially how he hated coming home to an empty house. Mom sighed. “We talked about this before, and you know I have to work,” she said. “I’d rather be home, but I have no choice. I wish you could have a pet, but the landlord won’t allow that.” Her shoulders slumped. Then she sat up straight. “Jared, you have something many of your friends don’t have. You have Jesus,” she reminded him. “That’s more important than anything else in the world. When we have to do without things we want, I think it helps to remind ourselves of what we do have.” Mom picked up a pen and paper. “Let’s make a list of good things we enjoy,” she suggested. “I’ll start. Let’s see... we have a place to live.”

“And clothes,” Jared added. Mom wrote it down. “You can go to school, and I have a job,” she said. “What else?” “Friends.” Jared started to smile. “We have a church where we can worship God,” added Mom. “We can go to the doctor when we’re sick,” suggested Jared. Mom nodded. “And right now we’re both healthy,” she said. “I’ll write that down, too.” Jared sniffed the air. He grinned. “We have our Maggi noodles,” he said. “Let’s set the table. I’m hungry!”

Thought: Do your friends have something you wish you had? Instead of thinking of those things, make a list of what you have. Learn to be content in your circumstances, and thank God for them. Then you’ll find that things don’t seem quite so bad anymore.

Prayer: Lord, whether I have a lot or little, please teach me to be thankful. I want to learn to be more thankful for I know that you have already given me so much. Help me to be a cheerful child and to look not so much at my difficulties but at the many things you have given me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

GOD'S WONDERFUL LETTER OF LOVE – THE BIBLE!

“What’s on your mind, son?” asked Adam’s mother. “You look so serious!” Adam sighed. “My Bible club teacher says God is three persons in one,” he answered. “I don’t get it.” Mother nodded. “It is hard to understand,” she agreed. “Mrs. Lee says there’s God the father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and they’re all one person,” said Adam. “How can that be?”

“I know it seems impossible to understand,” said Mother, “but that is what the Bible teaches.” The ringing of the phone interrupted her, and she went to answer it. “That was your father,” she said as she hung up a few minutes later. “He wants me to get his suit from the dry cleaners before they close.” As she spoke, the phone rang again. This time Adam answered it.

After talking a few minutes, Adam handed the phone to Mother. “It’s Grandma,” he told her. “She wants to talk to you.” Mother took the phone. “Hi, Mom,” she said. She listened “Sure, I’ll take you... Three-thirty? Okay, I’ll be there by three. See you then.” Adam grinned at his mother. “Grandma wants you to help her, too, doesn’t she?”

Mother nodded. “Yes. She needs to go to the doctor. I have to stop at Aunt Cindy’s, too. I promised to take the baby for her this afternoon. I’m going to have a busy day.” “Wow! What do people think you are?” asked Adam. “Triplets?”

Mother laughed. “Sometimes it seems that way, but I don’t mind. They all have a right to ask things of me. I’m Dad’s wife, so he asks me to do things for him. I’m Grandma’s daughter, so she has a right to ask me to help her. And as Aunt Cindy’s sister, she just asks me to be sisterly.”

Adam thought a while. “A wife, a daughter, and a sister—yet you’re only one person,” he said. “Maybe that’s a little like God being more than one person.”

“Good observation, Adam,” answered Mother, “though there’s no perfect example of the Trinity. We believe some things just because the Bible says they’re true—not because we fully understand them. That’s faith.” “Okay, Mom,” agreed Adam, “but this still helps me understand just a little.”

Thought: Do you doubt what the Bible teaches because it doesn’t seem possible? The Bible is the Word of God, and what it says is true. You think with a human mind, but God is far greater than that. Even if you can’t understand something, you can believe God.

Prayer: God, there are many things in the bible that I may not fully understand, but this I know, that it is thy word and in it I must trust. Help me then to put my faith in you and to be humble to read and receive from you the wonderful truths hidden inside. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

MAY THE LORD HAVE MERCY ON YOU!

“The milk tasted terrible!” As Sarah thought about it, she remembered that as Mother left for the grocery store, she had mentioned that the milk was turning sour. “Well, now what?” thought Sarah. Then she had an idea. If I add some chocolate, it will cover the sour taste, she thought. She got out a can of powdered chocolate drink and spooned some of the sweet mixture into the milk. She licked her finger where a little of it had stuck. “Mmmm, good!” she thought. But after taking a big gulp of the chocolate milk, she groaned. It still tasted awful!

Later that morning, Sarah skipped off to her weekly bible class. She listened carefully as Mrs. Lin shared a story Jesus had told His disciples. “Two men went into the temple to pray,” began Mrs. Lin. “One was a Pharisee—a man who did many good works and went to the temple often. The other man was a dishonest tax collector. The Pharisee prayed first, telling God that he was glad he was good and not bad like the other man. He reminded God of all the good things he did.” Mrs. Lin paused and looked around at the boys and girls. “Now let me tell you about the other man—the tax collector,” she continued. “He didn’t even lift up his head. He just cried out to God, pleading for forgiveness from his sins. And do you know what Jesus told His disciples? Jesus said that the tax collector—not the Pharisee—went home ‘justified,’ or forgiven. You see, the tax collector knew that only God could take away his sins, but the Pharisee was trying to cover up his sins with good works. He was really not a good man at all. He was proud and haughty—a sinner just like the tax collector. His good works didn’t change his sinful heart.”

As Sarah listened, she smiled and nodded. She remembered the sour milk, and she understood that good things don’t necessarily cover up the bad. Good chocolate hadn’t covered the bad taste of the sour milk, and good works wouldn’t cover up sin. “Only Jesus can forgive sin,” she thought, “I’m going to remember that.”

Thought: Do you obey parents? Behave politely? Go to church? Are you a “good” person? God says you’re a sinner! None of the good things you do can cover up the “sour taste” of your sin. Only Jesus’ blood can do that. Won’t you pray, as the tax collector did, asking God to be merciful to you. Ask Him to forgive your sin and save you today.

Prayer: God, please be merciful to me for I am a sinner. Help me to recognize that on my own, I can do nothing. If I am not saved, may I take this opportunity to confess my sins and accept Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. If I have already been saved, may I take this opportunity to confess I need the blood of Jesus daily to wash me white as snow. For it is in Jesus’ name that I pray, amen.

JESUS DELIVERS!

What is our world like? You may live in a happy family and Singapore is blessed with peace and prosperity. Why then does the Bible describe the world as evil? In a way, you are right. Earth was created perfect and happy. But the world turned evil because sin entered the world. Adam and Eve, the first couple had disobeyed God and so sin came into the world. This is the kind of world you live in. Does it sound scary to know you live in a wicked world?

With sin around, that is what makes the world a tough place to live for Christians who are serious in obeying God's Word. Some examples of sin are given in Galatians 5:19-21 - can you name a few here?

But God provides a solution from sin! This is good news for us, don't you think so? To deliver is to rescue. Don't you become excited to hear about rescue stories by brave people or animals? In the animated movie 'Bolt', a dog called Bolt was hailed a hero when it rescued his owner from the inferno. In real life, survivors spoke about how they were being saved by strangers when the tsunami hit Japan in 2011.

People in their sinful state are doomed to hell but our God of love had a rescue plan in which He sent His only begotten Son on a rescue mission to save us from the bondage of sin, death and eternal hell. So through Jesus, we can be delivered from 'this present evil world'.

Imagine you have fallen into a rough sea. A boat comes toward you and a hand stretches out to save you. Will you not grasp the hand? Jesus loves you and stretches His hand to you to deliver you from this terrible world, will you take His hand? Repent of your sins, take His hand and you will be free from sin and will be called righteous before God. You will be delivered out of this evil world and shall enter into the heavenly world. God is gracious and merciful.

Thought: Wonderful to be delivered out of this evil world!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am glad that You love us even though we are sinners. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for us and save us from our sins and deliver us from this evil world. Please forgive me for the wrong things I do and think for I want to give my life to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR BIBLE?

The Christians in the Galatian churches were young in their faith and were easily influenced. False teachers had come into their churches teaching them wrong stuff. To make matters worse, they believed these false teachers. They were told that to be saved, they must also be circumcised, on top of other false doctrines. Believing in Jesus alone was not good enough, so they were told. The Apostle Paul became very concerned and disturbed and so wrote the epistle to warn them. Look out for false teachers in your church!

Paul had started churches in Galatia preaching Christ and teaching the Scriptures during his missionary trip but within a short period they had forgotten his teachings and believed all these nonsense of the false teachers. Are you like these Christians? If you do not know the Bible well, how can you tell what is wrong teaching? So, study and know your Bible well.

How did the Apostle Paul help these young Christians? He was very helpful. He was like a father to the believers. When their faith was weakened by wrong teachings, he would encourage them. Read Galatians 6:1 and fill in the blanks:

*'Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a _____,
ye which are _____, _____ such as one....'*

Paul was always helping weaker Christians. The apostle's letter to the Galatians must be a great help to them in building up their faith. What will you do when another Christian who is more spiritual comes up to you and points out your mistake? You will:

- | | |
|--|----------|
| Get angry with him and walk away | YES / NO |
| Scold him telling him to mind his own business | YES / NO |
| Willingly listen to him | YES / NO |
| Ask him how to amend your fault | YES / NO |

Thought: What must you do so that you can tell what false teaching is?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for our ministers and Bible teachers who will teach God's Word well and accurately so that we will know right from wrong. Keep false teachers away from us because they can cause our faith to shake. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PEOPLE CHANGE

The author of Galatians was Apostle Paul. Before he came to know Jesus, he was called Saul, and was a terrible persecutor or punisher of Christians! No one can imagine that Saul could change and become a Christian. On his own, it was impossible. Yet he did become a Christian. How could that be possible? The gospel changed him. The gospel in the bible can change people. After Jesus appeared to him, Saul turned into a totally different person – one who once hated Christians now became a Christian himself, and became Christianity's great preacher. Saul was once an enemy of God. Then he became an enemy of Satan. There must be change in the life of someone who claims he or she is a Christian. Have you changed for the better after becoming a Christian?

How is your temper? Is it better than the past? How about pride? Do you think you're one of the smartest or best-looking child? And if you came from a wealthy family, do you look down on those from more modest backgrounds? You must see changes in your life because God has taught that every Christian is a new creature. He now has Jesus in him or her and that would cause him or her to want to follow Jesus. We are not talking about a complete change. Our weaknesses will remain, but increasingly we would want to fight against them. We are not talking about being perfect. No one will be perfect.

What was Saul like? Under strict parents he was taught to follow the Old Testament. Brilliant Saul learnt fast. He knew the Old Testament very well and was also a Pharisee, having a very high standard of moral purity. However, he did not know Jesus as his personal Lord and Savior. He had a deep hatred for Christians and went all out to crush them. He was known as the chief persecutor of the Christian church.

But, the gracious God had a plan. God saved and changed him. The gospel changed him – from being a murderer to a missionary. God used this man more than any other man in church history. Not only was he a great missionary, he was a great theologian and was used by God to write many books of the New Testament.

God can change any sinner. What needs to happen is for him to repent of his sins, and accept Jesus as his only Lord and Savior. And there'd be change in that person's life!

Thought: God can change people!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You can change people by the gospel. Help me to be willing to be changed and used by God to serve others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU LIKE CAIN?

Do you have brothers? Here is a true Bible account of two brothers - Cain and Abel. They were taught by their parents to obey God. What were their parents' names? Answer: _____. If they disobeyed God, they were told that there would be punished.

Offering to God is giving back to God a portion of what He has blessed us. The two brothers brought their offerings to God. Cain knew that a lamb was an accepted offering, as taught by his parents. But he doubted and disregarded their teaching. Sin was committed in his head and that was followed by his deed. Cain was a good gardener and so he offered to God some fruits or vegetables because to Cain, it seemed more sensible to give God an offering of fruits and vegetables from his garden than a slain animal. Perhaps he was lazy and did not want to offer the right thing. His brother Abel however brought a lamb which was the right thing to do.

What was God's reaction? God was angry with Cain and rejected his offering. Why? When God killed animals and clothed their parents Adam and Eve, He taught the significance of blood sacrifice. Hebrews 9:22 - 'And almost all things are by the law purged with _____; and without shedding of _____ is no remission.' Cain brought the wrong sacrifice in his hand and had the wrong attitude in his heart.

Some of the Galatian believers were like Cain - they did not obey what God taught in the Word and did what they thought was best. Today, there are also many people like Cain or those Galatian believers. Like the Galatians, many people think that they can get to Heaven by doing good works or simply being a good person. Some also think all ways lead to Heaven. Many people have their own thinking of getting into Heaven. These people reject God's way and instructions just like Cain.

But, child, there is really only one way - we must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. He was God's Lamb offered to God for our sins. His blood washed away our sins. This is the only acceptable way of being saved.

Thought: Are you like Cain?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. Only by His blood can we be saved for there is power in His blood. Help me to continue to trust Jesus, and it is in His wonderful name that I pray, Amen.

JUST LIVE AND DIE?

Today's verse teaches us that we are to "live by the faith of the Son of God". What does that mean? Read on...

Why do you exist? Have you asked yourself this question? It is good that you know why you exist or why God made you exist in this earth?

Consider the conversation and see if it sounds familiar to you.

Michael: What do you want to be when you grow up?

JW student: When I grow up, I would like to be an engineer or a teacher.

Michael: And after getting a job, what else will you do?

JW student: I'll marry and have a house.

Michael: What then?

JW student: Have two or three children and live happily together.

Michael: What else might you do?

JW student: I'll buy a car and also go on holiday with my family.

Michael: Then what?

JW student: I'll retire early and look after my grandchildren.

Michael: And after that?

JW student: Like everyone, I'll die.

From the conversation, you have learnt the student's life is not much more than growing up, getting a good job, making money and trying very hard to be happy. His life is just living to die. Is this the correct way of living? Paul gives us the answer to life and this was the way he had lived his life – 'live by faith'

How to live by faith? You see, faith believes the Word of the Lord. It believes in the impossible. It believes that God answers prayer. It believes that God forgives sin. It believes God. Think through these carefully and are you doing all these? So, living by faith in God is what God wants us to do. That JW student is not living by faith.

Now, write down what you must do to show that you live by faith:

Thought: Honestly ask yourself if you are living by faith

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me live by faith in God and not in my own strength. I have failed to obey You and please forgive me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

HOW TRUE IS YOUR FAITH? (I)

How true is your faith? When someone asks if you are a Christian, do you hesitate and utter a soft ‘Yes’? Do you feel unsure? It does us good to examine ourselves to make sure our faith is genuine. Do you have the Holy Spirit living within?

Know of any star gazer in the Bible? There was one such person ... Outside his tent in the warm, quiet night, Abram was alone. He was 85 years old. Under the dark dome of the sky, he gazed up. Before his eyes were many silvery stars. Wow! Imagine yourself standing beside Abram. The view was simply spectacular and fabulous. There were thousands of them, twinkling at Abram.

Was Abram alone? No. You see, God was there and He said, “Abram, someday you’re going to have descendants as numerous as the stars.” How could it be? How many children did Abram have then? At that time, not even one. He and his wife Sarai were not young, perhaps as old as your grandmother. Would a lady of your grandmother’s age give birth to a baby?

But Abram was thinking differently. He looked at the beautiful stars for a long time that night. He thought of how great God is and how God can do anything. And he believed in God. This was the faith of Abram and it pleased the Lord. Now God promised him a great family, a great company of people! He and Sarai would not be lonely for they would have children and grandchildren. Abram believed.

This is the kind of faith that will please the Lord – the faith of Abram. Is yours like that? Abram trusted God and believed in the impossible. He also prayed to God. Are you, like Abraham, walking by faith? Can you say confidently that you are a Christian? Like Abraham, you must love and trust the Lord. List some things you will do that are taught in the Bible to show you love God.

Thought: May I have faith, like Abraham.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be like Abraham, to trust in your Word. I know it is very tough to continue to be a faithful child so Father, please help me to do so. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HOW TRUE IS YOUR FAITH? (II)

Sometimes when you get into trouble and difficulties, your faith is tested. Will you still trust God under trying times?

Can you think of any men and women who were tested in their faith and how?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why is there testing of the faith? God tries His people to prove whether they mean what they say. Would Abraham trust God no matter what happened? God had a test for him. It was the hardest test anyone could face – sacrifice your own son! Would Abraham pass the test? Think how long he waited to have a child! Think how much he must have loved Isaac! He was the only son Abraham had left, as Ishmael had gone. No doubt it would have been easier to kill himself than to sacrifice his own dear son. To kill his own dear son – his heart must have cried out in terrible pain. “Why, oh, why have You asked me to do this thing?” It was not a complaint to God. It was a cry in anguish. But Abraham obeyed God.

The father and son climbed the mountain silently side by side. Isaac noticed that they hadn’t brought any animal with them, so when he began to wonder out loud why they hadn’t brought anything for the sacrifice, his father, the man of great faith said with confidence, “God will provide the lamb.”

When you are tested, you must pray and ask God for help. Trust Him and do not rely on yourself. Some Christians blame God for ‘bad’ things happening to them. They turn away from God. No ‘bad’ thing can befall on God’s people. Everything happening to you is always for your good to build up your faith and to make you a stronger Christian.

Thought: May I be a child of faith!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to trust You always, whatever problems I may have. And when my faith is put to the test, help me to pass! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

RAINBOW AND JESUS!

“Rain, rain, go away. Come again another day!” Little children want to play. Is this nursery rhyme familiar to you? When you were younger, did you sing it? Or your mother sang to you? How you wished the rain would go away because you wanted to play in the park. The rain spoilt your day and you had to go home. How sad that’d be. However, not all rains are sad! After a rain or when the rain has almost come to a stop, something wonderful appears. After that dark storm cloud came a beautiful half circle with gorgeous colors. What is it called? A _____ (unscramble IAOWRBN). Who but God could have thought of such a lovely thing to remind us of His promise? The promise was never again would it rain until the whole earth was covered with water.

The story in the Bible began like this.... At first just a few drops, rain came thicker and faster. The people fled to their homes. All night it went on, and all the next day – on and on and on! No more dry spots. Still it rained and rained! Inch by inch the water was rising. All except those in the ark died. The beautiful world was destroyed. God could not let the wicked people go on living in their wicked ways. Lying, cheating and bad language were common. Wickedness was everywhere. Where did all the sin and evil come from? Yes, from the hearts of the people, as given by Genesis 6:5 – ‘And God saw that the _____ of man was _____ in the earth, and that every imagination of the _____ of the heart was only _____ continually’.

The world did not worship God. God was angry with the world and sent the flood and Noah and his family in the ark were the only human beings saved. After this global catastrophe, God made a promise that the world will be spared from such a great flood, and the rainbow is the sign of this promise. Think of God’s promise every time you see a rainbow!

God also gave us a promise through Christ - it was in God’s heart to give His beloved Son, a descendent or seed of Abraham to born a human, to die for the sins of the world. He made this promise not because people are good but because He loves us so much. God does not want to destroy men. He desires to save them. Do you believe in Jesus who died for your sins to save you from destruction in hell’s fire? Don’t be like those God-rejecting people living during Noah’s time who perished in the flood.

Thought: Thank God for rainbows as reminders of His promises!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are the God of promises and You freely give them to Your children. I thank You for Your promises. In turn, I promise to walk and follow with Christ all my life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S CHILDREN

You are your parents' child. Since you were born, they have been taking care of your every need. As a baby, you were little and fragile. How could they not react to your every cry? You needed them and they have always been there for you. Now that you are older and in school, they still care for you, making sure you have enough to eat and a good school to receive your education. As long as they are around you, they will care for you! Why do they do what they do? It is simply because you are your parents' child.

Christians are children of God. Wow! Isn't it wonderful to know that you are a child of God? The Almighty King of kings! No joke! When we believe in Jesus, we belong to Jesus. We can call God 'Father' because Jesus also calls God 'Father'. Matthew 11:27 – '...no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save (means 'except') the Son, and he (means 'anyone') to whomsoever the Son will reveal him'. God loves you and wants to be your Heavenly Father. You can call God 'Father'.

The Heavenly Father also cares for His children and provides for you. Write Matthew 6:28 down and find out how God cares for you:

Through your parents, God gives you food and clothes and things that you need.

You are also weak sometimes. You don't have strength to fight against temptation and to overcome Satan. Your Father will protect you.

God, Your Father does so many wonderful things for you, just because you are His child. Like our earthly parents, God will take care of us. But way different from our earthly parents is the fact that God is the Almighty and can do much more than parents! So dear child, go to Your heavenly Father today!

Thought: Think of three wonderful things your Heavenly Father has done for you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for showing me what You are like. Thank You that You are loving and caring. Thank You that I can call You my Father. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

OTHER GODS?

Some people believe there are multiple gods. Perhaps there are two gods? Some think there are maybe four gods, and some of them think there are even a hundred gods, or more. Some people even believe the sun and moon are gods, so they bow down and pray to the sun and moon.

How about us? Should we pray to created things, no matter how lovely and powerful they may seem to be? and what about angels – surely they are powerful and beautiful? Should we pray to angels? Are they gods? No! They are not gods. Angels are created heavenly beings who fulfill God's wishes. These angels love God and some are in heaven praising God and some are here on earth helping us. Should anyone worship anything other than God, that anything is considered an idol.

There are many accounts of idols in the bible. Paul went to Athens and saw the city filled with idols. It was said that there were more gods than people in Athens.

In the Old Testament, there were accounts of people having other gods. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and the people had become impatient. They still had the fire and cloud to assure them of God's presence but that was not enough. They wanted another visible representation of God to encourage them. They built the golden calf and worshipped it.

How about us? Of course, most of you would not have a physical idol in the form of some god or statue you worship. However, many of us have idols in the form of things we like or admire that we love more than we love God. It could be sleep, for some of us are too lazy to read God's word and do Quiet Time, claiming we are "tired". Or it could be studies – that we rather put studies before our need to spend some time with God or to go to Sunday School.

God is angry with those who have idols. He is also angry with anyone who loves anything more than God. We must love God even more than our parents and the nice things we love.

Thought: What idols do you have?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, how can I love anything more than You after You have given Jesus to die on the cross for my sins? Help me get rid of the idols in my life and love You above all. This is my prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

NO MAGIC IN ‘SPECIAL DAYS’

Almost every religion has special days set apart to commemorate events or something else. The Buddhists have Vesak Day; the Hindus have Deepavali; the Muslims have a fasting month. What about us Christians? Well, Christmas and Easter are important days for Christians, and many churches hold special services on these days. What then does today’s passage teach us?

Paul was teaching the believers in Galatia that they should not be superstitious and think there is power in observing some particular day, or month or period. Although Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter, there is nothing “holy” about these days - these days are useful in pointing us to Jesus: Christmas to when Jesus was born and given to us as a most wonderful gift; Easter to when Jesus had victory over death for He rose again on Easter Day. However, there is no unusual power in going to church on these two days. In fact, we do not know the actual date Jesus was born or rose. God in His perfect wisdom did not leave behind any clues for He knows that if He did, man would surround these dates with some holy significance.

So does that mean Christmas and Easter are not important? Of course, not! It is crucial that we remember the gracious gift of Jesus and His power over death. So we ought to celebrate days like that. It is just that we should not be superstitious and think somehow by going to church on those days, we become cleansed. Or that we are holy on those days. We should be holy everyday! Let us also remember not to celebrate Christmas and Easter like non-Christians. To the world, Christmas is often a time of partying and fun. As Christians, we must not forget the “birthday boy” – Jesus! To the world, Easter is a time for feasting and bunnies with Easter eggs. That is clearly not in the bible!

Let us learn from Jesus. When he walked on earth, He observed special days such as the Sabbath day (Sunday for us) and the Passover (to remember how God led the Israelites out of Egypt – it is now celebrated as The Lord’s Supper). Let us continue to observe the special days for Christians, but understand they are to help us remember God, not remember these days themselves. And what we want to do is to thank God for the events that led to these days!

Thought: Thank God for Christmas and Easter!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the special days we celebrate as Christians. Thank You too for today’s lesson that these days are to point me to Christ and that there is nothing holy about the days themselves. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

PUNISHMENT IN HELL

Paul warned those who sinned continuously would be punished in hell! Hell is a terrible place where there is fire and pain and gnashing of teeth, signifying perhaps great anguish. And it is a real place.

To help us understand hell is a destination where sinners face undying fire and agony, perhaps God gave us actual examples of cities of Sodom and Gomorrah during the time of Lot – burnt to the ground. The Bible says that ‘the Lord rained... brimstone and fire.... out of the heaven’ and the smoke coming out of the cities were described as ‘smoke of a furnace’ (Genesis 19:24, 28).

To remind man of the horrors of hell, another event quite like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah happened in an Italian city called Pompeii on 24th August 79 AD. Pompeii was wealthy and the inhabitants lived in great sin. Pompeii was one of the larger towns located near the base of a volcano, Mt Vesuvius. On that fateful day, the volcano erupted and rained hot molten ash round the surrounding towns for 6 hours, killing instantly thousands who lived there. The people and buildings of Pompeii were covered in up to 12 different layers of volcanic ashes, in total 25 meters deep. Tourists still visit Pompeii today and they can still see remains of the effects of that frightening eruption.

There is really a place called hell. God hates sin and those people who do not turn from their sin will be punished in hell. If you have never asked God to forgive you, cry out to Him now. Tell Him that you are sorry for the all the things that you have done wrong – that is called repentance of sin. Thank God that He loves you and has sent His own Son to die on the cross so that the sins of His people could be washed away. And accept Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of your life.

Thought: Am I saved from hell?

Prayer: *(If you've already accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior)*

Father, I am grateful for the reminder of how much You hate sin and how I must not sin against You. Thank You that Jesus died to save sinners from hell. Thank You for Your love. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Prayer: *(If you like to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior now)*

Heavenly Father, I confess I'm a sinner. On my own would be lost in hell. Thank You for today's lesson and the reminder of how much You hate sin. I thank You that Jesus died on the cross to save sinners like me from hell, and I want to accept Him as my personal Lord and Savior, right now. Please forgive me and make me Your child. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DO YOU WORSHIP IDOLS?

The first word in today’s verse is “idolatry”. What does that mean? It is a sin of putting something or someone before God. We need to understand that anything we put before God can become, for us, an idol. God wants no other gods before Him – and that means we must love Him more than anything or anyone in the world. Yes, more than you love your parents, or computer games, or whatever hobby you have. If we make something the first priority in our life, even watching television, it can become the same as worshiping an idol in God’s eyes. There is nothing wrong with watching television, or playing sports, or whatever, just so long as God is still first.

How much time in a busy day do we have for God? Because of their busy lives and your desire to have as much fun as possible, you may often place God in the back seat. Try this exercise...

Imagine it is about eight o’clock Saturday morning and you just woke up. Assuming you sleep at ten o’clock at night, you have 14 hours to burn before it is time to go to bed. Using the chart of activities below, show how much time you would like to spend on each activity, using up all of the 14 hours. If you like, you can show 0 hours on any activity. Try it and see how much time you spend on God and things related to Him. Then you can see how much time you spend on things not related to God. Among the things you do a lot, is anyone of them your idol?

Activity	Hours
Watch television	
Play computer games	
Read books or magazines	
Study or do homework	
Do nothing or just relaxing	
Play with friends	
Do chores	
Pray or read the Bible	
Travelling from place to place	

Thought: Is there anything I love more than God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me love Christ more and more so that there would be no idol in my life. In His precious name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU AN ENVIOUS CHILD?

To be envious is to have “a sense of discontentment or jealousy with regard to another’s success or possessions”. An envious person is not happy with what he or she has and wishes he would be able to get what someone else has.

When does one get envious? Sometimes a child looks at others who may be more clever, or from a wealthy family, or with more friends, and that child gets envious. You may come across envious people often. In fact, your close friend may be an envious person. Even your parent or sibling or teacher! Envy can affect everyone! So how do we overcome envy? Well, one way is to pray that God will help us to be contented. God has given us eternal life and so many other wonderful gifts for which we are so blessed and should be so grateful.

Be happy for others around you when they do well in school or are talented in music or art. And if they come from happy families, even if you think your family is not perfect, be glad for them!

Another way is this - instead of looking at others from your viewpoint, try seeing people as God does. He is not interested or impressed by their wealth or looks or popularity. He sees the wicked as sinners on their way to Hell; He sees Christians as repented sinners who want to live a life to please Him.

It is important to remind ourselves how good God is and these are just some of the many wonderful things He has done for us!

- God is always with me and holds me up.
- God will guide me and receive me to glory.
- The only One who matters is God, and He is the One who takes care of me.
- God is my strength and portion forever even though I may be weak.

Remember, envy is a sin. The moment you think or know envy is affecting you, pray that God will help you get rid of that thinking and put you back on the right track of being contented for yourself, and happy for others!

Thought: May I never be envious!

Prayer: Gracious God, You have done so much for me and so please remind me never to be envious. I know it can affect me at times so I have to be so careful to not commit this sin. Instead, help me to be so grateful and contented for the much I have already been blessed with. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU A MURDERER?

Is there a mistake in today's title – "Are you a Murderer"? "Of course, not!" you'd say.

In today's verse, the idea behind the word "murders" is not so much the murders one may read of in newspapers but hate.

Today's lesson follows from yesterday's, on envy. We have discussed that to be envious is a sin. And if you allow envy to stay in your heart, it will grow. And it will grow to such an extent that you may hate the person you envy. Don't think that is impossible! In fact, there are times when this hate grows so dreadful that it causes the one who hates to actually murder!

The problem with us in tackling sin is that most of the times, many of us think that a "little" sin is alright. In any case, many other people do the same thing. That is dangerous thinking and leads us to slide further from God. The less serious we are about sin, the more sin will grow.

But, to hate someone is considered murder? Yes! 1 John 3:15 teaches us that "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."

This verse is a serious warning to all of us – if we are Christians, we cannot have hate in our hearts. That is why the second part of 1 John 3:15 says, "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Dear child, do you hate anyone? Do you think someone has done you or someone you love such terrible harm that you cannot but hate this person?

To hate someone and want revenge is part of what our old self would want to do. Before we became Christians, it was natural to envy, or hate, or want revenge. But the bible teaches that once we become the children of God, all these must stop. I know it is not easy, but would you not try? Pray to the Lord for help, and He will answer you.

Thought: May I not hate anyone...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, if I have problems dealing with hate, please help me. It is such a difficult area and I know that on my own, I cannot have victory in this area of my Christian walk. So Almighty God, please give me the power to submit to You and not to hate anyone, even if there this person has done something terrible to me or someone I love. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – LOVE (I)

Instead of envy and hate and other kinds of sin, what must the Christian possess? He must have evidence that the Holy Spirit is in his life and that is demonstrated by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. For the next few days, we'd be learning about different aspects of this wonderful fruit of salvation, and we start with love!

There are many stories and lessons of love in the Bible. There is a real account of a young man and his love for a young lady. He had to work for seven years before he could marry the lady. To children like you, seven years seem to be a long time. But to Jacob the days, months and years seemed to speed by on wings. His work in the house of this lady's father never seemed too hard for he was deeply in love with her. He knew that when the seven years were up, he would be able to have the privilege of this lovely lady as his wife. She was worth it all. Love made the work easy. Who was she?
Answer: _____

To love God is central to the Christian. A Christian must always love God, and that must be evident in his life because love is seen in the fruit of the Spirit. Do you have this trait?

Jesus was asked by one of the teachers of the law, "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment." (Matthew 22:36-38) Loving God is a Christian's highest priority. Do you love God above anything? Even more than your parents! Even more than your beloved toys and computer games... Examine your hearts if you honestly have this love for God inside you.

What does it mean to love God whole-heartedly? Just like Jacob, who loved Rachel so much that he would do anything for her, we will also do anything to please God when we love God. The most important thing is not to continue sinning. And we are to love doing the things that would please Him. We will love going to church, be a good child and hardworking student, performing our duties joyfully for His sake. When we feel like grumbling about something, think of the love of God. We should do things well because we love the Lord Jesus.

Thought: How deep is your love for God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help my love for Christ grow deeper and stronger day by day. I must at the same time learn how not to sin, so please help me, gracious Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – LOVE (II)

You'll recall from yesterday's lesson that Jesus taught we are to love God as the first most important commandment. Loving God is good, but not enough. If we claim we love God, we must show that love by love for others around us. Jesus taught that the second most important is "Thou shalt love thy _____ as thyself". (Matthew 22:39)

What does it mean to "love our neighbor"? "Neighbor" covers people you know. It does not mean literally those who live next to you. It includes them, of course, but it also includes friends, schoolmates, and family members. In fact, it covers everyone you meet or know.

Is it easy to love everyone we meet or know? No! It is very difficult! In fact, it is impossible, if we rely on our own strength! Why? Because our sinful self will find fault with others and not be able to love them. The ability to have this kind of love is given only to Christians, for they are to rely on God, not themselves.

If we love God, we'd know we are not perfect but in fact have many areas to improve. And when we grow to love God and the bible more, we'd be able to learn that we are very sinful and need God to help us daily. The more we discover our own weaknesses, the more humble we'd be. And when we get more humble, we'd be able to appreciate others around us. They would not be perfect, like us. But we'd obey God in trying to love them as well. That will teach us so many great lessons! Among the many lessons we may have, we could learn not to be petty with friends, not to be selfish but to share toys, not to be jealous of others, not to be disobedient to parents. The list goes on.

If we are able to love people we know despite their imperfections, that shows we are on the right track. That shows we have obeyed God by not selfish or proud. That shows we love God. The sequence is crucial: we must first love God before we can ever love man.

To love everyone is really difficult. Your friend may have just offended you, but you are to still love him. Your sister may have broken your all-time favorite toy, and yet you are to still love her. Wow! It is so hard to love others who have hurt us.

Thought: Who is your neighbor?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to be selfish and love others. I know that is absolutely difficult but with Your help, I'd be able to. So please help me, God. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - JOY

Christian joy is given by God. It is the joy in our innermost being. It does not mean we are laughing and joking all the time. It does not mean we are giggling and will have success all the way. So what does it mean?

We must first remember who are to have this joy? Only Christians! Only people who have committed their lives to God may have this joy? Why is this so? Because only real Christians know they are forgiven by God and have a place in heaven reserved for them. And more than that, a real Christian trusts God. That is why he is also joyful! The Christian knows that God allows difficult situations to come our way and that we learn from them. Even if going through them does not seem fun or happy, God has His reasons. And as His children, we are to trust in Him completely.

When Jesus was on earth, He'd allow his disciples to go through difficult times too. He allowed the ship they were in to experience a terrible storm in the sea. And yet, they are to have joy for Jesus was with them. However, they failed. That happens to us often, for we fail. God does not promise smooth pathways all our lives. But He does promise He would be there, waiting for us to pray to Him for help! May the words of this hymn encourage our hearts as we learn more about what Christian joy is!

*Joys are flowing like a river, Since the Comforter has come;
He abides with us forever, Makes the trusting heart His home.*

*Blessed quietness, holy quietness, What assurance in my soul!
On the stormy sea He speaks peace to me, How the billows cease to roll!*

How do you have this kind of joy? First, you must have a new life in Christ. You must first be a Christian. When you do that, you have a new life, a fresh start, a relationship with God. You will then have Christian joy.

Thought: Do I have real joy?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me and giving me Christian joy. Remind me to trust in You and to cast all my worries to You in prayer. This is my humble cry, in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - PEACE

If you are not a Christian, you are not at peace with God. Your unbelief says that you are God’s enemy. Your sin has built a wall of hostility between you and God. You are at war with God. But Jesus is the greatest peacemaker. He came and died on the cross to make peace between sinful people and God. When you become a Christian, you become God’s friend. Jesus has smashed the wall of hostility between you and God, for He has bridged the gap between sinful man and a righteous God by being the sacrifice needed. So if you have accepted Jesus, you are now a child of God, your heavenly Father. There is peace. You are made right with God.

Are you at peace with God? As a Christian, you are to have this peace as a result of trusting in God. After we have this peace with God, then we can be peacemakers to live peaceably with people. As Jesus is a peacemaker, He exhorted his disciples to be peacemakers and encouraged them that peacemakers will receive the blessings of God.

Write down Matthew 5:9.

A peacemaker is peace-loving. Recently, how many arguments have you had? Think of your last argument. What was it about? Who was it with? Who started it? Who ended it? When children have arguments, it is often because one of them does not get his way. Are you a quarrelsome child? Do you get unhappy easily and want things your way?

Put the phrases in order and write in the blank:

no man shall see the Lord without which and holiness Follow peace with all men

Thought: Am I a quarrelsome child? (Hebrews 12: 14)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that Jesus had made peace possible between sinners and God by dying on the cross. I pray I’d learn from Him to be a peacemaker, and to learn to be a better person so others can see the Christ in me. In His precious name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - LONGSUFFERING

Another fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering. What is longsuffering? It is a wonderful thing and refers to patience, forbearance and also slowness to anger. It is to be able to “suffer for a long time”!

Wow, nobody wants to suffer! And who would want to “suffer for a long time”? This verse is not teaching us to look for ways to punish ourselves by suffering. Instead, it is teaching us that there are times when it is necessary for us to be longsuffering, and when that happens, we are to follow God in this respect.

Was God longsuffering? Of course He was! Our God has shown Himself as patient and slow to anger. Here are some examples of His longsuffering:

1. God gave the sign of a _____ (AOIRWBN) that He would not send a flood to destroy the world (Genesis 9:11).
2. He is longsuffering and does not wish that any man to _____ (HIEPRS) (2 Peter 3:9).

In the Sermon of the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”. (Matthew 5:11-12)

We are put to the test when our patience is tried or when people are unkind to us. Or when we try to witness for Christ and others laugh at us. That is when our character, especially our longsuffering or patience is tested. Dear child, remember the words of Jesus and do not retaliate. In fact, Jesus teaches that we are to rejoice! That certainly sounds tough? How may we do that? Only through the power of God. No one would be able to rejoice when others persecute or bully them, unless God empowers.

The next time you are frustrated or tempted to get angry, remember today’s verse – that an evidence of the Holy Spirit in us is for us to be longsuffering. Do not retaliate. Do not get angry so easily. Do not seek revenge.

Thought: May I be more longsuffering!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when trials come, I know it is good for me. But I fear I would not be able to take them well. So please help me to not grumble, but rejoice and have patience and trust You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – GENTLENESS

Gentleness is not to be confused with weakness or a lack of resolve or determination. It is a trait of character of the true Christian - mildness and kindness of disposition. This is often lacking in our world and indeed, gentleness doesn't come naturally. Gentleness is something Christians must learn. It is a trait that is godly, and as His children God expects us to become gentle, as He is. Becoming gentle is not easy. Sometimes gentleness comes with great difficulty and through difficult circumstances.

The opposites of gentleness can be bitterness, anger, slander, malice, deceit and envy. Psalm 103:3-14 describe the gentleness of God.

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed...

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust...

Meditate on these verses and write down God's gentle deeds towards us in your own words. As you write, think of yourself how you can show gentleness to others. Example: God forgives, so I must forgive others who wrong me.

Thought: Why must we be gentle to others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as your spiritual children, help us be kind and gentle to others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – GOODNESS (I)

How to be good? We cannot be good until we know where goodness comes from. Of course, goodness can only come from God. God is good! He is good all of the time – His character is good, His thoughts are good, His plans are good, His Word is good. Everything about God is good.

John 10:14-15 – I am the good _____, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my _____ for the sheep. There is no better example of God’s goodness than when He sent His son into the world to save sinners. It was not as if we deserved it, or that God had no other choice. He could have left us in our sins to suffer eternal hell. But He sent Jesus to rescue us, to show us His goodness and to turn us back to Himself.

So, goodness comes from God. And as His children, we are to be like Him. Goodness does not exist in a vacuum – it does things. You and I can do good things to others.

Below is a list of things.

Circle “Yes” if it is a good thing and “No” if it is bad thing:

- Submit to good authority eg parents, teachers etc YES / NO
- Submit to bad authority eg gangster leader YES / NO
- Share and be kind to others YES / NO
- Be selfish and greedy YES / NO
- Get angry with other people YES / NO
- Gossip about others YES / NO
- Help friends with their homework YES / NO
- Steal your classmate’s stationery YES / NO
- Share toys YES / NO
- Give way to the old and young YES / NO

We can do a lot of good things to other people with God’s help and strength. Boys and girls, our lives bring glory to God when we are good to others!

Thought: Do I really do the good things in this list?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank God that You are eternally good and You are a perfect example for me. Teach me to learn to be a better child and to show that I am a Christian by doing good to others around me! This is my prayer in Jesus’ name - amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – GOODNESS (II)

Being Christians, we must actively pursue goodness. What people see in us should be what we really are. We are to be completely honest and don't hide anything.

Take a look at a Bible character – Barnabas. The Bible has accounts of what this man Barnabas had done. The source of Barnabas' goodness was the Spirit. The Spirit makes Barnabas a good man, and the Holy Spirit can do that in us too. Acts 11:24 describes him. Write the entire verse down.

He served Jesus and that is why he had goodness in his daily life and he did many good things. Child, be prepared to learn from Barnabas. Some of his good deeds are:

1. Goodness prompted him to care for others. When other Christians treated Paul with coldness and suspicion, Barnabas gave him the warmth of friendship and fellowship. Before Paul became a Christian, he was a terrible person for he persecuted the Christians. Perhaps that is why others shunned him. But Barnabas was sensitive and caring towards him. It was Barnabas who convinced the Jerusalem church leaders to accept Paul.
2. Goodness made him give generously. Barnabas sold his property and gave generously to the church.

Barnabas did many wonderful and good things. His original name was Joses, but the apostles gave him the name 'Barnabas', which means _____ (Acts 4:36). The Bible says that 'a good name is better than precious ointment' and 'rather to be chosen than great riches'. (Ecce 7:1; Proverbs 22:1)

What do people think of you?

What name do you think they will give you?

Thought: What is the meaning of your name? Do you live up to it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the wonderful example of Barnabas. Help me to learn from him and please help me to be close to You so that I may draw strength to be good in thoughts, words and actions by the help of the Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – FAITH (I)

How is it that we can put our faith in God with such confidence? It is because He is faithful! There are many verses in the Bible that describe the faithfulness of God.

- Hebrews 10:23 - Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is FAITHFUL that promised)
- 2 Thessalonians 3:3 - But the Lord is FAITHFUL, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil
- 2 Timothy 2:13 – If we believe not, yet he abideth FAITHFUL; he cannot deny himself

God is FAITHFUL, He would not change for He is completely consistent. People change. Look at a picture of yourself when you were a baby. Look at photographs of your parents when they were younger. A friend whom you have not seen for a while has a new hairdo or wears a new pair of spectacles. The behavior of your classmates change; some change from good to bad and others from bad to worse. Things around us change. Singapore is always having new buildings, roads, parks and schools. But God does not change.

So when challenges and temptations come, what should you do? Be afraid or worried? God will give you strength and help you. The verse is ‘There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make _____, that ye may be _____ it.’ (1 Cor 10:13) Making ‘a way of escape’ means giving us a solution to our problems. If we follow Him, our troubles will be over. The storm would have passed. After passing through a dark tunnel, you come out into the light. ‘Be able to bear it’ means that God will give you strength in times of your need. He will provide help, perhaps through a family member or a close friend or even a stranger. You will not be alone for He is there for you.

Consider one great man in the Bible and the troubles he had - David. David, as a young boy, had to overcome the giant Goliath. Then he was hunted down like an animal by the angry and jealous King Saul, and later his own son turned against him. He had great faith. When you are discouraged and feel like giving up because the Christian life is too hard, think about David and how he remained faithful in spite of all difficulties. Also remember that we live the Christian life not in our own strength but with the strength God gives us. He is faithful to His children – pray to Him, have faith in Him.

Thought: May I have more faith!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I rededicate my life to You and help me live the Christian life not in my own strength but Yours. You are faithful and please make me faithful to trust more and more in You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – FAITH (II)

Faith is given to us by the Spirit living inside us. How is your faith? Do you really believe that God will save you from an eternal hell? Do you have a desire to be faithful to Him? The world demands our loyalty. There are many things that attract us and rob us from keeping a good relationship with God. But we are called to remain faithful to God!

The Christian faith is the experience of living in a new personal relationship with God through the transforming and indwelling power of the Holy Spirit in us. The key to this new experience of living is trusting God. Have faith in Him to make you into a new person by allowing Him make you a kinder, gentler, more faithful child.

One area we may know we are in the faith is whether we love Christian fellowship. A true Christian will want to have fellowship or friendship with other Christians. All Christians should be involved in some church fellowship. Are you? Or are you always with your non-Christian friends? Or perhaps you do not like being with other Christians? If so, why is that the case?

The Bible instructs us that we should be faithful brothers and sisters to one another in God's family because of our common relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ. We should be eager to think of the kind and good things of others. We help each other in our spiritual walk within the church body. We also stand by each other. Learn to be demonstrate your faith in God by getting to know more Christians. that way, you may be able to help them, and they in turn may be able to encourage you. Play more with other Christian children and in turn, all of you would be able to strengthen your friendship with each other and ultimately, encourage each other to be close to God.



Thought: Do I have enough Christian fellowship?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make me be good and faithful. There are so many distractions that draw me away from being a good and faithful Christian. Gracious Father in heaven, help me have more good Christian friends so that together we may grow and learn more of Your Word and Your goodness. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – MEEKNESS (I)

Meekness is least appreciated by people. If you are meek, you are called a coward or sissy, especially for a boy. But God's Word tells us that meekness is a trait that you and I should possess. A Spirit-guided Christian is to be meek! What is to be meek? It is to have strength under control. It is to be humble towards others, to be like Jesus. Jesus possessed all the power in the world, but was most meek. He did not go around trying to impress others.

When there are conflicts among people, being meek helps to solve problems. A meek person does not get angry easily but instead calms the situation. Most of us can be easily angered or irritated. Are you? If so, read on!

Moses was criticized by his sister Miriam who spoke against him because he had married an Egyptian woman. She, together with Moses' other brother, Aaron, was jealous of Moses for the Lord spoke through Moses. So, the Lord was angry with Miriam and struck her with leprosy – a disease that causes skin and flesh on the body to come off bit by bit. Leprosy is a terrible flesh-eating disease, very painful, very horrible. But what was Moses' response? Was he happy Miriam was punished? Instead of saying 'That serves you right, Miriam', Moses prayed for her to be restored and God graciously answered him and healed her. This account is recorded in Numbers 12. Numbers 12:3 says that 'the man Moses was very _____, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth'.

When you are meek, you don't insist on your right. Abram put Lot his nephew's interests first, before his. Abram and Lot moved about together and they both had flocks and herds. While they stayed together the land could not support them and so their servants began to quarrel. Abram took the initiative to give Lot the first choice, although it was his to be had. Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of Jordan was well watered, so he chose that area for himself. The two men parted company, and Lot set out towards the east. Abram, the older man, should have had the first choice. Meekly, he gave that choice to Lot and when Lot chose selfishly, Abram chose to say nothing.

Child, when you are provoked, what must you do? Be like meek like _____ (Unscramble SSEOM) and not get angry easily but settle matters in an amicable way. When you have the right, what should you do? Be like meek like _____ (AAMBR) and put others' interests first.

Thought: How can you copy the examples of Moses and Abram?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be meek when I am provoked and give up my rights even though I have the first choice. It is no easy but with Your strength, I can be meek. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT - MEEKNESS (II)

Are you proud? Do you like to boast? Do you like selling yourself as someone clever because you want to be popular with people? You like to show off so that your friends will like you. Meekness is the opposite of all these. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained meekness as one of the traits of Christian character. Jesus wanted his disciples to be meek. So child, you see, Jesus desires you to exercise meekness in your life, not to be proud or boastful.

Most of you may not have heard of a man called William Carey. He was a great missionary to the land of India and was a very faithful man whom God used to a great extent. One day, a very important person – the governor of India - invited him to a dinner party. In the party, a proud guest asked one of the governor’s servants if Carey had once been a shoemaker. Overhearing what was asked, Carey stepped forward and said, “No, not shoemaker, sir, just a cobbler.’ You see, shoemakers may own companies such as Hush Puppies, Bata, Bumble Bee etc and may be rich people. However, cobblers are people you find on the streets or at corners of shopping centers repairing your shoes and footwear. William Carey, though he was at that time already a famous missionary, chose not to be offended, but in great humility, answered that proud man. He was a great example of a meek man.

Child, are you a proud person? Be wary of your pride, be humble. It is difficult to be humble. Satan is keen to put pride in us for he knows that would slowly destroy our testimony and affect our walk with God. Guard yourself.

Proverbs 16:18 - _____ goeth before _____
and an _____ spirit before a _____.

Thought: How can you guard yourself from being proud?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me never to be proud but to always remember what I have been given by You. Help me to achieve on a daily basis this fruit of the Spirit - meekness, and never be proud. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – TEMPERANCE (I)

Temperance is admired by people and nations throughout the centuries. What is temperance? Temperance is self-control. Temperance is to be able to know you are sinful and to not allow yourself to do whatever fancies you.

Is it easy to achieve temperance? No, it is very difficult. We have to constantly battle against ourselves, for the sinful nature in us wants us to commit sins and to do whatever our mind wants us to.

For example, you help a classmate in her school project. When the teacher sees it, he is pleased and asked that classmate whether she did it herself and she said “Yes”! That is simply not true, and the natural reaction for anyone may be anger. For a Christian child, he is to have temperance and that means we are not to be angry as any other would be but to control ourselves.

One other aspect you must watch out is to control your speech. All of us at times tend to speak carelessly and say things that hurt friends’ feelings. Or feelings of family members. Are you rash in speaking? Or are you a temperate child? Remember that our tongues may do more hurt than even our actions. James 3:2 – ‘...If any man offend not in _____, the same (refers to the man) is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole _____’ A man who can control his tongue can control himself as what he speaks reflects his heart and mind. He is perfect (perfect as in mature, not perfect as in sinless) – he does not speak angrily, is not critical or makes rash promises which he cannot fulfill. Instead, he speaks wisely and kindly.

Thought: Am I a temperate child?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to exercise self-control. Sometimes I get too excited and am not temperate, but please help me to improve. I know I have to be temperate as this is pleasing to You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT – TEMPERANCE (II)

Apostle Paul used three pictures of people who live self-controlled lives if they are to succeed – the soldier, the athlete and the farmer. Let us focus on athletes – you know they have to be very disciplined.

The Olympics is one of the most prestigious sporting events in the world. And one of the most watched events in the entire Olympics is the Men's 100 meter race. Whoever wins it is often called "The Fastest Man in the World". And when this man wins it and stands on the winner's podium, people round the world cheer and acknowledge him. The world is not only giving credit to his achievement in winning the race, but also the self-control or self-discipline in the many years that he has put in to achieve this win.

Behind all athletes who succeed and win are many consistent habits of self-control. They must be disciplined in having enough hours of sleep and rest, eating and drinking well, and having a disciplined lifestyle. Athletes must spend lots of time training and practicing. They run in the tracks and go to the gymnasium. They carry weights to build muscles for strength and stretch to develop flexibility. Often, they are cut off from friends or other social events because they have to concentrate on their training. So it is in Christian life – we are to be disciplined.

Young reader, as a Christian, you must discipline yourself in being a true Christian. Ask yourself these questions:

Do you honestly love God?	YES / NO
Do you love other people, even those who hurt you?	YES / NO
Are you obeying your parents?	YES / NO
Do you read your Bible and pray every day?	YES / NO
Do you share Christ with unbelievers?	YES / NO
Do you meet Christians for fellowship regularly?	YES / NO
Do you control your tongue?	YES / NO

When we recognize that our aim is to please the Savior, self-control is not too difficult. All athletes have goals, and you as a Christian must have your goal. What would it be? To please yourself or to please the Lord Jesus?

Thought: Do I seek to please myself or Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me strength to live for the Lord, to be disciplined like an athlete to live a pleasing life unto the glory of God. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW!

Most of us live in cities and probably know very little about farming. Consider a farmer. He sows or plants seeds into the soil and waters the soil daily and after a period of time, the seeds grow into shrubs or trees that bear fruits. The farmer then reaps or plucks the fruits and sells them in the market place, perhaps keeping some for his own family. The hard work he puts in pays off. What do you think would happen if that farmer sows bad seeds? Would good crops grow out of bad seeds?

Dear child, life is like that too - what you get depends on what you put in the beginning. That is the meaning of “reaping what you sow”. What happens to a person who has done wrong? When one has done wrong, he will receive punishment. There is a price to pay for sinning. This applies to everyone, young and old, male and female, rich or poor. You know how it works – if you study hard and put in effort into studies, you’d do better than if you had slacked and not been hardworking.

If we sin, there would be consequences as well. Even if we repent and ask God for forgiveness after we sin, we still bear the consequences of that sin, even if God forgives us. Consider the example of one of Israel’s greatest kings – King David.

He abused his authority and sinned by taking Bathsheba as his wife when she was married to another man! David committed murder by ordering that Bathsheba’s husband be sent to fight where death was certain. And David succeeded; Bathsheba’s husband was indeed killed. Even after David repented of his sins, he had to pay a very high price. He lost fellowship with God. He lost the joy of serving the Lord. As a father, he was a terrible example to his children. His sin also brought great hurt to his own family as four of his sons died! David’s moment of sinful pleasure with Bathsheba led to a lifetime of sorrow.

However, if we sow good seeds, God will bless! Verse 8b reminds us, “but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”. A Christian would have the fruit of the Spirit in him or her. We have spent many days understanding what this fruit is and this is the time to remember we have to “sow” the right seeds – to put what we have learnt in to practice!

Thought: What does reaping what you sow means?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You so much for today’s reminder that whatever I sow I would reap. I confess I have sinned in the past and done bad things. Please forgive me for those times I have sowed “bad seeds”. Please help me to sow “good seeds”, so that I may show forth the fruit of the Holy Spirit in my life! This is my prayer in Jesus’ name, Amen.

ARE YOU DOING GOOD TO MEN?

The Apostle Paul concluded his letter by encouraging the believers in Galatians to do good to all people. It is interesting to note that Paul teaches us to “not be weary in well doing”, meaning we must continue to do good to others. He also teaches that we “faint not”, and the idea is clear – we must go out of our way to be good to others. Often we feel reluctant to help others. Here, God’s standard is way above that – we are to do so much good to others that we may even feel tired, but we are to press on nonetheless! And among the people to whom we do good, we are instructed, in particular, to do good to those who are of the household of faith – meaning Christians.

Sometimes we may not feel like doing good to others, especially Christians. We think some Christians, who ought to know better since they are supposed to read the bible and know God’s Word, are not living the life God wants them to. Perhaps they are not showing the fruit of the Spirit. Perhaps they are proud or easily angered or envious children. And this is all the more sad as they are to be witnesses for Jesus! And that could put us off! But think about it – we are often like that ourselves! We, who are to know God’s Word and instructions, often do not live a godly life. We, who have tasted of God’s forgiveness and kindness, often are unforgiving and unkind!

What is to “do good” to others? It is to be showing forth to them the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is to be a consistent witness for Jesus. The ultimate good you can do is to be Christ-like. That means you would live your life as Christ would. That means you would have the fruit of the Spirit in full blossom in your life. That way, Christians may see how they can follow you in being loving, joyful, peaceful, longsuffering, gentle, good, faithful, meek, and temperate. That way, non-Christians may see how a Christian ought to live and would surely want to follow you in your choice of Jesus as personal Lord and Savior!

To “do good” to others is to be what a real Christian is.

Thought: Will you do good to others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for this month’s lesson on Galatians. There is so much to learn and I pray I’d just improve bit by bit on a daily basis. For today’s lesson, I ask I’d remember to always try my best to do good to others. This is my humble request, in Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

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