
EXCITING NEW SERIES - SERMON ON THE MOUNT!

The Sermon on the Mount is the first and longest teaching of Jesus that we have in the Bible. Shortly after Jesus had chosen his 12 disciples, he was travelling when he saw many people who had come to hear him teach – by this time, Jesus already had a far-reaching ministry which attracted large crowds to him. When Jesus saw the crowd, he went up onto the side of a mountain to sit down and teach his disciples and the people - this was how Jesus usually taught. What Jesus taught that day is called “The Sermon on the Mount” and it was recorded and written down by one of his 12 disciples, Matthew.

Jesus’ message to the disciples and the people was to repent from their sins because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. One day soon in the future, Jesus Christ will return to earth to rule over it. When that day comes, only those who have had their sins forgiven by God and who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour will qualify to rule with Jesus Christ.

What a privilege we’d have this month to be able to learn from our Savior’s first teachings! Starting of the Sermon on the Mount is The Beatitudes or The Blessings, and this month we’d focus on them. Here we learn:

- the true will of God
- the behaviour and character children of God should have if they have repented from their sins and entered into God’s kingdom
- the blessings from God that a child of God receives.

Thought: Am I a child of God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner and my sin has separated me from God. Please forgive me of all my sins. Cleanse and wash me by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. I accept Jesus Christ into my heart as my Lord and Saviour. Thank you for sending Jesus to die in my place and take away all my sins. Thank you for everlasting life and hope in heaven. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes – or blessings – are the foundations for God’s spiritual kingdom in our hearts. It is a description of Christian character. It is not a new set of laws nor is it a code of ethics or morals. God promises that we will be blessed if we follow his teachings. These blessings may not turn out the way we prefer them to. It will not be easy. We all, Christian adults, JW teachers and church leaders, are still figuring out how to do these things in a way that pleases God. So, don’t be discouraged! God calls us to be different than the rest of the world.

God wants to help and be a part of all the decisions you make and all that you do. Keep in mind that the beatitudes are impossible to carry out without God’s help.

“For with God _____
shall be _____.” (Luke 1:37)

Remember how Joshua had called out to God for help in his battle in Gibeon and God heard him and made the sun stand still and stopped the moon so that Joshua could defeat the enemies before it was dark (read: Joshua 10:8-14). Nothing is too difficult or impossible for our God!

Thought: God can do anything, but fail!

Prayer: Most gracious and merciful Father, I know that nothing is impossible with You. I need help and I can’t do it alone. Please help me to remember that I am not alone and to ask for your help in everything that I do. This I pray in Jesus’ most precious and holy name, Amen.

HAPPINESS VERSUS BLESSEDNESS

We hear people say “Blessed” but what does it mean? Does it mean “Happy”? It is more than simply being happy. Fun can last a few hours, happiness for your entire life, but blessedness or real joy is forever.

God offers more than temporary happiness. To be “blessed” is to have inner joy and peace in our hearts that comes with being right with God. Happiness may indeed be a part of it; but it is the happiness and joy in our hearts no matter what is happening around us, both good and bad. It means rejoicing and having joy even when we are being bullied or badly treated or when the situation around us is very difficult or bad. In other words, blessedness is more than happiness because it is not dependent on circumstances but it is the state of mind of a person.

So when Jesus says “blessed are they,” He is not only describing them as being filled with an inner sense of joy and peace because they are right with God, but He is praising them for their character. Jesus promises rewards in heaven for it.

Jesus is not teaching us about being blessed because we are able to go to Disneyland for a holiday or because we have the latest iPhone. What Jesus is teaching us is being able to be cheerful and grateful to the Lord even when we have all our things taken away or become very sick or when all our friends make fun of us (think of Job and what happened to him and how he reacted: Job 1:21).

Thought: Do you live a life of Jesus first, Others next, Yourself last?

Prayer: Most merciful Father in Heaven, remind me that you are our God and that we must put you first no matter what. When times are troubled, when I’m distracted or when I am worried, help me to trust in You and to look to You for help and to remember to pray without stopping! This is my humble cry in Jesus’ name, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

The world tells us that people are happy if they are rich, successful and powerful. Everyday, we see pictures and articles telling us that latest fashion, the sleekest cars, and biggest bank accounts are cool. These people with all of these things look very happy. So why does the beatitude tell us instead that we have to be poor to be blessed?

Actually, that's not what the first Beatitude says. It says "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Jesus Christ was not commending poverty but Jesus Christ came to give us another idea of blessedness and blessed people. To be "poor in spirit" is to recognize and admit that we are sinners who have nothing to offer to God and that we deserve nothing but the judgment of God and so need to seek salvation from God. To be "poor in spirit" means we know we are spiritually bankrupt, that we have no resources in ourselves and we must seek the assistance of God. So to be "poor in spirit", we have to look at the Lord Jesus Christ for help, begging for his mercy as we know on our own we can do nothing. And if we truly do that, we therefore have to get rid of all of our self-pride, self-assurance and self-reliance and ask God to forgive us of our sins and for all the wrong things that we do and have done and ask God to save us from going to hell and fill us with the Holy Spirit.

The hymn writer James M Gray puts it this way:

*Naught have I gotten but what I received;
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;
Boasting excluded, pride I abase; I'm only a sinner save by grace!*

Only a sinner, saved by grace!(2x)

This is my story, to God be the glory – I'm only a sinner, saved by grace!

Thought: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"
(Romans 3:23)

Prayer: Most merciful and gracious heavenly Father, please forgive me of all of my sins. Help me to realize I'm spiritually bankrupt, for I am nothing in your presence and unable to do any good on my own and that I need Jesus as the Lord of my life. This is my humble cry, and I ask in Jesus' name, amen.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN?

Isn't it wonderful that God promises us that if we ask him to forgive us of our sins and for Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour, he will bring us to Heaven? In contrast, if you do not have poverty of spirit, God's word is very clear - you cannot go to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew 5:3 says that "theirs is the kingdom of heaven". This is written in the present tense. The wonderful promise Jesus gave to his disciples is that if we believe in Him, we are immediately guaranteed a place in heaven. And more than that, the peace of heaven can be within us and present with us this morning, this afternoon, this evening – all the time!

Dear child, are you sure you will enter the kingdom of heaven? Have you confessed your sins to God and have Jesus be the Lord and Saviour of your life?

Our verse for today is most important. We can only gain access to heaven if we know we are spiritually unable to do anything on our own and therefore go to Jesus, asking him to be our Lord and Saviour. If we do not do that, we will not be able to go to heaven. God is gracious and He will answer that prayer - not because of anything you have done, but because of His goodness. This is a relief because now our salvation is dependent upon a loving and dependable God, and not the fickleness of man's heart.



Thought:

Am I a citizen of Kingdom of Heaven?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the lesson that there is absolutely no way I can go to heaven, unless I first realize I am totally unable to go there myself, and therefore need to rely completely on Jesus. And it is in His precious name that I pray, amen.

BLESSED ARE THE PROUD?

Joyce and her family have moved from Singapore because her father has taken a job in China. Her father was a senior manager in a big company and Joyce was very proud of her father's accomplishments. The house they were to live in was a big luxurious one in an expensive area of Beijing and that made Joyce even more proud. Further, Joyce was a smart girl who did well in school in Singapore and expected to do well in Beijing too.

Joyce's father, on the other hand, was a humble Christian who despite his wealth and senior company position, was keen to find a good church in Beijing so he can continue to learn God's Word. Over dinner one evening, he mentioned he was still searching for a good church when Joyce interrupted, "Dad, perhaps we don't need to search anymore. We already know a lot of the bible and I don't think there is anything we can learn here. Besides, we are wealthy and sometimes, I wonder if we need God to help us..."

Joyce's parents were shocked. The night before, they just had family devotion on Matthew 5:3 and dad thought Joyce didn't seem interested. However, he didn't confront her as he thought she may have been too tired. But what Joyce said revealed what was in her heart: pride and probably a life not surrendered to Jesus. Dad was very concerned and he once again taught from Matthew 5:3, that the proud won't inherit the kingdom of heaven as they won't be saved. Only those who are truly repentant, fully aware that they are absolutely dependent on God alone to help.

As Joyce laid in bed that night, she realized that although she has been to church for years, she has been a secretly proud person and has not really accepted Jesus as Lord. And so that night, she gave her life to Jesus.

Thought: Are you poor in spirit?

Prayer: Most gracious Heavenly Father, help to me trust and depend on you with all my heart. Help me not to rely on myself and my own way of doing things but instead, direct me in all that I do and help me to do your will all the time. This I humbly pray in Jesus' most holy and precious name, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

Blessed are they that mourn? The world thinks that's ridiculous! The one thing that the world tries to avoid is any form of sorrowing and sadness. The philosophy of the world is "Don't worry, be happy!" and there are entire multi-million-dollar industries built on making sure that the world receives utmost pleasure and happiness.

What does God's Word tell us? It's the exact opposite – "blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted". This verse is a logical continuation of Matthew 5:3. If we know we are spiritually bankrupt, we would mourn over our own inability and sinfulness. But the world rejects this teaching.

The warning is very plain and clear in Luke 6:25, "Woe to you that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep". Our Lord is condemning apparent laughter, joviality and worldly happiness.

What then is spiritual mourning? Does this mean we have to be sad and sorrowful over everything, all the time? Remember, what the Lord is in fact telling us is that we should be sad and mourn because of our sins. Godly sorrow leads to true repentance, a humble mind, a continual dependence on God's mercy and constant looking for the Holy Spirit to cleanse away the evil in our lives.

Our Lord promises that one day, all of this spiritual mourning will turn to great peace, joy and happiness when we are with God in His Kingdom:

Verily, Verily I say unto you, That ye shall _____ and _____, but the world shall _____: and ye shall be _____, but your _____ shall be turned into _____. (John 16:20)

Thought: Laugh now and weep later, or weep now and laugh later?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please forgive me of my sins. Thank you for your grace and mercy that you have showered on me and I pray that you will cleanse me of my sins. This I pray in Jesus' most holy name, Amen.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

Are you troubled? Is there something or some one at home or in school who is causing problems for you or your family? The faith of the Christian should grow stronger in times of trials and trouble. Trials from God are good for us since they provide opportunities for us to get to know God better. In his epistle to the Colossians, Paul assured the Christians that he was praying for them on a regular basis and included in his prayer list was the request that they might be increasing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:10). Paul knew that one of the secrets to a full and blessed life is getting to know God better. The main source of the knowledge of God is through His Word.

Times of trouble are very often times of silence. These can be precious moments of quiet thought when God speaks to us. If we do not set aside some time each day to be silent before God and do our QT, then He has His own way of setting us aside. If we take advantage of these periods of quiet, we too can increase in the knowledge of God. Yes, dear friends, our time of trouble can be for each of us a time of getting to know God better.

When Paul spoke of the God of all comfort, he was speaking of a personal experience of God. This was Paul's personal testimony that in all of his troubles, he was comforted by God. That comfort did not merely enable him to endure his trials but also to receive special blessings from these troubles. Paul of course knows what trials, trouble and hardship are all about for he suffered such severe trials in Asia that he even worried for his life!

Thought: Do not be dismayed or discouraged. God is your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble – Psalm 46:1

Prayer: Oh most gracious and merciful Heavenly Father, please protect me and give me comfort and strength when I am troubled or sad. Please help me also to count my many blessings that I have received from you. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED

When David came back from his battle with the Amalekites, a young man arrived with bad news. Saul's army had been attacked by the Philistines. Fighting was very fierce and in the chaos of battle, an arrow hit and wounded Saul. Rather than being taken by the Philistines, Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword. His son, Jonathan, as well as his brothers and others also died in the battle.

When David heard this, he took hold of his own clothes and tore them. David and his men mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan and all the others, who had died in the battle.

Have you lost a friend or loved one to death, like David? Or do you know a friend who, like David, has lost a loved one through death? You would probably feel a little uneasy talking to a friend who has lost someone through death. When you meet your friend, sometimes it is best not to say too much, but just to sit quietly with your friend. Your friend will feel your comforting presence even though you don't say much. If your friend would like to talk, ask her to tell you about the fun times that she remembers. Tell your friend how it makes you feel to see her so sad. You can tell her, if she is a Christian, that God loves her very much and feels sad with her. Tell her that God has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us and to be our Comforter. God wants to comfort her. Encourage her to tell God how she feels. If your friend doesn't feel like praying, you could ask if it would be okay to say a prayer for her. Pray that God will help her to feel His great love and Holy Spirit that will comfort her and thank God for the hope we have of being together one day in Heaven.

Thought: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; they rod and thy staff they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today's reminder that the Holy Spirit is my Comforter and I pray that I would always go to You in prayer and reading of the bible and my Junior RPG. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

The world thinks in terms of strength and power. The non-Christian attitude is that the more aggressive or assertive or self-confident you are, the more you show your power and ability. Of course that leads naturally to you being a leader and succeeding. To non-Christians, being meek or gentle or humble is viewed as being weak and that does not lead to success in the world.

What is meekness? The meek are mild, patient, gentle. When they are threatened or attacked, they do not retaliate, do not respond with anger and do not take revenge. It is a cheerful, quiet and willing obedience to our God. It suggests a teachable and obedient spirit. It is also strength under control, by God.

Why then is our Heavenly Father asking us to be meek? Our Heavenly Father is asking us to realize our own weaknesses and inability, which in turn leads us to realize that we are nothing but helpless sinners saved only by God's grace. And even if we are able to retaliate, we do not for we no longer think like the world.

Jesus Christ was the perfect example of being meek. He obeyed God, and did God's will by going to the cross to die for us. He did so quietly, willingly. Jesus did not respond with anger to those who hurt him. He had all the power in the world to destroy his enemies, but didn't. His strength was under control, God's control.

Thought: How will I react when I am being bullied by others? How will God want me to react when I am being bullied by others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins. Help me to be more like Jesus – to do your will for me cheerfully and willingly and without complaining and grumbling. This I pray in Jesus name, Amen.

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF MEEKNESS

In addition to the perfect example of meekness we see in Jesus Christ, the Bible provides us with other examples in the Old Testament and New Testament of people who showed meekness in how they lived, acted and spoke. These men are not perfect, but we may learn a lot from them too.

ABRAHAM. Abraham was God's chosen to be the father of the Jewish nation, yet in Genesis 13, we see that Abraham allows Lot to assert himself and take the first choice. Abraham does without complaining and grumbling. That's meekness.

MOSES. Numbers 12:3 calls Moses the meekest man on earth. Moses had many earthly opportunities and power because of his position as the son of Pharaoh's daughter but he thought hard about all of this and humbled himself completely to God and God's will (Exodus 40:16). That's meekness.

STEPHEN. When Stephen was false accused (Acts 6:13&14), he did not fight back. When they stoned him, Stephen cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin against their charge" (Acts 7:60). That is meekness.

PAUL. Paul suffered a lot at the hands of his own countrymen and other people. As you read his letters in the New Testament, you will see this quality of meekness coming out especially when he writes to the Christians in Corinth who had said unkind and nasty things about Paul. That's meekness.

Are you a meek child? Try your best and as a Christian, you must submit this important area of your life to God. It would be very difficult as you start, but as you continue to obey God and put Him first in your life, you would understand what it is to be meek. Meekness is a part of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit, something that must be seen in the life of someone who calls himself a Christian. Are you a Christian? If yes, this aspect of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit has to grow in your life!

Thought: The fruit of the Spirit is meekness (Galatians 5:22&23)

Prayer: Oh Heavenly Father, help me to be humble and meek. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY TOWARDS GOD

In the Bible, meekness is usually emphasized as submissiveness toward God for if we can be meek toward God and deny ourselves, we would learn to be meek toward men. As directed toward God, meekness and humility require us to do the following:

Recognize our sinfulness. We see that the Pharisee trusted in himself - that he was righteous. He prayed with himself, thanking God he was better than other people. Note the Pharisee's emphasis on exaltation of self and his failure to see his sins. The Publican (a job that was scorned among Jews in those days), on the other hand, pleaded for mercy admitting he was a sinner. If we say we have not sinned, we are liars. We are all sinners, and often need forgiveness. We all deserve to be punished for our sins. We have hope of salvation only by God's gracious willingness to forgive. We are no better than the Pharisee or publican, in the sense we are all sinners, but we must do better than the Pharisee and recognize our own sinfulness.

Depend on God. Our physical blessings come, not by our own power and might, but from God. All good things come from God. We must appreciate how weak we would be without Him. This leads us to depend on God to meet our needs. In turn, we then appreciate and give glory to Him, rather than exalting self.

Accept God's will for us in our lives. A meek and humble person will accept persecution or hardship without rebelling against God or doubting God's wisdom. This person will accept that God has chosen to allow this to happen for His good purposes. Facing hardships that we cannot solve alone helps make us humble - we see our weakness and turn to God for help which helps us to appreciate God and see our need for God. This does not however mean we should blame God for causing all the problems, nor does it mean we only have problems when we sin. Sometimes our problems are caused by our own sins. Other times we have not sinned but, like Job, God allows Satan to cause hardships. Satan is ultimately responsible for the existence of troubles, but God uses these troubles to make us humble.

Thought: One who exalts self will be made low; one who humbles self will be exalted! (Luke 18:14)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know that I need help from someone far greater than I am. You know what I need and what is good better than I know, and I know that you have the power to do what needs done. Help me to listen and obey your will and commands. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

MEEKNESS AND HUMILITY TOWARDS OTHERS

Meekness toward God is the most fundamental and basic sense in which we must be meek and humble. Yet if we are truly meek toward God, this will lead us to be meek and humble toward other people. It may be easy for you to read today's devotion, go through the verses above, and pray the prayer below. But to be truly meek is really difficult!

In our relations with other people, meekness and humility means we should do the following:

1. Submit to human authority (like parents and teachers) as ordered by God.
2. Honour others rather than obtaining honour for ourselves, and give God recognition for our good points.
3. Serve the needs of others, even if it is inconvenient for yourself.
4. Help others to overcome sin. This can mean helping to stop quarrels and fights or misunderstanding among your friends or being patient and putting up with things we do not like, instead of fighting back.

Can you think of someone you know who may be meek? Why is he or she meek? In what ways may you learn from this person?

Thought: In yourself, nothing; in God, everything. The rule followed by a truly meek and humble person: Jesus first, Others next, Yourself last.

Prayer: Most gracious Heavenly father, please help me to be meek and helpful to others so that I can be a good testament for you! It would be something unnatural for me as I am given to pride and self, so I really Your help, Lord! I pray for forgiveness for the times I have not been meek. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

THEY SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH

The phrase “the meek shall inherit the earth” is from Psalm 37:11. The psalmist means that though the wicked may have temporary power, yet God’s true servants shall really and finally have supreme authority over the earth. The earth we live in was beautiful, given by our good God in a perfect state. But man and sin stained it. So one day, God will make a new earth and the meek, who shall be with God then, shall inherit the new earth!

However, God’s promises also extend to the meek today that:

- They are provided for (Matthew 6:33).
- They may be content (Philippians 4:11&12).
- They have peace (Isaiah 26:3).

The meek (faithful Christians) will also receive as their rightful possession from their Heavenly Father - the new heaven and earth to come (Revelation 21:1) when Jesus comes back to earth again. As children and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), the meek are the only rightful occupants of the new heaven and earth.

The meek may not now be rich in worldly goods. The ungodly may dominate and increase in wealth and power. Yet the truth is that the earth belongs to the meek ones (faithful Christians) for only they have a rightful claim to it.

Thought: Are you thankful and excited about your inheritance from God?

Prayer: Heavenly and most gracious Father, thank you so much for making me a child of Yours and a fellow heir together with Jesus Christ. I am looking forward to the return of Jesus and the new heaven and earth. I know many people may not believe this but gracious Father, please grant me faith to trust in what You say in the Bible. This I pray in Jesus name, Amen.

MEEKNESS IS NOT WEAKNESS

There is a group founded by J. Upton Dickson called DOORMATS. That stands for “Dependent Organization Of Really Meek And Timid Souls.” Their motto was: “The meek shall inherit the earth — if that’s okay with everybody.” Their symbol was the yellow traffic light, whose message is, Slow down and prepare to give the right of way to others.

That’s not what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of meekness. The biblical concept of meekness does not imply weakness. It does not mean wimpy. Biblical meekness is not being a doormat so that everyone can step all over us. All we have to do is to think of Moses confronting Pharaoh or to think of Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the temple. Both Moses and Jesus were meek people but were they wimps? Definitely not! From Moses and Jesus, we can see why meekness is not weakness but instead it is power and strength under God’s control.

Being meek is against our human reasoning. Our natural human tendency is to strive for honor, high positions, material possessions, and power. Yet in this beatitude Jesus commended and blessed the meek!

Are you meek? In other words, are you humble? God doesn’t want you to be weak and He doesn’t want you to be proud, either. Jesus Christ became a humble servant for you and God desires you to be humble too. Instead of thinking only of yourself, He wants you to be unselfish and put the feelings of other people above your own.

Thought: If Jesus was meek, I’d follow Him!

Prayer: Heaven Father, please help me to become a truly humble servant for you. Help to put the needs and feelings of others first before my own. I thank You for the few lessons on meekness and for drilling in the importance of this aspect of my life. This I most humbly pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

REAL HUNGER AND THIRST

Ever been hungry? I mean really hungry? When was the last time you were hungry enough to be thankful for a plate of plain rice, or something tasteless? Perhaps in Singapore, not many have been really hungry or thirsty but in the times of Jesus, having enough food and drinks was a privilege not all enjoy.

In this 4th beatitude, we learn that righteousness is to be right with God. It is to be spiritually acceptable to God and Jesus compares righteousness to food. You hunger for food and thirst for drinks. Food is of course essential to our physical life. You hunger and thirst for that which you think, like food, to be essential to your life. Without food and drink, we die. So when our body hungers and thirsts, it is actually crying out in what is described as thirst for drink and hunger for food because the life of our body depends on it. The only person who does not get hungry or thirsty is a person who is dead. This has a parallel in the spiritual realm – you can tell if a person is alive in Christ by whether he hungers and thirsts for righteousness, whether he or she wants to be right with God.

Jesus is saying this: righteousness is as vital to the spiritual life as food and drink is to the physical life. Righteousness is something so vital to your spiritual life that your spirit, if it knew what it needed, would be crying out, hungering for righteousness. Without righteousness, you cannot live spiritually. So the comparison is between food and drink that we need at the physical level to righteousness, which is both food and drink, at the spiritual level.

Do you have an appetite for righteousness? Do you hunger for righteousness? A sick person has no appetite. If you have no or a small appetite for righteousness, it might be that you are spiritually sick. Righteousness holds no attraction to those who have a lack of spiritual appetite. If that is the case, pray that God will help you recognize and solve it by repenting and asking God to renew a right attitude in you.

Thought: Do I crave for God and His Word?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to truly hunger and thirst after you. Help me to have a daily desire for the sincere milk of your Word so that I can grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

After a heavy meal, would you feel like eating more of the same food? Probably not. However, this is not the case for spiritual food. Matt 6:5 teaches us that if we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we shall be filled. Does that mean after we are filled, we do not hunger and thirst for more spiritual food? No! If we are true Christians, we would want to be right with God and do the right things. And when we do that, we would want to do more of that as we become more and more righteous. That is how a Christian grows spiritually.

If you see a classmate who is the height of your baby cousin, would you be surprised? Of course, yes! That child is not growing properly. Likewise when we consider our spiritual life, there must be evidence of growth. One of the most visible signs is whether that person is changed. Whether that person now submits to God and no longer to his old, selfish thinking. And one of the most obvious signs is to see if that person exhibits the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Read Galatians 5:22&23 and see if you can identify the various aspects of the fruit of the spirit?

OLEV DOSOGNES OYJ
ATFIH EPCAE KSEMNESE
ETNSGESLNE PECRTEMANE
OLGN-FSINUFERG

Are these 2 verses like a mirror in that you see yourself in it at times? Or are they absent in you?

Thought: Do I have the fruit of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Heavenly father, please forgive me for my lack of hunger and thirst for righteousness. Do please increase my appetite for reading and obeying the bible. Please help me to be more like Jesus Christ, obedient to your holy law and your will for me, kind merciful and compassionate. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

NO FOOD REQUIRED!

Recently, there was a true story about a teenage model. She was 19 years old, had several teen magazine cover shoots behind her and career ahead of her as a model. She was also dead from an eating disorder called anorexia. With this eating disorder that she had since she was 16 year old, this young lady started reducing the amount of good that she would eat. Over three years, she kept reducing the amount of food she would eat until she was getting almost not food at all. In the end, this weakened her heart, which eventually gave up. She had quite literally starved herself to death.

The same can be said of some Christians. They start off going to Church and reading their Bible and praying daily. Soon, they become too busy with their daily activities and their time spent at bible reading and praying begin to decrease, sometimes even stopping altogether. After time, they backslide and stop coming to Church. It's ok they think – as long as I believe in Jesus Christ and he is my Saviour, all is well with my soul. Just like the teenage model with anorexia, these Christians are slowing but surely starving their spiritual life. Without sustenance from God, they begin to fall into sin. This in turn leads to them gorging on the junk food of the self-centered life. Either way, the result is hardly spiritually satisfactory or satisfying.

Young Christian, do you take care to feed your soul each day? Or do you feel that is not necessary? Do you feel you can live your life successfully without God's help? Watch out! Don't neglect your spiritual life.

Thought: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. (Luke 4:4)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to read and obey Your Word every day, talk to you in prayer all the time, and spend more time in fellowship with other believers. This I pray in Jesus' precious name, Amen.

MERCY

The word “mercy” indicates compassion for people in need and a desire to help them. We see mercy first of all in God’s relationship with man. He is a merciful God and shows us the gift of mercy continuously, God delights in mercy. We see that God’s mercy is great, plenteous, everlasting, good, tender, rich and abundant.

God has shown His mercy to us by giving his Son Jesus Christ to die for us so that we are pardoned and saved from our sins. Each day of our life, each hour, and each moment, we guilty sinners receive God’s undeserved mercy. All the blessings we enjoy are evidence of his mercy.

Now if the supreme desire of a person who hungers and thirsts after righteousness is to be like Jesus Christ, then this person ought certainly to show mercy in his dealings with others as Jesus was merciful. If we, then, show mercy to others (like the poor, the wretched, the guilty), it shows that we are like Christ. We have His spirit, and will not lose our reward in heaven.

But how can a child like you show mercy in your life? Every day of our lives we have opportunity to show that we are like Jesus Christ. We can help the poor and less fortunate – perhaps the cleaner in your school or the toilet aunty at a hawker centre, we can forgive those who injure or hurt us, we can show compassion on the souls of others who are not saved by praying for their salvation and we can pity those who are in sin and pray that God will stop their sinful ways.

Thought: God is merciful and shows mercy continuously, so should I.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank you for being merciful by sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross to take away my sins. Just as I have received so much mercy everyday from you Lord, please help me to be merciful to others around me. [Is there any family member or friend whose salvation you wish to pray for too?]. This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE MERCIFUL SHALL OBTAIN MERCY

The 5th beatitude says that those who show mercy, mercy shall be shown to them. We see a similar truth in Matthew 6:14& 15, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses”.

This does not mean that we can receive mercy from God by showing mercy or receive forgiveness by showing forgiveness to others. We cannot receive mercy or forgiveness unless we first repent of our sins. And we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are unmerciful towards the sin of others.

People make mistakes. We all do. It is showing compassion and mercy to forgive those mistakes and forget them, rather than to get angry and hold a grudge against them. Part of being a true Christian is to freely forgive, without any strings attached.

When a person who has done something wrong to you, apologizes to you, what is your reaction? Do you accept the apology and let bygones be bygones? Or do you accept the apology but remember the wrongful act and find ways to “punish” that person in future?

It’s been my observation that those same people who want to keep punishing are the same people who have a hard time understanding the gift of grace and mercy given to us by Christ’s death on the cross. However, the person whose habit is forgiving others will have a much better understanding of the mercy and forgiveness God has shown us. That person is truly blessed and happy because their acts of forgiveness are a small reminder to them of Christ’s great act of forgiveness.

Thought: Forgive, as God forgave

Prayer: Most gracious Father, thank you for forgiving me of my sins. Help me to truly forgive others and not to hold grudges when others wrong me. Help me also not to be proud when I am in the wrong but to be quick to say “sorry” and to ask others for forgiveness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

GRANDMA'S CRYSTAL

“Oooh, Kim! Look what you’ve done! You broke Mom’s favorite crystal!” Beng Lee exclaimed. “It’s the one grandma gave her just before she died last year. Suspect she won’t be happy!” Kim stared in horror at the shattered pieces of crystal on the floor. “I-I-I couldn’t h-help it,” said Kim nervously. “I...”

“What’s the matter?” Both children were surprised Mum was home so early from the market. An initial frown creased over her face as she realized what had happened. Kim burst out. “Mummy, I d-d-didn’t mean to. I was just trying to rearrange the display cabinet. .Oh! I’m s-s-so sorry.” Mother put on a brave smile and an arm around Kim. “Don’t worry my girl. Don’t cry!”

“Does she have to buy you another one? It’d be expensive!” asked Beng Lee. “No, Some things can never be replaced.” Mother said sadly. “Then are you going to discipline her?” Beng Lee dug deeper. Mother shook her head. “Spank her?” Beng Lee asked. Again there answer was a “No”. Beng Lee was astounded. “Aren’t you going to punish her at all?” “No.” Mother sighed. “I’m going to forgive her and show mercy. We can see clearly that Kim has already learned that she needs to be more careful.”

Beng Lee started to protest but Mother, fighting back tears, told him, “Don’t be jealous when mercy is shown to someone else. You see, Beng Lee, mercy is something for which we should all be very grateful. Except for the mercy of God, we would all receive the eternal punishment we deserve. So, thank God for His mercy to you, and be glad when mercy is given to others, too. Who knows when you may need it again yourself.”

Kim asked how mum would remember grandma now that the crystal was gone. Mother wisely replied, “We’d all remember grandma by this incident for it was her that taught me forgiveness and mercy.”

Thought: Are you a forgiving and merciful child?

Prayer: Most gracious Father in Heaven, thank you for showing mercy on me and saving a wretched sinner like me. Just like how I was shown mercy, please help me to be merciful to others and to love mercy even when it is given to others. This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

PURE IN HEART

Did you know that in the bible, the heart mainly refers to a man's thinking process (Proverbs 23:7)? When Jesus Christ spoke of the "pure in heart", he was thinking of the mind, which in turn controls the will, which in turn controls the responses of emotion. What God is after, is therefore, a new heart.

A new heart? Is God going to give me a heart transplant when I become a Christian? Perhaps not literally but the human heart is utterly corrupt, wicked and deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9) and it cannot be changed, reformed, or improved to become like God's heart. That is, unless and until God's transforming spirit changes our lives when we become children of God.

It is easy to change the way we appear on the outside without a real change of heart. You may go to church, carry a bible, recite bible verses but if your heart is not pure and clean, you have not met God's standard. It is therefore not enough to clean up your act only on the outside. Only God knows your true motives. Jesus Christ's goal is to truly change the hearts of sinners like you and me.

True Christianity is therefore about transforming a person's heart and purifying his life. Only Jesus Christ can purify the heart and cause you to do the right things for the right reasons. God's cleansing and purifying of your life is a complete transformation of your desires and inner motivation. It is giving up a life fixed upon self-centered desires to embrace a life dedicating to living the Christ life and doing God's will. This person, Jesus Christ promises, will see God!



Dear child,
which heart is yours?



Thought: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Prayer: Most gracious and merciful Father, please forgive me of my sins. Please transform and give me a clean and pure heart so that I can do the right things for the right reasons. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THEY SHALL SEE GOD

How can we see God if he doesn't have a body? Can we or can we not see God? To "see" God means to be allowed into his presence. When you call the clinic and say, "Can I see Doctor today?" we don't mean, "Can I get a look at him?" or, "Can I see a picture of him?" We mean, "May I have an appointment with him?" So the first thing seeing God means is being admitted to His presence.

The pure in heart "see" God as they are accepted by God and therefore allowed into His Presence. Now what does that mean? It is the sense of knowing Him and knowing that He is near. The pure in heart are close to God and have a close experience with God, which is the result of having our sins washed away by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is a definite shift in the direction of our priorities. God's interests become our interests. Our old lifestyle loses its fascination and we gain a sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

The pure in heart "see" God not in visions and dreams but see God at work in his gracious dealings with us, as Saviour, and living Lord, and personal friend. We "see" or have God as our comforter (Matthew 5:4) and counselor (Isaiah 9:6) and constant companion (2 Thessalonians 3:18).

The pure in heart also "see" God in His holy Word, and see the wonder-working power of God in nature and in events in history.

So when Jesus promises the reward of "seeing God" it is the beginning of a whole new view of life. It is a view that is expanded beyond the material world to the spiritual world. Indeed, we are now "seeing him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27)! But one day soon, the bible promises us that the Lord Jesus Christ "shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Thought: Do you see the power of God changing your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to see You with the eye of faith while I try my best to be a better Christian. And I await the day when I can see You face-to-face. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DARE TO BE PURE OR DIFFERENT!

Do you ever forget to wash your hands before eating? Some times, I think that we all forget. While I am sure that it is a good thing to always wash your hands before eating, according to Jesus, there are some other things that are far more important.

The religious leaders, during the time Jesus lived, the Pharisees, were very very concerned about cleanliness. They had many religious laws and traditions which they followed to make sure that nothing unclean went into their mouth. One day some of these religious leaders asked Jesus why his disciples were not keeping their tradition of washing their hands before they ate. Jesus answered these religious leaders by telling them that what comes out of your mouth is more important than what you put into it. He said that the words that come out of your mouth come from your heart and those words show whether you are clean or unclean.

I am sure that you have heard the children's rhyme that says, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." That sounds nice, but it just isn't true. Words can hurt. We can all remember a time when we have been hurt by someone's mean and hateful words. God hears every word we say and he knows every thought we have in our heart. It is very important for us to be careful about the things we think and say, because hateful words come from an unclean heart.

Thought: Do I have clean hands and a pure heart?

Prayer: Heaven Father, let the words that come out of my mouth and thoughts that I have and the actions I take be clean and pure, so that they are pleasing to You. O Lord, please help me to avoid temptations and give me the courage to stand firm when I feel pressured or tempted to do wrong things. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

PEACEMAKERS ARE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Many people talk about finding peace but never experience it, because they ignore their sin. Man will never produce peace on his own, because real peace is a result of holiness, righteousness, and purity. A person can't have real peace until he bears righteous fruit. If two people are fighting, it's because of sin; eliminate the sin and the fight will end. Mere separation achieves nothing. Only then the two will be reconciled.

Peacemakers make peace by sowing righteousness. You can't be a peacemaker until the first 6 Beatitudes characterize your life. That means you must start with the attitude of a beggar in your approach to God because of your sin (Matt 5:3). Next you must mourn over your sinfulness (Matt 5:4). That will produce meekness toward God in the light of His holiness (Matt 5:5). As a result, you will hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matt 5:6), and God will extend to you His mercy (Matt 5:7). When you've received His mercy, you become pure in heart (Matt 5:8). Only the pure in heart can be peacemakers (Matt 5:9). But when you become a peacemaker, the world won't accept you. That's why Matt 5:10 says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Peacemakers are always trying to bring about righteous solutions to problems.

To be effective as a peacemaker, you must maintain your peace with God. If you are living in disobedience to God's will, you cannot function as a peacemaker. You can't commune with God openly when you're in sin nor can you dispense God's peace to others. A true peacemaker first concentrates on his own peace with God. Remember that peacemaking is a God-like work. God makes peace with us; and as his children, we are to imitate him. Be warned though, if "blessed are the peacemakers", then cursed are the peace-breakers. If peacemakers are the children of God, then peace-breakers are the children of the devil.

Thought: Am I a peacemaker or a peace-breaker?

Prayer: Heavenly father, please help me to be an ambassador for Christ and bring together those who are at "war" with each other by telling them the truth in Your Holy Word. Forgive me of my sins and help me to be more like Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

ABIGAIL, THE PEACEMAKER

In the book of Samuel, we learn that Abigail wasted no time in thinking of a plan to stop David (he was not yet King then) and his men from killing her husband Nabal, after she had heard of Nabal's insulting behaviour toward David. She took two hundred loaves of bread, some wine, five sheep, grain, and cakes of raisins and figs. She loaded everything on donkeys and told her servants to go on ahead. She didn't tell Nabal that she was going out to meet David.

When Abigail saw David coming, she bowed down with her face to the ground. "My master," she said, "let me take the blame for what has happened and do not pay any attention to what Nabal said. The Lord will make you king because you are fighting His battles. Please take this present and do not take Nabal's life. And when the Lord has made you king of Israel, you won't have to feel guilty for taking someone's life unnecessarily." The result of Abigail's actions was that David's heart was softened and he was kept from bloodshed that day.

How can I end a quarrel between my friends? How does one stop a fight or a quarrel without becoming part of it, making things worse, or taking sides? Abigail knew that unless she did something, someone was going to get hurt. Let's see what she did to bring peace to an ugly situation:

- She didn't take sides. Although Abigail was married to Nabal, she tried to understand the way David felt.
- She made an effort. Abigail gave of her own food, worked out a clever plan, and used her servants (see 1 Samuel 25:18-19).
- She was willing to take a risk. She put herself between Nabal and David (see 1 Samuel 25:23-24).
- She helped David see the bigger picture. Abigail convinced him not to do something he would regret later (see 1 Samuel 25:30-31).

Thought: Peacemakers reap a harvest of righteousness (James 3:18).

Prayer: Most gracious Father in Heaven, please help me to keep the peace among my friends and family. Help me to learn from Abigail's example so that I can be a peacemaker. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

What is persecution? It is to follow and hunt down as one does an enemy. Here in today's reading, it means to oppress someone on account of their religion.

Many bible scholars take verse 10 as the last beatitude and consider verses 11 and 12 an elaboration of this beatitude, with personal application. We also note that "Blessed" is used twice in today's reading – why? One bible commentator suggests that God doubly blesses those who suffer and those who are persecuted.

It should be observed that only those who are persecuted for "righteousness' sake" (v10) and for "my [i.e. Jesus'] sake" (v.11) are blessed. In other words, persecution or bad treatment that you bring on yourself because of your own sinfulness, faults, flaws of character or self-righteousness or for a non-biblical belief bring no blessings whatsoever, except to teach us for the need to go to Jesus Christ for more purification of our hearts (1 Peter 3:13-17).

Christians should expect persecution! Jesus Christ himself said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15: 18-19). And the apostle Paul wrote that "Yea, and all that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution". (2 Timothy 3:12).

This last beatitude is the most difficult of the beatitudes to live out. This beatitude, more so than the others, will draw the line and divide between those who are truly righteous and those that are not - between those that are truly Christians and are saved, and those that pretend to be Christians, but are not actually truly converted and saved.

Thought: The nature of righteousness is that it provokes the unrighteous.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to be brave in standing up for You and Your Word with my friends and unbelieving family members. Help me to be brave, even to rejoice when I am harassed for Your sake. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

In both the first and last beatitude, Jesus Christ says of the blessed ones, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. Please refresh your memory and read again the reading of April 5.

Matthew Henry, an English Presbyterian minister and commentator on the Bible, writes that, “God will provide those who lose for him, though it be life itself, shall not lose him in the end. Heaven will, at last, will be abundant recompense [i.e. reward] for all the difficulties we met with in our way. This is that which has borne up the suffering saints [i.e. Christians] in all ages – this joy set before them.”

In the course of a Christian’s journey of faith, we must travel against the storm and opposition in a hostile world. As we move along our journey, we have God’s guarantee that ours is the kingdom of the heaven. Regardless how others may treat us, this is a divine right promised to us by God that cannot be taken away. No matter how badly the ungodly treat us, remember that we do not look at the present scheme of things for this is Satan’s order. We should instead be looking for it future when our Lord Jesus Christ returns to rules the earth.

Thought: Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven. (Matthew 5:12a)

Prayer: Most gracious Father in Heaven, I know that there is only one way I can go to heaven. I am totally unable to go there myself and it is only through Jesus Christ alone who can redeem me of my sins and bring me to heaven with him. Please sustain me and help me through all the difficult things that I may go through. And it is in His precious name that I pray, amen.

SUFFER FOR JESUS...

Think it's not possible to suffer because of the right things you do for God just because you're only a child? Think again. These are some true examples of children who have faced difficult situations in their lives.

Mei Ling posted a bible verse on her Facebook, wanting to encourage her friends because she had found the verse helpful. While some friends liked her post, there were also others who replied that she had posted enough "bible stuff" and should shut up. There were others who made fun of the fact that she was a Christian and posting "un-cool" bible verses. Mei Ling was hurt, but after sharing this incident with her Junior Worship leader, was encouraged to continue the good work of posting encouraging bible verses.

Michelle was training hard for the under-9 chess tournament. That is, until she found out that the tournament would be held on a Sunday. Her chess coach told her it was alright to miss one day of church. After all, it would only be 1 Sunday out of 52 Sundays and he was sure that God wouldn't miss her this one Sunday. Michelle spoke with her mother and together they went to see her chess coach. They explained that Sunday is God's day and that it is God's commandment to keep the day holy. Playing in a chess tournament on Sunday would not be honouring to God and so Michelle would not be going for the tournament.

When we obey God, unbelievers who are watching often feel uncomfortable, so they try to make us uncomfortable too. God says to pray for them. The Bible promises blessings to those who suffer for doing the right thing. Be brave like Mei Ling and Michelle and don't give in pressure or the temptation to retaliate against those who have been mean. Remember- just pray and praise.

Thought: If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God. (1 Peter 4:16)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to do what is correct according to God's Holy Word. Help me not to give into pressure or the temptation of getting even with those who are mean to me because I want to do God's will and command. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

LIVING THE BEATITUDES

Do you simply read about the Beatitudes and have knowledge of it (like the Pharisees) or do you actually practice what God's Word tells us? Living the Beatitudes every day can seem very difficult unless we:

- study the Bible consistently
- pray constantly for God to help us understand what God is trying to teach us
- listen to God's will and direction for us

Remember that the beatitudes do not describe the requirements of how to get in the kingdom, (be this way and you get in) but they describe the characteristics of someone who has true righteousness and therefore enjoys the blessings that come with true righteousness.

Let's refresh our memory on the beatitudes we've spent this month learning about. Beatitude fill in blanks:

1. _____ are the _____ in spirit:
for theirs is the kingdom of _____.
2. Blessed are they that _____: for they shall be _____.
3. Blessed are the _____: for they shall _____ the earth.
4. Blessed are they that _____ and _____ after
_____ for they shall be _____.
5. _____ are the _____:
for they shall _____.
6. _____ are the _____ in heart:
for they shall _____.
7. Blessed are the _____:
for they shall be _____ the _____ of _____.
8. _____ are they which are _____ for _____
sake: for theirs is the _____ of _____.

Thought: Be doers of the word, not just hearers of God's Word.

Prayer: Oh most gracious Father in Heaven, please help me to practice what you have taught us in the Beatitudes every day of my life. Forgive me of my sins, especially when I fail to act according to your Word and will for me. This I humbly pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

IT'S TRUE

“Grandma, this isn’t the way it really happened,” complained Jessica as she held up her school magazine. “I wrote this story, but they changed it!” Jessica thrust the paper toward Grandma and pointed to one of the articles.

“I’m sorry, honey,” said Grandma, “but when we tell stories, people quite often change them. They might twist what we say or leave out some of our words. They think they’re making the story better.” “But this was a true story! You can’t change the facts,” protested Jessica, “and they did! This says Amanda was the winner of the competition, but she’s not. It was Bee Lan!”

Grandma shook her head. “Well, I guess this goes to show that you can’t always believe what you read,” she said, handing the paper back to Jessica. Jessica frowned. “I guess not!” she agreed.

Grandma smiled as she got out some milk and cookies and set them on the table. “I’m glad to know that there’s one book we can read and be certain that whatever it says is true. Do you know what book that is?”

“Sure.” Jessica nodded. “It’s the Bible,” she said confidently. “We learned John 17:17 in Bible club. It says, ‘Thy Word is truth.’ We talked about how the Bible is always true.” “Good!” Grandma smiled. “How else do you know God’s Word is true—other than by the verse you quoted?”

“Well... I learned that things predicted in the Bible a long, long time ago actually happened down to the littlest details,” replied Jessica. “Old Testament prophets told how Jesus would be born—and it happened exactly the way they said it would. And archeologists have dug up cities mentioned in the Bible... and... and... I just know in my heart it’s true.”

“That’s because God the Holy Spirit helps you,” Grandma explained, giving Jessica a hug. “News reports quite often state something wrong, but the Bible never does. We can always believe what it says.”

Thought: What do you rely on for truth? Books? News reports? Your friends? Teachers? Newspaper, television, and radio reporters disagree among themselves, so some of them are obviously wrong. Books reflect their author’s beliefs, and they’re not always right. Preachers, teachers, and parents should be respected—they’re in authority—but even they can be wrong. Only God always tells the truth. Whatever He says in His Word—the Bible—is ABSOLUTELY correct.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for the reminder that only Your Holy Word is completely true and I can rely on it always all the time! Help me read more of it, and it is in Jesus’ precious name that I pray – amen.

BETTER THAN REWARDS

“I got an email from Soo Hoon today,” said Erica one afternoon. “She has to learn about 50 Bible verses for Sunday school.” “50!” exclaimed Erica’s brother Mason.

“Well...actually, she doesn’t have to learn that many, but she hopes to win the top prize,” Erica explained. “I wish my Bible school had prizes like that. Then I’d learn verses, too.”

“I don’t know,” muttered Mason. “That’s still too many.”

“Memorizing verses and winning a prize is fine,” said Mom, “but there’s an even better reason to learn them. God can use His Word to teach you how to handle various things that happen in your life.” Erica looked doubtful. “Tell you what,” said Mom, “I’ll give you a list of verses to work on. Start learning them, and see what happens.”

“Okay,” agreed Erica, and in the next few weeks, she was surprised to see how quickly she could memorize verses when she really tried. She was also surprised at how often she recalled one of them.

There was the day a big dog started following her as she walked to her cousin Anita’s house. Erica caught her breath—the dog seemed friendly, but she was afraid of dogs! Suddenly she remembered Psalm 56:3, “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” She kept saying the verse over and over, and soon her fears were quieted.

Later that day, Erica’s friend Ellen said unkind things about another girl. Erica was ready to agree and add her own comments when Ephesians 4:29 popped into her mind, “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” Erica bit her tongue and quietly told Ellen she would really rather talk about something else. “Mom, you were right,” Erica said when she arrived home. “There are good reasons for learning verses, other than winning prizes.” She began to explain what she meant. Even Mason, who was also listening, looked interested and thoughtful when he heard what had happened that afternoon.

Thought: Do you learn Bible verses even if nobody promises a reward for doing that? Try learning the reference verse with each day’s reading!

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for reminding me I must learn to love and memorize bible verses on my own. Perhaps I have not done enough so Father, please give me the strength to do more. This I humbly ask in Jesus’ name. Amen!

THE SURPRISE RIDE

With a click, Mom fastened her seatbelt. As she adjusted the rearview mirror, she caught a glimpse of Jeremy's worried face. "Honey, is everything all right?" she asked. "I'm afraid to go to the dentist, Mom," Jeremy moaned with both arms wrapped around his stomach. "It's making my stomach hurt."

"I'm sorry, honey," said Mom. "You always liked Dr. Yee, but he is away and I'm sure you'll like Dr. Tan, too. But I totally understand. Going someplace new can be scary. There have been times I had butterflies in my stomach, too." "Butterflies, Mom?" Jeremy replied. "It feels more elephants! Or a whole zoo!" Mum smiled "Like the animals we saw at the zoo last week?"

Jeremy's grimace turned to a smile as he thought of the surprise ride and the trip to the zoo. "Dad likes to surprise us, doesn't he?" he said. "He does, and neither you nor I had a clue as to where Dad was taking us," replied Mom, "so were you afraid?" "Of course not, Mom!" Jeremy replied. "I trust Dad. He always takes us on the best surprise rides!"

"Yes—and what would you say, Jeremy, if I told you this trip to the dentist is like one of the surprise rides Dad gives us?" Mom asked. "What do you mean?" Jeremy was puzzled.

"Think of Jesus as our driver, and just like you had to trust Dad, you need to trust Jesus," said Mom. "But Dad always takes us to fun places," said Jeremy. "Going to the dentist isn't fun."

"Not all the places Dad takes us are really fun," replied Mom, "but they're good places for us. Like the time he took us to help out at the old folks' home – Lentor Residence. You weren't quite sure about that at first, remember? But later you were glad you went. With God, we don't know what's going to happen, either, but we need to trust Him. His plan is perfect."

Mom patted Jeremy's knee. "I recall Psalm 56:3... "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." Mom winked. "So what do you say we leave those elephants in the zoo and go to Jesus right now?" "Okay," agreed Jeremy, "and I'll ask Him to help me remember that verse, too."

Thought: Has God taken you on a "surprise ride" lately? Go to the dentist or the doctor? Were you afraid? You don't need to be. Jesus doesn't want you to be afraid; He wants you to trust in Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I remember the lesson and verse for today, that I may always trust in You even in "surprise rides"! This I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

FORGIVE!

Isabella felt her face burn with embarrassment and anger. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Kok Wan and Amos looking at her and laughing. “All those freckles,” she heard Amos whisper, and then they laughed again.

“Amos! Kok Wan!” Mrs. Tan spoke sternly. “Settle down!”

At recess time, Isabella didn’t feel like talking or playing with her friends. She found a quiet spot in the school garden and plopped down by herself at the bench. “I hate my stupid freckles,” she thought as she watched a butterfly fluttering nearby. “Or maybe I just hate Amos and Kok Wan. I wish I could go home.”

Isabella saw her teacher approaching. “Mind if I join you?” Mrs. Tan asked. “It’s such a lovely cool day, I just had to come out, too.” Isabella tried to smile as Mrs. Tan sat down. Then Mrs. Tan spoke again. “Isn’t that butterfly beautiful, Isabella?” she asked. Without waiting for an answer, she continued. “God made butterfly wings very delicate, and He made them in a special way so water doesn’t soak into them. It just sits on top. If the water soaked in, the wings would get so heavy that the butterfly wouldn’t be free to fly.”

“That’s interesting,” murmured Isabella. She wasn’t in the mood for another science lesson, but she didn’t want to hurt Mrs. Tan’s feelings.

“Our hearts and spirits are like that, too,” continued Mrs. Tan. “If we let hurt soak in, heaviness weighs us down and we can’t be happy and free. So God gives us the ability to forgive. When we forgive, it’s like our hearts have a special coating that won’t let the hurt soak in.” Isabella looked at her teacher. She knew Mrs. Tan must have heard what Kok Wan and Amos said.

Isabella’s eyes turned back to the butterfly as it danced around their heads. She was struck with the beauty and joy of its freedom. “Thanks, Mrs. Tan,” said Isabella at last. She stood. “If it’s okay with you, I think I’ll play with my friends now.” Mrs. Tan smiled and nodded. As Isabella ran to the swings, she passed Kok Wan and Amos. “Great job on your drawings in art today,” she called to them. They looked at her in surprise. She smiled and felt free as a butterfly.

Thought: Has someone hurt your feelings? Have you allowed the hurt to soak in and weigh you down? God wants you to forgive others as He has forgiven you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for today’s reminder that I must forgive. Help me to remember how much God forgave me for all my sins. And when I do, it’d be easier to forgive and instead of dwelling on my hurt, I can enjoy God’s goodness, blessings, and freedom! In Jesus’ name. Amen.

THE MESSENGERS

"I'm tired of getting preached at," complained Matt. "Everywhere I go, I hear, Do this; don't do that. Love your brother; obey your mother. Pray every day; watch what you say." He chuckled. "I'm a poet as I can make these sentences rhyme, and didn't even know it." "Yes, well, those certainly are inspiring rhymes," teased Dad with a grin, "but please remember that God gives you parents and teachers and pastors to help you."

Matt shrugged. "Maybe so, but my teachers and Pastor aren't perfect, either." He grinned and quickly added jokingly, "Of course, you and Mom are, but why should all those other people always tell everyone how to live?"

"They're simply God's messengers, reminding us of His laws," replied Dad. "Well, I don't like messengers!" declared Matt. He jumped to his feet. "I'm going to see if Uncle Lim has any work for me." Uncle Lim owned a nearby ice cream shop and sometimes paid Matt to do odd jobs.

When Matt returned home that afternoon, he was quite annoyed. "Uncle Lim sent me to the hardware store down the street to return some stuff he didn't need," Matt reported. "The clerk there grumbled because, according to her, Uncle Lim always buys stuff and then returns it. I doubt that's true, but would you believe the clerk bawled me out for it? She called me a smart aleck kid and ranted and raved for at least five minutes!"

Dad smiled. "All that just for giving her Uncle Lim's message, right? You were his messenger." "Exactly!" Matt scowled. "So why yell at me?"

"Well, I guess she doesn't like messengers," Dad said calmly. "You don't, either, as I recall, so she must be just like you." Dad paused, then added, "If you don't like the messages from God that your parents or pastor and teachers give, shouldn't you complain to God, not to me or to them?"

Matt didn't know what to say. "I... I don't want to do that," he mumbled. "Think about the reason you don't like their messages," suggested Dad. "Is it because the Holy Spirit is convicting you of some sin in your life?" "I don't know. I... I guess it might be," admitted Matt. "I'll try to think about that more often."

Thought: Does it make you angry when God's message applies to you? Do you wish pastors and teachers—perhaps even parents—would leave you alone?

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for today's lesson that those in authority are simply messengers, ministers to me for good. Help me to listen to what they say, and to appreciate them. When they bring me Your message, help me to be sure to obey, and don't get angry and grumble at the messenger. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

NOT FAIR!

Kok Tong stormed into the hall where his parents were reading. “That’s it!” he blurted out angrily. “I’m through being Mr. Nice Guy!” Kok Tong’s father looked up from his magazine. “Whoa! What are you so upset about?” Dad asked.

“I’m beyond upset!” Kok Tong exclaimed. “I’m mad! I’m the one who started this whole football club,” he continued. “I’m the one who found the balls and site for that first game, and...” Dad held up his hand. “So what happened now to make you so mad?” Kok Tong got to his feet and began to pace across the floor. “What happened is I was practically dumped from the team! Now that they’ve got a lot more guys to choose from, they--our manager included--forgot I’m the one who got things going. I even got Burger King to donate those T-shirts for us.” Kok Tong looked over to see if his father was becoming properly upset at his news.

Dad asked, “Are the new guys good players? Better than you?” Kok Tong whispered “Well—they’re okay, I guess, but I’m the guy who got things going! I don’t have a problem letting the new guys play some of the time, but I almost never get to play anymore. It’s not fair, Dad!”

“Maybe it’s not really fair,” Dad said quietly. “Things in this world aren’t always fair. Try to look at this as an opportunity,” he encouraged. “You told me you’ve invited some of your buddies to come to church. Maybe if you take this calmly, the guys will see that being a Christian makes a difference in your life and actions. Do you think you could do that for the Lord?”

It was hard for Kok Tong to accept what his father was saying. “You know,” Dad added, “Jesus was treated extremely badly by people, too, and He’s the one who got everything in the whole universe started!” Kok Tong knew it was true and that being bitter and angry about what happened wouldn’t change anything. But handling it calmly might make a difference.

Thought: How do you act when you feel you’re mistreated—or when someone does something that really hurts you? At a time like that, do you react with love as Jesus would?

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for the lesson. Help me to live a life so friends can see that You make a difference in me! Today’s text tells how Jesus acted when He was mistreated, and may I learn from this perfect example in Jesus. This I ask in His name. Amen.

ALL CREATURES MADE BY GOD!

“I sure don’t like spiders, do you?” Shana asked her friend Kwee Ling. A spider had stretched its web across a section of fence in their school garden, and the girls had gone to look at it. “Ugh! No! I hate those things!” Kwee Ling shuddered. “They’re creepy.”

“The web sure is pretty, though,” observed Shana as they studied it. All the silvery strands of the beautifully constructed web were connected to make a lacy pattern. Dew drops on the web sparkled in the morning sun.

“How do spiders know how to make such a pretty web?” Kwee Ling wondered aloud. Shana shrugged. “I don’t know,” she said.

Just then an insect buzzed around their heads. When Shana swatted at it, the bug flew into the web. Quick as a wink, the spider dashed out from a corner of the web and spun strands of webbing around the insect until it was held tightly.

“Wow! Did you see how fast that spider moved?” marveled Kwee Ling. “Yeah. It sure didn’t take long to make a prisoner of that bug,” replied Shana. “That’s a good thing—that bug might have stung us.”

“Bugs can hurt us in other ways, too,” said Kwee Ling. “Some eat garden plants, and some carry diseases. Every bug that’s caught by a spider is probably one that could hurt us.” “Before we see any more icky bugs, let’s get outta here!” Shana exclaimed. She shivered at the thought of coming face to face with the spider’s next meal.

“Okay,” agreed Kwee Ling, and the girls headed back for class. “Like my mom always says,” said Shana as they walked along, “God created everything for a purpose.”

Kwee Ling nodded. “Yeah, I’ve heard that, too,” she said. “I guess spiders are good for something after all! God knew we’d need them.” She grinned. “Does that mean we should be thankful for them?” Shana laughed. “Now that’s going to take some practice,” she said, “but I’ll try!”

Thought: How about you? Have you ever thanked God for creatures and nature? God made them for us!

Prayer: O Lord, I may be scared of some creepy-crawlies but I know You are the Creator of all creatures and they form part of the great nature You have designed so beautifully for us. Thank You too for creating me! This I give thank in the precious name of my Saviour, amen.

WRONG REASON

Amanda smiled as she shook the coins out of her piggy bank. “I can give more than I thought for the special missionary offering at Sunday school. I’ll put half of this in the offering and use the other half for some things I’ve been wanting,” she decided happily.

When Amanda arrived at Sunday school, she sat with her friend Daisy. “My aunt gave me a nice big ang-pow for my birthday,” Daisy said, “and I’m going to put some of it in the offering.” She showed Amanda how much she had brought—and it was a lot more than Amanda planned to give.

Elijah looked at the money Daisy had taken out. “I’ve got that much, too!” he said proudly, and added, “Even a little more.” “How about you, Amanda?” asked Daisy. “What did you bring?”

Amanda blushed. What she planned to give didn’t seem like much anymore. But she had brought all her money along, including what she intended to use for herself. She showed it the kids, and when the offering was taken, she reluctantly dropped it all in. On the way home from church, Amanda neither smiled nor chatted as she usually did. “Why such a sad face, honey?” asked Mom. Amanda sighed and explained what had happened in her Sunday school class. “I don’t get it,” she said. “I gave more than I had planned to give, so I should feel good about it, right?”

“Not necessarily,” said Mom. “The money you planned to give was of your own free will—d isn’t pleased when we give for the wrong reasons.” “That’s right,” Dad agreed. “It’s best to decide what you believe Jesus wants you to give. Don’t discuss it with your friends. Keep it between you and the Lord. Then joyfully give it to be used for God’s glory, not your own.”

Amanda sighed. “My reason for giving all of it wasn’t right, but God will still bless it as the missionaries use it, won’t He?” she asked anxiously.

“He will,” Dad replied. “You missed a blessing, but yes, they’ll be blessed.”

Thought: Do you give some of your own money to the Lord’s work? Never give to try to impress others; give because you love God and obey His commandments.

Prayer: Almighty God, help me never to give for the purpose of impressing other people. And help me to give generously and cheerfully. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

TOO MUCH HONEY!

Seng sped up and reached his grandpa's place. "I won! I'm the fastest runner. No one can beat me!" shouted Seng as his cousin Eli ran up. "Good race, Seng. You are fast!" puffed Eli as he tried to catch his breath.

"I'm the best. I'll always be the race champion!" Seng sang as he did his usual victory dance. "Let's run again, Eli. I'll beat you by even more this time." Eli shook his head. "No way, I'm going home now," he said.

After Eli left, Seng went into the house, where Grandpa was fixing a snack. "Grandpa, Eli's a sore loser," complained Seng. "He left just because I always win." Grandpa looked thoughtful as he took a jar of honey from the cupboard. "Want some of this?" Grandpa asked.

Seng took a big spoonful of honey. "Yum!" he exclaimed. "I love honey." While Grandpa mixed some lemonade, Seng helped himself to more honey. At first he gobbled it up quickly, but then ate more slowly. "Grandpa, this was so good at first, but..." He looked at his spoon. "I took too much. I don't think I can finish this or I'll be sick," Seng said.

Grandpa nodded. "Did you know the Bible says it's not good to eat too much honey?" "It does?" Seng was surprised. "Where?" he asked. "In Proverbs 25:27," Grandpa replied, "and it's compared to bragging." He looked at Seng. "I heard Eli compliment you on your running speed. What did you say in reply?"

Seng's brow furrowed as he remembered how he had bragged. Putting the lid on the jar of honey, Grandpa added, "A little honey is delicious, but too much makes us feel sick. And being happy about winning a race is fine, but bragging about it is something else. It's like too much honey—and it even makes other people feel sick."

Seng was quiet. Then he nodded. "Can I call Eli? I... I need to apologize to him, and maybe he'd want to come back with me. Okay?"

Grandpa smiled and tousled Seng's hair. "Sure thing," said Grandpa. "I'll fix snacks for you guys." Seng smiled as he went to call his cousin. "Okay, Grandpa," he said, "but no honey with those snacks, please! I've had enough!"

Thought: Do you boast about yourself and your accomplishments? Don't toot your own horn, don't brag about yourself and what you can do.

Prayer: God in heaven, teach me not to be boast. Instead, I should thank You for each success, and ask You to help me be humble. I remember all my abilities are gifts from You, and to You I give all credit and thanks. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

THE COACH'S VOICE

The basketball bounced into Stephanie's outstretched hands. This was her first season on the school team, and her heart pounded with excitement as she scooted around the other team's players. She heard someone yell, "Play number 5!" Stephanie recognized the voice of Coach Ho and remembered the practice. "But the game is almost over, and the basket is so close!" she thought. With a quick pivot turn, she threw the ball hard toward the basket—but the defense had closed in, and her shot bounced off the rim. The crowd groaned as a tall girl on the other team grabbed the ball and started dribbling fast toward the opposite end of the court.

After the game, Coach Ho sat down on the bench beside Stephanie. "Did you hear me call the play number?" Coach asked.

"Yes," Stephanie admitted tearfully, "but I... I thought I had the perfect chance to make some points! I'm sorry." Coach Ho nodded. "I think you've learned a good lesson," he said. "Next time I'm sure you'll listen."

Stephanie went to the locker room, changed her clothes, and ran out to ride home with her dad. "Good game, Steph?" he said. "I shouldn't have tried for that last basket, Dad," Stephanie replied sadly. "I feel awful. I heard Coach Ho call a play, and I should have done what he said."

Dad was quiet for a moment. "Steph, I think I know how you feel," he said. "I'm afraid I don't always listen to my coach, either."

Stephanie gave Dad a puzzled glance. "I didn't know you had a coach," she said. "Who's your coach?" "God," Dad said quietly. He smiled. "There are times when I know God wants me to do a certain thing," Dad explained, "but I seem to think I have a better plan than He has for me, so I just go my own way."

Stephanie sighed. "That does sound like me," she said. She smiled and added, "I'm glad Coach Ho let me stay in the game. I learned a lesson I'll never forget—and I'll remember it, too, when I know God is telling me something."

Thought: Do you hear God's voice through His Word and through wise people?

Prayer: O God, help me to listen to and obey You, instead of going my own way? You know what's best for me, and Your plan is much better than mine. Impress on me perhaps one thing You want me to do today—perhaps it's to do chores cheerfully, be a friend to someone, or to be more gracious and forgiving. And help me do it, please, in Jesus' name, amen.

SLEEP ON EARTH; WAKE UP IN HEAVEN

When her grandmother died, Danielle felt very sad. “Grandma’s happy with Jesus now?” she asked her mother. “Mom assured her that was true. As time passed, she learned to be happy, too, as she thought about her grandma. But now, Danielle was very sick. Her parents were honest with her when she asked about it. “Yes, you do have a serious illness, sweetheart,” Dad told her, “and we’re praying that God will work a miracle and make you entirely well again. We know He wants the very best for you.” Mom nodded. “Doctor Lim says the medication he prescribed will help you feel much better, and he reminded us that researchers are making great progress every day. He’s hopeful that they will soon discover a cure for this illness.”

As the days passed, Danielle did feel a little better, but she knew she was far from well. “I could die from this disease?” Danielle asked one day. “I know I’m a Christian and I’ll go to be with Jesus. But I don’t want to leave you and Daddy. And I wonder what it’s like to die—how does it feel?” Mom held her tight. “Baby,” said Mom after a few minutes, “do you remember when you were a very little girl and would sometimes get scared during the night and crawl into bed with Daddy and me?” Danielle nodded. Being in bed with her parents had always made her feel safe again. “And where would you find yourself in the morning?” Mom asked. Danielle thought about it for a moment. “In the morning...” She smiled. “I would be back in my own bed!” she said.

“That’s right.” Mom smiled, too. “After you went to sleep, Daddy would pick you up in his strong arms and move you to your own bed.” Danielle’s mother spoke softly. “I think that must be what death is like,” she added. “We go to sleep here on earth and wake up in heaven.” As Danielle considered that, she nodded. It was a beautiful thought. At just the right time, God would lovingly take her to heaven to be with Jesus forever. It definitely was not something to fear. It was something to look forward to.

Thought: Are you afraid of death? If you’re a Christian, you don’t need to be afraid, for someday you, too, will be moved from earth to God’s beautiful heaven.

Prayer: Help me gracious Father to know that the most important thing is to be sure I’m a child of Yours. Then, I need not be afraid of death, and I know that at just the right time, You will take me to my new home in heaven. It will be a wonderful experience and I will spend eternity with Jesus, for it is in His name I pray – amen.

KEEP TELLING OTHERS!

“Miss Gan taught us a silly song in music class today. It was about a man who tried to go to heaven in a hot air balloon. When that didn’t work, he tried a kite,” Sonya told her family one night. She frowned. “I felt bad singing that song. Actually, I just quit singing. It seemed like it was making fun of the Bible.” “It doesn’t sound like a good song,” agreed Dad.

“That’s not all,” added Sonya. “After we were done singing, Yee Ping raised her hand and asked Miss Gan how you really get to heaven. Miss Gan said nobody actually knows. But then some of the other kids started talking about it. Kai said you have to do good deeds, and Bonnie said her church minister told her she had to be a member of their church to go to heaven.”

“Did you take part in the discussion?” Mom asked when Sonya paused. “Yeah, I raised my hand, and when Miss Gan called on me. I said I knew the real way to heaven,” Sonya replied. “I started to tell them about Jesus and that you have to believe He died for your sins and rose again, and you have to trust Him as Savior.” “Good for you! What did Miss Gan say then?” asked Dad.

“Before I could finish, she said it was time to end the discussion because we weren’t allowed to talk about religion in school!” replied Sonya. “She taught us that song, and she let the other kids talk, but when I wanted to tell what the Bible said, she interrupted me and changed the subject!”

“That’s too bad!” Dad shook his head. “Quite often that’s the way it goes, though. People may refuse to listen to the truth, but don’t let that keep you from telling it whenever you can.”

“People like to think they can get to heaven by their own efforts,” added Mom. “They often don’t want to hear that they’ll never be good enough on their own and may try to keep you from talking about it. But God promises that when we give out His Word, He will use it to accomplish His purpose.”

“Well, I’m sure glad I know the Bible is true, and that I know the real way to get to heaven!” Sonya exclaimed. “And you know what else? Tomorrow I’m going to talk to Yee Ping and give her the right answer to her question.”

Thought: Has anyone tried to keep you from telling others about Jesus? Sometimes people don’t want to hear what God’s Word says—that being nice, joining church, or doing good deeds will not get them to heaven.

Prayer: Lord, I know I may be teased for giving people the important message that the only to heaven is through repentance and having Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour. So please help me use every opportunity to speak up for Jesus, even if I am laughed at. In Jesus’ name, amen.

THE REAL REASON!

“Hi, Liz,” crooned Sophie into the phone. She was using her sweetest voice. “I was wondering if you’d like to come to my birthday party on Saturday. It’s at one o’clock.” She paused, then added, “Okay, see you there!”

Mom smiled as Sophie hung up the phone and headed to play with her friend Gina. But Mom’s smile faded when she overheard the girls talking. “Is she coming?” Gina asked. Sophie grinned and nodded. “Good,” continued Gina. “When she gives you something as nice as the bracelet she gave me, you’ll be glad you invited her even though she is weird. You’ll even thank me for telling you about it.” Giggling, the girls linked arms and headed for the nearby park. That evening, Mom sat on the edge of Sophie’s bed. “Sophie, I couldn’t help but overhear you and Gina talking this afternoon,” she said. “I was sorry to learn you had an ulterior motive when you invited Liz to your birthday party.” “Ulterior motive?” Sophie asked. “I don’t even know what that is.”

“Well, when you have an ulterior motive, it means you have a reason other than the obvious one for doing something,” Mom explained. “I thought you invited Liz to your party because you wanted her to be your friend, but your real reason was to get a nice gift from her.”

“Oh, Mom,” protested Sophie. “She won’t bother—she won’t even think of that as her family is wealthy!” “People may not see the real reason for things you do or say, but God always does,” said Mom firmly. “The Bible says God searches every heart and understands all of our motives, or reasons, for doing what we do.”

Sophie hadn’t thought of what God would know or think. “I... I didn’t mean any harm,” she said, “but... should I call her and tell her not to come?” Mom looked solemn. “How do you think that would make her feel?” she asked. “I think you can find a better solution.”

“I... maybe I could tell her not to bring a present?” suggested Sophie. Mom shook her head, and Sophie thought about it some more. “I should be a friend to her all the time, shouldn’t I?” she murmured at last. “I... I never did really try to be her friend, but I will. I’ll try my very best. I’ll tell Gina, too.”

“There you go,” said Mom with a smile.

Thought: Do your motives please God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that You know all my thoughts. You know why I do the things I do and say the things I say. I pray I’d not hide any bad motives but instead always be pure and true. As I pour out my heart before You, please help for I pray this in Jesus’ name, amen.

SPIRITUAL BREAKFAST!

“I wish we didn’t have family devotions right after breakfast every day”, thought Ally. She especially wished they could skip them on days when she was late and had to wait till after devotions to eat breakfast—and that happened quite often. One day when she was late, she decided to ask about it.

“How come we have to do this every single day—even when I’m really busy?” she asked when Dad ended his prayer. “Emma’s family never has devotions.” Instead of answering her question right away, Dad picked up the cereal box and held it toward her. Before she could take it, he pulled it back. “Oh... maybe you don’t want breakfast today,” he said.

“Of course I do!” Ally exclaimed. “I’m starving! Besides, our teacher says breakfast is the most important meal of the day.” “I see.” Dad handed her the cereal. “Well, I don’t suppose you’ll be eating lunch today, will you?” he asked.

Ally looked at him in surprise. “Why wouldn’t I? You know I always eat in the cafeteria or come home for lunch.” “Oh, that’s right. Well, what about dinner?” Dad asked. “Do you plan to eat dinner today, too?” “Da-a-ad!” Ally was beginning to get irritated. “Why are you asking all those questions? You know I always eat all my meals. I love food!”

“Yes, I know you always have in the past,” Dad said, “but don’t you think it might be a good idea to give up eating on busy days?” “Give up eating?” Ally repeated, pouring milk onto her cereal. “When I’m busy I need food even more than when I don’t have much to do. We talked about that in health class, too. So why are you...” Suddenly she stopped. “Oh,” she added slowly, “you’re trying to tell me I need a time of devotions on busy days, too, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” agreed Dad with a smile, “perhaps it’s even more important on busy days. I think of daily Bible reading as getting spiritual food every day. It’s good to spend some time each day with God and His Word. Don’t you agree?”

Buttering a piece of toast, Ally said, “I do, and I know breakfast time is a good time to do that.” She paused. “But for some people, later in the day might work out better,” she added. “That’s okay, too, isn’t it?” Smiling, Dad nodded.

Thought: You wouldn’t go very long without food for your body, would you? How about food for your soul?

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 – my spiritual food! And may I indeed follow the formula for the RPG – Read, Pray and Grow! In Jesus’ name, amen.

BE KIND!

“Look! Here comes that girl on her three-wheeler,” said Kim Seng. “She’s not very smart.”

“Yeah,” said Tom. “Let’s pretend we’re going to run into her and see what she does.”

So Kim Seng and Tom steered their bikes toward the girl. Fear spread across her face as they came closer. “Stop!” she shouted.

“Retard! Retard!” chanted Kim Seng, and Tom joined in. Laughing loudly, they steered away just in time to avoid actually running into the frightened girl. Just then, Kim Seng saw Mrs. Lim, their Sunday School teacher, coming out of her house. Feeling guilty, he turned and looked the other way. CRASH! Before he realized what was happening, he had run into Tom. Down they went—a tangle of boys and bikes! Kim Seng felt a sharp pain where his arm was badly skinned, and Tom was limping when he got up.

Mrs. Lim hurried to help them. She went back into her house to get bandages. “Do you like to get hurt?” she asked when she returned. “Do we like to get hurt?” Kim Seng asked in surprise. “Of course not.” “So how would you have felt,” continued Mrs. Lim, “if I had come out and pushed you over and then laughed when you got hurt?” The boys looked at her in wonder. “That would have been mean,” Kim Seng answered finally. Mrs. Lim nodded. “Yet that’s something like what you did to that little girl.” “We didn’t touch her,” protested Tom. “We just teased her a little.”

“Yes, and that is enough to her,” replied Mrs. Lim. “It hurts her to be made fun of because of her disability.” In their hearts, the boys knew that and felt guilty and sorry. “Jesus taught us to treat others kindly,” continued Mrs. Lim. “He treated everyone with love, and He wants us to do that, too.” Both boys looked ashamed. “I’m sorry,” said Tom. “Me, too,” said Kim Seng. “We won’t do that again. We promise.” Tom nodded.

In the following weeks, Mrs. Lim smiled when she saw that instead of teasing, the boys went out of their way to be kind and helpful to the little girl.

Thought: Are you kind to those who are different because of special problems? Or do you sometimes tease them?

Prayer: God, You know that sometimes I can be mean. Thank You for reminding me that teasing can be very painful. Help me think how I would feel if I were in their place. Then instead of teasing, I’d treat them the way Jesus would. He was kind to everyone, and He wants me to follow His example. May I never forget this! In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

A HUMAN BOUQUET!

“I love flowers! And you make such pretty bouquets and centerpieces, Mom,” said Kara as she and her mother worked in the flower garden, selecting and cutting flowers for bouquets. “It’s fun to help you with your home florist business,” Kara added. “You’re so creative.”

Mom smiled. “Thanks, honey,” she said, looking at the wide variety of flowers in the hall. “I’m glad you like my arrangements and think I’m creative, but...” Mom paused and motioned to the flower beds all around them. “I’m not nearly as creative as God is. Look at all the different kinds of flowers He made!”

“I know,” agreed Kara. “There are so many colors, and they’re all so pretty! White and yellow daisies, red and pink dahlias—and the roses and lilies come in all sorts of pretty colors.” “Yes,” said Mom, “and it’s not just the colors that are different. The petals are also different. Lilies are shaped like trumpets, daisy petals are like teardrops, baby’s breath is like little stars, and gladiola petals are all stylish.” She smiled. “God made people like that, too,” she added after a moment.

“Are you saying we’re stylish and like little stars?” teased Kara. Mom laughed. “No, but He made people with different colors of skin and hair and eyes,” she said. “Even body shapes are different—people can be tall or short, round or thin. Their hair might be straight, wavy, or curly.”

Kara grinned. “That makes them more interesting than if they were all alike,” she said. “I think so, too—I’m glad we’re not all exactly the same as everybody else,” said Mom. “We gather a variety of flowers for our bouquets, and the Bible says God will gather believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation to worship Him in heaven. Won’t it be wonderful, honey, to praise the Lord along with believers from all around the world?” Kara’s eyes widened. “Like a human bouquet!” she exclaimed. “Now that’s a lovely thought, Kara,” Mom said with a big smile. “A beautiful human bouquet!”

Thought: Do you wonder what it will be like to worship God with people from everywhere? In heaven, there will be believers from every tribe, tongue, and nation!

Prayer: Thank you, gracious Lord, thank You for the wonderful reminder that in heaven, what an amazing time that will be! May I learn now to accept and appreciate the huge variety of people You have made, and to learn to love them. Help me not to judge people on their looks or background too. This I humbly pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

GOD CREATED THE WORLD!

“All animals evolved from lower forms of life,” Amy’s science teacher declared. Amy raised her hand. “Where did the lower forms of life come from?” she asked. “We can’t go into the details,” said Mr. Mok. “They... just happened. What I want you to remember at this time is that all life evolved from them.” Amy raised her hand again, but Mr. Mok looked at her and shook his head. “Some of you have been taught a lot of nonsense about a creator,” Mr. Mok said. “You need to accept that life came about in the natural order of things. It just happened—without any creator.”

“I know God created everything, but how can I convince Mr. Mok?” Amy wondered. Then she had an idea. After school, Amy hurried home. She went to her room, took a beautifully carved wooden pigeon her uncle had made for her, and wrapped the wooden bird in several layers of paper. The next day she took it along to school. When it was time for science class, Amy set the pigeon on her desk. The other students admired it, and even Mr. Mok came back to where she was sitting and looked at the bird. “Whoever carved this bird certainly knew what he was doing,” he observed. “This is beautiful! Who did it?”

Amy shrugged her shoulders. “Mr. Mok, what would you say if I told you I woke up this morning, and there it was? It just happened?” Mr. Mok frowned. “I’d say if you can get anybody to believe that, you should become a salesperson. Don’t you know who made it?” Amy grinned at him. “Mr. Mok, you’d think I was silly if I really believed no one made this wooden pigeon, yet you told me that no one made the real birds,” she said. “Isn’t that even sillier?”

Mr. Mok gave Amy a thoughtful look as she added, “My uncle made this pigeon, and God made the real ones.” “I... I don’t think so,” murmured Mr. Mok as he moved away. Amy knew she hadn’t convinced him that God created the world, but she silently thanked the Lord that at least her teacher was thinking about it. And she prayed that he would soon acknowledge the Creator—God.

Thought: Have you heard that things in nature just came about on their own? That there is no God in heaven who created the world and everything in it? Don’t believe that! God created the heavens and the earth!

Prayer: My King in heaven, thank You for teaching me that things don’t come into being by themselves. Someone had to make this world, and that Someone is You! I see Your handiwork in the beautiful, awesome world in which I live, and for that, I praise You in Jesus’ name, amen.

IN THE DARK

The dining room at Camp Sentosa rang with singing as the children group gathered for bedtime devotions during the JW Retreat. A storm had been brewing, and soon thunder and lightning interrupted the singing. Suddenly the dining hall was enveloped in darkness. “Sit tight,” Mr. Pang advised. “Uncle Dave will see about getting the lights back on.”

Initially, the kids huddled where they were, but soon they got accustomed to the darkness and became braver. Ignoring Mr. Pang’s warning, some of them started moving around. “Anna, there’s a mouse on your leg,” Dylan called out. Anna laughed. “If there were one, you wouldn’t even be able to see it,” she said.

As kids moved around, something brushed against Grace’s leg. “What’s that?” screamed Grace as she jumped back, bruising her knee on a table. “All right, kids. Calm down!” Mr. Pang ordered, and the group reluctantly settled down. “While we wait for the lights to come back on, let’s think about what happened tonight,” Mr. Pang continued. “How did you feel when the lights first went out?”

Dylan laughed. “The girls were scared,” he said. “I think you all were a little uncertain and uncomfortable,” said Mr. Pang. “But when you got used to the darkness, some of you actually delighted in it and enjoyed scaring each other. Was that a good thing?”

“No!” Grace promptly replied. “I think it’s dangerous. I hurt my leg.” “Wandering in darkness can be dangerous,” agreed Mr. Pang, “and it’s especially dangerous to wander in what we refer to as the darkness of sin. We sometimes get used to that kind of darkness, too. We may get so used to a particular sin that we actually like it. We don’t realize the danger until we get hurt. We need to stay close to Jesus—He’s our light.”

As Mr. Pang paused, the lights suddenly came back on and the group gave a loud cheer. Mr. Pang nodded. “We also tend to forget,” he added, “that some day everything will be brought to light. Let’s ask God to help us live in such a way that His light brings joy, not embarrassment.”

Thought: Would you like people to know everything you do? Or would it be embarrassing for you if they knew some of the wrong thoughts in your mind?

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for the lesson today. I don’t want to be counted among those who “loved darkness rather than light” and I pray I would be able to walk in the light by following Jesus. O Lord, especially when I am weak, may I learn to be strong by thy strength. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED!

Alex sighed as he sat on the beach and watched the waves, thinking of his friend Jared, who had teased him about going to church and Sunday school and had asked some difficult questions. “What makes you so sure you’ll go to heaven?” Jared had wanted to know. “My grandma sings a song about having sins rolled away. Do you sing that one, too?” Jared laughed. “If sins are rolled away, they might roll right back again,” he added. Alex hadn’t been quite sure how to answer.

Alex turned and saw his grandfather. “As I look out,” said Grandpa, “I’m reminded of how God has pardoned all my sins and gotten rid of them. He says He cast them into the depths of the sea.”

“Oh, yeah. I remember learning a verse about that,” Alex replied. “If they’re buried in the sea like that, they can’t ever come back, can they?” “Better than that,” Grandpa replied. “God gives an example that helps us understand they’re gone for good. Can you see where the sea ends?”

Alex cupped his hands over his eyes and looked into the distance. He shook his head. “No. I see where it looks like it ends,” he said, “but I know it goes on a lot farther than that. If we were out on the fishing boat in the ocean, we could see only sky and water in every direction.”

Grandpa nodded. “It seemed a long, long way from one edge of the sky to the other, didn’t it? But that’s nothing compared to the distance God has removed our sins from us,” said Grandpa. “The Bible says the sins of those who trust in Jesus are removed as far as the east is from the west.”

“In a lesson on distances, the textbook said the east and west never meet,” said Alex thoughtfully. “So I guess that would mean our sins can’t come back.”

“They sure can’t,” Grandpa answered firmly. “If we try to remove them ourselves, it doesn’t work—we’ll still have them. But the Bible says God has removed them. You can be sure He’s done a good job. You won’t see those sins again!”

Thought: Once saved, always saved!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder that once saved, I’m always saved. It’s true that I still sin sometimes and should repent of any sin and confess it. But thank You for the assurance that if I’ve accepted Jesus as Savior, I can depend on Him to have done what He said He would do—that is, to remove your sins far, far from you and cast them into the depths of the sea and give to me eternal life! In His name I pray, amen.

TREASURE FOR TRINKETS

“You may show this necklace to your class, Eva, but I don’t want it damaged,” said Mom. “It belonged to my Grandma when she was a little girl. It’s not worth a lot of money, but it’s very valuable to me, so be sure to take good care of it.” “I will,” promised Eva as she and her brother Jason left for school.

When Eva and Jason came home that afternoon, Eva was all smiles as she pulled a music box from her backpack and wound it up. “Look what Nikki brought to school today,” she squealed as a little bird on the top spun around while music played. “I let her borrow Grandma’s necklace, and she gave me the music box to play with tonight. We’ll trade back tomorrow.”

Mom frowned. “Eva, you were given the responsibility of taking care of that necklace,” she said sternly. “You should have known better than to trade.” “Nikki will be careful,” said Eva. “If she hurts it, I’m sure she’ll replace it.”

Mom sighed. “It’s not replaceable,” she said as she went to answer the phone. When Mom returned, she was smiling. “That was Nikki’s mother,” said Mom. “She recognized that Grandma’s necklace is valuable to me and insists on coming right over to return it. You’ll have to return the music box, too.” Eva sighed. “Okay,” she said.

“You’re like the French traders, Eva,” declared Jason, who had been listening. “When they first went to America, they tricked the natives into trading furs and gold and silver for shiny little trinkets, like mirrors and worthless beads.” “I didn’t trick anybody,” protested Eva.

“Well, then... maybe you’re the one who was tricked,” suggested Jason, her brother. As Eva began to deny that, he added, “My Sunday school teacher says people get tricked all the time and don’t even know it. He says Satan always likes to trick us into making poor trades.” “Like what?” Eve asked.

“Well, for example, remember in JW class Brother Michael said we might trade spending time with God and learning about Him for time to watch TV or play video games or go to play games,” Jason explained. “Good point,” observed Mom. “We need to be careful to not be tricked into trading away the most valuable things we have—not even for other good things.”

Thought: Has Satan tricked you into making a poor trade? He’d like to give you television programs in exchange for time spent with God...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray I would not let Satan fool me! Help me please to be wise and to not trade the most precious spiritual truth and joy such as reading the bible for some additional time of leisure. This I pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

FAMILY TRAITS

There was much excitement as Jack and several family members watched a plane taxi to a stop. Jack's Uncle Dan and Aunt Mary were returning to Singapore after their first mission term. Everyone was eager to see their little son, Benjamin, who had been born in Africa. When the families finally got together, Jack stood back while the grownups greeted one another. Then Uncle Dan turned toward him. "And this must be little Jack," said Uncle Dan, "but you're not so little anymore, are you?" "I'm ten years old," Jack proudly told Uncle Dan.

Uncle Dan grinned. "Yes, you've grown up while we were gone," he said. "I see you have your father's eyes." Jack's mother pointed to the little boy Aunt Mary was holding. "And your son looks just like you, Dan," observed Mom. "Yes." Uncle Dan laughed joyfully. "He's my boy!"

Driving home that night, Jack fired off a stream of questions. "How did I get Dad's eyes?" he asked. "And why does Benjamin look like Uncle Dan?" "Kids inherit certain things from their parents—like their size or the color of their hair and eyes," replied Jack's older sister Meg. "You inherited your dad's big eyes, and Benjamin inherited his dad's straight hair. We can inherit other kinds of things, too—like a talent for music or an interest in building things. Right, Dad?"

"Right. And something we all inherit is Adam's sinful nature," said Dad. "That's because we're all descendants of Adam, the first man God created, isn't it?" Meg asked. "And that's why we all sin?" Dad nodded.

"Oh, that's not good, is it?" exclaimed Jack. He knew that to sin meant to do something wrong.

"You're right," agreed Dad, "but because Jesus lived a perfect life and died to take the punishment for our sins, we can have them forgiven. If we accept Jesus as Savior, we become children of God. Then we're part of His family, and we become more and more like Him as we follow His teaching." Jack nodded. "And that's good," he said solemnly. "It's good to be like Jesus."

Thought: Did you know you inherited a sinful nature through the first man - Adam?

Prayer: O Lord, I know that when I was born, I received that sinful nature through Adam, who is my ancestor. As a result, I sinned but thank You so much that since I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior, I'm now part of God's family forever! Thank You in Jesus' name, amen.

HELP EACH OTHER!

“Did you already fix that one?” asked Kyle, pointing at a large clock standing on the counter. He always enjoyed visiting Uncle Ramon’s shop—especially when his uncle was working on a clock. “That one seems to be ticking all right,” Kyle added. Uncle Ramon laughed pleasantly. “Yes,” he agreed, “but that’s all it’s doing.” Kyle looked at the clock more closely. “Oh—it doesn’t have any hands on it,” he remarked, feeling foolish for not having noticed that. “No, it doesn’t.” Uncle Ramon shook his head. “So even though the clock is ticking, it isn’t doing its job and giving the correct time, is it?”

“Not without the hands it isn’t,” Kyle agreed. “What happened to them?” “I have them right here, and I’ll put them back on. But first I want to use this clock as an illustration when I teach my Sunday school class tomorrow,” Uncle Ramon replied. Kyle grinned, remembering when his uncle had been his Sunday school teacher. “So you still use clocks as illustrations,” said Kyle. “What does this one illustrate?”

“Well, the inside of a clock has lots of different parts, and each one is needed,” replied Uncle Ramon. “But you can have all of those inside parts clean and running good, and the clock still doesn’t give you the time. Or...” Uncle Ramon held up the clock hands. “You can pick up the hands or face of the clock and look at them closely, but you won’t learn the time of day that way, either.”

“To tell time, all the parts have to work together,” said Kyle. He grinned. “I think I already know where you’re going with this.” Uncle Ramon smiled. “All the parts are important, but none can do the job alone,” he said. “Both in clocks and in the Lord’s work, all parts—or people—are needed.”

“Yep.” Kyle nodded. “I thought you’d say that. Pastors, Sunday school teachers, musicians, nursery workers—or whatever—need to all work together. No one is the whole clock—no one is the only important person in a project.”

“That’s right,” said Uncle Ramon. “Each one has a special job to do, and to do the best job and accomplish the most, all are needed.”

Thought: Have you tried to be the “whole clock” in your Sunday school? Or do you go to the opposite extreme and decide that your small part in the group is not important?

Prayer: God, thanks for the reminder that just like it takes many parts to make a clock work, it takes many people to do the best possible job in God’s work. Help me do my part faithfully, working together with all the others, and being a helpful child. This I ask in Jesus’ name, amen.

JUST LIKE ANYONE!

Nick felt a little nervous one Saturday afternoon as he was on his way to return books his dad had borrowed from Pastor Quek, who happened to live in the same HDB block! “Wished we were not neighbours with Pastor! Our family hasn’t attended any church until lately, but now I have to talk with the pastor!” he thought. “What can we talk about? Maybe he won’t be home. Hope so!”

Nick walked slowly to the door. Timidly, he rang the bell. “Hey, there, Nick,” Pastor Quek greeted, taking the books Nick handed him. “My wife just took some of her chocolate chip cookies out of the oven. Are you hungry? Come on in.” Nick never could turn down a chocolate chip cookie, so he followed the pastor into the house. As he greeted Auntie Angie in the kitchen, Nick heard the sound of a basketball game on TV—the same game he had been watching back home. “Looks like the game is done,” observed Pastor.

“You watch basketball games?” Nick asked in surprise. Pastor laughed. “Sure. I’ve been a fan ever since I was your age.” Now that he realized Pastor was like anyone else, he found himself talking to Pastor about school and ball games and all kinds of things.

“I didn’t know pastors did... ah... regular things,” Nick said after they had talked a while.

Pastor Quek grinned. “Some people seem to think pastors study and read the Bible all the time,” he said. “I’m sure we study more than most people because we need to teach God’s Word to the congregation. But we have to learn all those lessons ourselves, too. And, we’re really just like anybody else.”

Nick nodded. He was thoughtful as he went home with a plastic bag full of chocolate chip cookies a little later. The next Sunday, Nick and his father listened to the sermon more attentively than usual. Knowing that Pastor Quek liked basketball and chocolate chip cookies made it easier to listen—and to learn!

Thought: Have you wondered what a pastor does when he’s not preaching? He would be just like anybody else! Ask him, he’ll be glad to tell you.

Prayer: Lord, I pray for my pastor and other leaders in church that they would remain faithful and humble to do Your work! I also pray for their families, that You would protect them and strengthen them. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT!

Jeff loved spending school holidays with his cousin RongYi—except for the time each evening when Uncle Paul called them together for family devotions. “You don’t really believe all that religious stuff, do you?” Jeff asked RongYi one night from the bed across the room. “Sure I do—but it’s not religious stuff!” replied Rob. “It’s what the Bible says.”

“How can you believe some of those Bible stories—like about men walking in fire and not being burned or crossing a sea and not getting wet,” mocked Jeff. “They’re true stories,” insisted RongYi. “They really happened.” Jeff shrugged and turned over to go to sleep.

The next day, Uncle Paul took the boys canoeing at the MacRitchie Reservoir. As Aunt Mary drove them there, Rob read a bumper sticker aloud: “If God said it, I believe it, and it’s so.”

“It should just say, If God said it, it’s so,” commented Uncle Paul. “What God said is so, whether I believe it or not.”

Aunt Mary and RongYi nodded, but Jeff acted as if he hadn’t heard. “Okay, guys. Have fun, and I’ll pick you up about 5 pm,” said Aunt Mary when they reached the reservoir. Soon Uncle Paul and the boys were floating downstream. “This water’s not very deep,” said Jeff. “I can see the bottom.”

Uncle Paul chuckled. “It’s deeper than it looks, Jeff,” he said. “I’m sure it’s over your head.” “Na-a-ah. I don’t believe it,” scoffed Jeff.

“Duck!” RongYi exclaimed suddenly as they floated under a low-hanging branch. They all ducked, but the canoe was thrown off-balance and tipped, spilling them into the water. They came up spitting and sputtering—and laughing. “Stand up, Jeff,” called RongYi. “I can’t!” Jeff called back. “I can’t touch the bottom.”

“Let’s get this canoe right side up,” said Uncle Paul. They all helped, and soon they were again paddling towards the boardwalk. “That water was deeper than I thought,” admitted Jeff.

“It was deep whether you believed it or not, wasn’t it?” observed Uncle Paul. “Yeah, Jeff. Not believing it didn’t change the fact,” RongYi added. “The same is true of the Bible.” Jeff grinned sheepishly as RongYi repeated, “If God said it, it’s so!”

Thought: Do you believe what God says in the Bible—all of it?

Prayer: O Father and Creator, I believe all that the Bible says. Help to live in faith and to continue to read the Bible and my Junior RPG so that I may grow to be a better child and Christian everyday! In Jesus’ name, amen.

COMMON COURTESY

Mr. Lee's van was packed full of kids. The noise level in the van was at its usual high pitch as he drove them to church. He good-naturedly let them chatter until he pulled onto Clementi Road. "Okay, kids," he said then, "I'm going to ask you to settle down and be quiet for the next few kilometers. The road is under construction here, and driving needs my complete concentration."

"Your dad says that every week," Mandy whispered to Beng Seng. "Well, it's not easy driving through here," Beng Seng defended his dad. For a while the kids were quiet. Then one of the boys playfully punched another boy, who punched him back. Others joined the fun and soon nearly everyone was taking part in the tussle. Mr. Lee glanced in the rearview mirror. "Settle down," he ordered as he put his foot on the brake and began to pull off to the side of the road.

Before Mr. Lee could stop, a book went flying hitting him on the head. The steering wheel jerked, and the van gave a crazy turn back toward the traffic lane. "Watch out!" someone screamed. Mr. Lee gripped the wheel and managed to stop. "Thank You, Lord," he breathed. Then he turned and solemnly talked to the children about how important it was for them to sit quietly.

When the group arrived at the church, the kids piled out. Their teacher soon heard all about what had happened. She shook her head. "Driving a vehicle full of boys and girls is a huge responsibility," said Mrs. Tan. "Mr. Lee accepts it as a ministry—a way to serve God. You can share with him in that ministry."

"We can?" asked one of the girls. "How?" "By sitting quietly," said Mrs. Tan. "One of the characteristics a maturing young person needs to develop is self-control. In your situation, that involves talking softly and not fighting or yelling while Mr. Lee is driving. Why not help him in his ministry by encouraging each other to show self-control and be quiet? Will you do that?" Solemnly, many of the kids nodded.

Thought: Do you ride on a school bus? Do your parents or a friend's parents drive you to different places? How do you act? Are you polite, or do you goof off, fight, or yell?

Prayer: O Lord in heaven, thank you so much for the reminder that we are to be kind and polite—and it includes being polite when I'm riding in a vehicle. I know it's difficult to drive when kids are noisy, so courteous behavior in a bus or car will require me to exercise self-control and talking quietly. This I ask in the name of Jesus my Lord, amen.

THE REAL THING

“Look at this!” Isaac held the newspaper in front of his mother’s face. She backed away a few inches and saw the headline: “Thousands in USA Attend Rally for Self-Proclaimed Christ.” Isaac spoke again. “How can anybody believe that?” he asked. “Everyone knows that only Jesus is the Christ—the only Savior.”

Mom reached for her wallet as they prepared to leave for the mall. “No, Isaac,” she said. “Many people have no idea who Jesus is.” Their first stop was at a bank. As they waited in line, they heard the teller talking with a customer. “Sir, do you know where you got this?” asked the teller as he held out a fifty-dollar note.

“No, I can’t remember” replied that man. “At my store we take them in every day. Is something wrong with that one?” “There may be,” replied the teller. “We’ve been warned that counterfeit bills are being circulated in this area. Our manager will need to check this.”

When Isaac and his mother got up to the counter, Isaac spoke to the teller. “How did you know that was a counterfeit bill?” The teller smiled at him. “Well, I don’t know for sure, but part of our training is to study bills, and I’ve handled and examined them for years,” he said. “When you’re well-acquainted with the real ones, it’s easier to spot the counterfeits.”

When they left the bank, Isaac was thoughtful as he studied a dollar note. Then he snapped his fingers. “I’ve got it!” He turned to his mother. “People are fooled by men claiming to be the Christ because they don’t know the real Savior.” “You’re right.” Mom nodded. “If we’re well-acquainted with the real Christ through studying His Word and talking with Him, we’re less likely to be led astray by false teachers or others who claim to be Christ.”

Isaac continued to look at the dollar note in his hand. A twinkle came to his eye. “I sure wish I had a bunch of notes so I could get to know just what they look and feel like. Then I wouldn’t be fooled into taking a counterfeit one,” he said. Isaac grinned at Mom. “Can you help me out with that?”

Mom laughed and gave him a playful swat. “No,” she said, “but I’ll help you with Bible study so you’ll know what God says and won’t be fooled by Satan.”

Thought: Do you know Jesus Christ—the only Savior of the world?

Prayer: Lord, may I start today to learn more about Jesus, to read His Word, and to pray more often! May I get to know Him well, then I won’t be easily fooled by teachers who present counterfeit christs. In Jesus’ name, amen.

HYMN MEANINGS

“Do you have any funny stories for us today, Auntie Kim?” Isabel asked one evening when her aunt and uncle were over for dinner. Auntie Kim, who was a kindergarten teacher, smiled. “Well, my class has been learning the first verse of ‘God is so good.’” she replied. “One little girl thought God was only good to her because of the words ‘God is so good, He’s so good to me.’”

“That reminds me of myself,” said Uncle Don. “I must have been at least ten years old before I realized the true meaning of the hymn *In the Garden*. The chorus says, *And He walks with me, and He talks with me.* I always thought it said, *Andy walks with me; Andy talks with me.* To me, that meant the nice church warden whose name was Andy. He always talked with us kids.”

Dad nodded. “I remember him,” he said. “It’s sad to think that people often don’t really know what they’re singing about in church.” “But some songs have hard words,” said Isobel. “Like when we had that old-fashioned hymn sing a couple weeks ago. One song had something about raising an Eb... Eba...” “Ebenezer,” said Mom. “Well, what’s an Ebenezer?” Isobel asked.

“I wondered about that, too,” said Isabel’s brother Elliot. “Ebenezer is a man’s name, isn’t it? Like Ebenezer Scrooge in Dickens’ Christmas Carol? We had to read that in my English class.” Elliot shook his head. “Is that song talking about raising a kid called Ebenezer?” “That doesn’t make sense to me,” said Isobel. “I don’t think very many people would have a kid with that name.” Dad smiled and reached for the family Bible. “In Hebrew, the word literally means stone of help. The prophet Samuel built a stone monument and named it Ebenezer because, as he said, the Lord had helped them win a battle,” Dad explained. “We read about it in First Samuel.” Dad turned to the passage and read some verses (see 1 Samuel 7:12). “So to raise an Ebenezer means to declare the Lord is our helper,” continued Dad. “Does that make sense to you?”

“Yeah, I get it,” said Elliot. “That helps me understand that hymn.” “Me, too,” agreed Isobel. She was glad she had asked the question.

Thought: Do you understand the words you sing in your church? Perhaps you sing some of the old hymns. They’re great, but some may have words you don’t often hear anymore—and new songs may also have words you don’t understand.

Prayer: God, thank You for so many wonderful hymns and I pray that I’d be able to understand more of the meaning of the words in these hymns! In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

NO FATHER?

Joshua slowly pulled on his socks. “I hate school,” he thought. “I wish I didn’t have to go. The guys will all talk about what they did with their fathers over the weekend, and I’ll be left out again.”

Joshua used to talk about the things he and his dad did together, but now Dad was gone. Without warning, Dad had left home and moved away – his parents had divorced. Joshua hardly ever saw him anymore. Just as Joshua expected, many of the boys at school talked about their weekend activities. Some had gone to a game, some went shopping, and it seemed to Joshua as though all of them had done something with their dads. He pretended he didn’t care.

As Joshua got ready for bed that night, his heart was heavy. “All my life I’ve been taught that prayer can change things. Well, I prayed lots and lots, but nothing changed. Dad’s still gone. What’s wrong, I wonder? I know I’m a Christian, but maybe I’m praying the wrong way.”

Kneeling beside his bed, Joshua began to pray again—shyly at first, and then with more confidence. He prayed for his father and mother and for his whole family. Then he prayed for himself, telling God all about how he felt. For the first time, he didn’t ask God to change only the circumstances. He also asked for help to accept not having Dad home. He asked God to comfort him and his mother and brothers and sisters.

As Joshua climbed into bed, he actually felt much calmer and more peaceful than he had for a long time. “I guess I shouldn’t be surprised,” he thought. “After all, God is my heavenly Father. Mom read some Bible verses that said He’d be a father to the fatherless. It’s not like He’s going to play baseball with me, but He does take care of me—and I can talk to Him whenever I want.”

The next time Joshua heard boys talking about their dads, he reminded himself that he had a Father, too—God—and he was able to laugh at a joke one of the boys had played on his dad. Joshua still felt a little out of place, but he had something new—a peace in his heart as he realized that his heavenly Father was with him.

Thought: Are you a member of a one-parent family? Do you feel emptiness inside your heart? If you’re a Christian, tell God exactly how you feel from Him. He wants to hear you.

Prayer: God, I’m so glad You are my heavenly Father! I know You care and You want to give me peace. May I give to You my fears and troubles for You are able and willing to meet each need, for it is in Jesus’ name that I pray, amen.

SCARY BUGS!

A piercing scream from Amelia's room filled the midnight air and woke everyone in the house. Mom's feet hit the floor, running. She found Amelia shaking and sobbing. "Did you have a bad dream, honey?" asked Mom soothingly.

"There was a gwate, big, giant bug." baby Amelia held her arms far apart to show its size. "He was c-c-coming at me!" Mom hugged Amelia and turned on the light. "But it wasn't real," Mom assured her. "It was just a dream." Mom held Amelia and quietly talked to her. It took a while, but the little girl finally calmed down and went to sleep.

The next morning, Amelia talked about her nightmare. "It was an awful dweam," she said, "about a gwate, big bug." Amelia shivered as she thought about its pincers and creepy eyes.

"You don't need to be afraid of bugs," said Jacob, her older brother.

"Right," agreed her sister Alyssa, "especially when they're in dreams. They don't even exist."

"I'm scaid of them anyway," said Amelia. "All of us are occasionally afraid of things that don't exist," said Mom, "and nightttime seems to be a time for those fears to come out." Alyssa nodded. "Sometimes I'm just plain afraid of the dark," she said. "What about you, Jacob? What scares you?"

Jacob shrugged. "Let's see...well, I do have scary dreams sometimes," he admitted, "but they have scarier things in them than a few little bugs."

Thought: What frightens you? When you're afraid, do you trust God?

Prayer: O God, I thank You for Your promise to be with me and care for me. I remember that Your children will never be separated from Your love and care. I believe it, and the next time I'm afraid—I'll talk to You and ask You to watch over me. In Jesus' name I pray – amen.



DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

Meng Sin skipped into the house, her ponytail bouncing along behind her. “Mom! I got it! It’s finally my turn to borrow the Magic Eye book,” she called. “Remind me what that is,” Mom said as she came into the kitchen from the living room.

“It’s a book of pictures... well, sort of just shapes and colors, but if you stare really hard, a picture comes out—it’s like a three-D one,” explained Meng Sin. “My teacher said they used to sell these all over the place, but these days they’re harder to find. Now it’s my turn to look at a book full of them!”

“I remember those in the mall,” said Mom. “I could never see the pictures.” “Here... hold it up to your eyes like this,” said Meng Sin, holding the book right up to her mother’s face. “Then pull it away real slow. Keep your eyes on one spot—you’ll probably feel like you’re getting cross-eyed.” She paused. “It’s a cat. Can you see anything yet? Sometimes it takes a while.”

“I don’t see anything but squiggly lines of color. Are you sure there’s a picture here?” Mom asked.

When Meng Sin’s dad came into the kitchen, Meng Sin handed him the book and explained how to look for the cat. Dad found it on the fourth try. “I’m good!” he joked with a grin. They sat down to eat, and Dad thanked God for the food. “You know, Meng Sin,” he said, “I was just thinking of your Magic Eye pictures. They remind me of how difficult it is for some people to see Jesus. We know He’s here, but sometimes it’s hard to explain it to people and get them to see Him—to believe He’s with us.”

Meng Sin nodded as she thought about her friends. “I tried to make Sarah understand about Jesus,” she said, “but she just didn’t get it.” “I had to try four times before I could see the cat, but I finally found it,” said Dad, “so keep talking to Sarah about Jesus. We’ll all pray that she will understand. It’s really God who opens people’s eyes—we can’t do it.”

“Okay,” agreed Meng Sin. She grinned as she added, “I’ll call her right after dinner and invite her to Sunday school if Mom will look for the cat again.” Mom nodded. “And I am going to find it!” she declared.

Thought: Do you tell your friends about Jesus? Do you feel like you’re not getting through to them?

Prayer: O Most High God, I must confess that at times, I don’t feel like talking to friends about Jesus. But please help me to press on and keep being a positive influence on my friends. Also, keep me witnessing and praying faithfully for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives. In Jesus’ name I pray – amen.

MEMORIES

When Bee Leng and Tze Seng came home from school, they found their mother sitting in the middle of the living room floor, surrounded by small piles of pictures. “You kids want to help organize these?” she asked. They eagerly agreed, and soon Tze Seng and Bee Leng were giggling about the pictures—some taken years ago. “Look at Mom in this one!” squealed Bee Leng. “She has a ponytail!” Tze Seng laughed. “Here’s Fiona when she was a tiny kitten,” he said. When Dad came home, he joined the twins on the floor. Soon all three were chuckling over a group of baby pictures.

Before opening the Bible for family devotions later that evening, Dad took two snapshots from his pocket. He showed them a picture of an old car. Mom laughed. “Oh, dear! Remember all the trouble we had with that old Mazda?” Dad smiled but looked thoughtful. “Yes. When I saw this picture, I remembered the time the transmission had to be replaced and we didn’t have the money. Remember how God provided the funds for it by allowing me to find that painting job?” Mom nodded.

Then Dad showed the second picture—a snapshot of Bee Leng in her bathrobe, looking very pale. “That was taken after my operation!” Bee Leng exclaimed, and the family talked about how her appendix had ruptured and the doctors had said she might die. “Wasn’t God good to us?” Dad asked. “He healed Bee Leng.”

Tze Seng was puzzled. “Dad, what do those two pictures have to do with having family devotions?” he asked thoughtfully. “Just this, Son,” Dad replied. “We have all been a little anxious lately, wondering if changes being made at my office will result in the loss of my job.”

“Oh yeah,” Tze Seng said quietly. “But I think God wants us to always remember what He has done for us in the past. Just like He was faithful then, He will continue to lead and help us in the future—no matter what changes take place.” Bee Leng smiled. “You just used pictures and memories to remind us that God took care of us before,” she said. “And that helps us trust Him to do it again!”

Thought: Are you worried about the future? Perhaps your dad needs a job. If so, trust God for He will provide.

Prayer: O Lord, sometimes difficulties will come my way. Especially in those times, help me to trust in You. Even if there has been an illness or some other hardship in my family, remind me of what You have done for me in the past, for You are always faithful. This I pray in Jesus’ name, amen.

WHO CAN SAVE BUT JESUS?

When you face difficulties or problems, do you wish for someone to come quickly to your aid? There are difficult problems that people can help us with. But there is one big problem that no one on earth can solve. It's found deep in every person's heart; even the youngest child! This problem is sin.

Why is sin such a big deal? Sin separates us from God, and the result is death. God is pure and holy, but we are sinful people. No matter how many good things we try to do, and even if our parents and teachers praise us for being good boys and girls, our hearts remain in the same sinful state of rebellion and disobedience towards God. We are still separated from God our Creator.

Sin is also a big deal because of what it results in. It's not like paying a \$100 fine for doing something wrong, or getting a few demerit points in school. The Bible tells us the wages of sin is death. Sin results in physical and spiritual death. This means that if there's no one who can take our place to die for our sins, we have to die for our sins ourselves. The penalty of sin is an eternity in hell. Compared to our earthly problems, don't you think this is of a much greater consequence?

If sin is our greatest problem, shouldn't we long for someone to quickly come and save us? Truth is, He already has! God loved us so much that He sent Jesus Christ, His only begotten and precious Son, to become a man to die in our place. Pause for a while and think about that.

Can you see how much God loves you? From the very beginning, God planned every detail so that Jesus could be born of a virgin into this world. He obeyed God perfectly, and died for your sins so that you don't have to. Jesus Himself made the full payment to bring you back to God and to give you everlasting life. Dear reader, only Jesus can save you. Have you trusted in Him to be your personal Saviour? Make your decision today!

What does the name Jesus mean? Unscramble the letters below!

R A V S O I U

Thought: Have I trusted in Jesus to be my personal Saviour?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for your great love to me, to send Jesus to save me from my sins. Help me to trust in You as Lord of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE ART OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

There's no holding back in times of war. While real war is deadly, spiritual attacks are far worse - they can affect our souls. The Lord Jesus Himself was not spared. Satan tempted Him three times but Jesus emerged victorious! Let's follow His example. Bear in mind these three things as you go through spiritual warfare on a daily basis.

1. Be prepared. To be prepared is to keep close to God at all times. It is the only way not to be caught off guard by a surprise attack! When Jesus was tempted, he was hungry and craving for food after fasting for forty days and nights. But He was prepared for Satan's attack because He was in constant close fellowship with God. It doesn't mean that we should fast for forty days and nights! But we must make every effort to keep close to God in our quiet time and daily prayer. Are you keeping close to Him?
2. Know what tempts you. Jesus was tempted by Satan in areas which are common to all man. These areas are: the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, and the lust of the eyes. Lust of the flesh is when we desire to experience the sinful pleasures of the world. It could be watching shows that promote sin, or leading a godless lifestyle. We let the lust of the eyes lead us astray when we set our sights on - materialism and jealousy are common culprits. The pride of life is worst because it causes us to reject God. To have the pride of life, is to think highly of yourself and lowly of God and others. What tempts you?
3. Use God's Word. Be sure to build up your knowledge of God's Word, so that you know what is sinful and what is good. But knowing is not enough. Like Jesus, we must apply it. Jesus knew his deceptive tactics well and used the best weapon He had - God's Word. You have this same weapon in your hands! Cultivate a love for God's Word by soaking in every verse, every word. Read it slowly and quietly. Don't rush! As you read, ask God to help you understand and to give you the wisdom to apply it.

Thought: Spiritual warfare only ends when we see Christ face to face.

Prayer: Father in heaven, keep me close to You at all times. The struggles against sin are so real. Help me to arm myself with Your Word and to hide it in my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHEN JESUS CALLS

*There were some fishermen long ago, who heard His call to serve.
They left their nets without delay, to follow Him that day.*

*Why follow Jesus? You may ask. Why forsake all for His sake?
You see, those simple fishermen had faith! They knew that Jesus was.*

*the Messiah they were waiting for, the Christ, the Chosen One!
He came to save His people from sin, In flesh, the Lord had come.*

*So dear friend, it's your turn now, to heed His call this day.
Your Saviour calls for you to serve, to live for Him each day.*

Today's Bible passage tells us Jesus called his first disciples to follow Him. In Greek, the word 'follow' literally means, 'come here, come now!' It was a simple call and an urgent one. There was a need to minister to the needs of many, and a need to preach the kingdom of God to them. Jesus didn't have much time on earth! Now that you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, this urgent call goes out to you too.

Will you be a fisher of men, to bring your loved ones and friends to God? It will require sacrifice to forsake what is precious to you, and to put God first in your life. There are many opportunities among your family, classmates, and friends to live for Christ and share your faith. Your Saviour urgently calls you to follow Him. Why do you still delay?

Thought: Am I still following the world, or following Jesus my Saviour?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for calling me to salvation and to follow You. Help me to see that I'm just passing through this world of sin, to my eternal home in heaven. Grant me the faith and courage to share Christ with my loved ones, that my life may point others heaven-ward. In Jesus name, Amen.

MAKE A SALTY DIFFERENCE!

Wherever Jesus went, great multitudes of people followed. It was during this early part of Jesus' ministry, that He gave what is known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus teaches us that we must be as salt and light. Why? For today, let's look at what salt was used for. Salt was used to preserve food and to add flavor. Have you tasted food cooked without salt? It's really flat and tasteless. But with salt, the dish naturally becomes tasty! In the same way, the lives of those around us are really tasteless because they do not know God. Every day is an aimless routine, an empty chase of results and ambitions that will all pass away. How can you add flavor to their lives? By living differently. Live every day with a strong commitment to God, and with the knowledge of an eternity in heaven. People will see the difference and realise that their life is tasteless without God!

Salt was also used to preserve food like fish or meats. If not they would spoil and decay very quickly. When you live as the salt of the earth, you act as one who slows down the decay of sin around you. Our unsaved friends and loved ones have no reason not to sin. The world's attractions and sinful lusts all beckon to them, and they follow this path that leads to destruction. When you do not go the same way as them, it makes them feel uncomfortable. For example, they may not swear, or tell dirty jokes when you are around, because they know you will not be happy. With your presence and influence, it slows down their sinful ways.

How did Jesus describe Christians who are no longer 'salty'?
Fill in the blanks below.

_____ for nothing, to be _____ out,
trodden under _____ of men.

Have you been the salt of the earth, or have you lost your 'saltiness' to peer pressure? Before you finish today's quiet time, think of one way you can be a positive influence for Christ.

Thought: Influence others for Christ!

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me to influence others for Christ. Grant me a heart of faith as I resolve to live differently from the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

JESUS BIDS US SHINE

It's a dark world we live in today. It's dark with sin and confusion. There is a disregard for the Creator's existence and commandments. Man has replaced the living and true God with many false religions and false gods. The darkness in the world grows greater each day as people find more ways to sin and rebel against God. In fact, stumbling around the internet and bookshops to look for answers to life only leads man further from the truth. Where can a person turn to for light and truth?

That's where you come in. Jesus commands Christians to be the light of the world. Light brightens up our paths, shows us which way to safety, and brings comfort to the home. Christians are to shine brightly like a city set on a hill! Wandering and weary travellers who need to rest for the night, need only to look at the city's lights and be able to find their way to safety soon. Dear reader, if your friends and teachers look at your life, can they tell that you are a Christian? Does your testimony point them to God, or will they see you a worldly person?

Christians are also to shine brightly like a light in the house. At home is really where the test is. To outsiders, we are concerned to give a good impression of ourselves. But it is at home with our loved ones, where we reveal our true selves. The tendency is to relax and 'be ourselves' at home. It is where we throw tantrums, get provoked easily, and are rude to our siblings and parents. I feel this way about myself. Do you? Consider your testimony today, especially at home. How can you reflect God's love with your parents and siblings?

It is through the Christian's testimony, good works of kindness, and sharing the gospel that will cause others to be directed towards the only true God. Having tasted the joy of salvation and forgiveness of sins, we must shine brightly for Christ. Don't ever be ashamed and hide your light! The beautiful result is that God will be glorified. They will no longer stumble in darkness but find salvation rest in Jesus Christ.

Thought: Jesus bids me shine. How bright is my light today?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for saving me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Help me to shine brightly for You wherever You place me, especially at home. May my life be used to point others to You, and Your name be glorified. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MURDER BY ANGER

In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the relationships we have with each other. The sins that we commit against each other hinder our fellowship with God. It is a hard message because the truth of our deceptive, sinful hearts is revealed. Today, we learn how seriously God views anger.

Judgment for murder is rightfully the death sentence. But what we may find hard to accept, is how we can murder someone with our anger and by our words. Jesus tells us that whoever is angry without a cause is guilty of murder. Remember Cain in Genesis 4? He harboured hatred and jealousy in his heart towards Abel. He was angry for the wrong reasons. Murder grows from anger and always starts with our hearts.

Is there someone who seems to make you angry no matter what he does? A sibling? This is what Jesus means by being angry without cause. Our hearts are filled with pride and envy, and so we let small, trivial matters provoke us easily. We refuse to let the matter go even though we know it's a very minor issue. We become angry and shout just to show that we are right and the person is wrong. In our anger, we deliberately want to hurt others and make them feel bad. All sorts of names and mean words start to come out from our lips.

Jesus says that such hatred and anger is the same as breaking the commandment "Thou shalt not kill". This is a serious sin because it breaks our fellowship with God. If there is any conflict between you and someone else, your offerings of worship and service will not be accepted by God! Jesus tells us to first make peace with the other person, before coming back to worship God. It doesn't matter whose fault it is. Don't wait for him to approach you. You can be the one to approach him. If it's your fault, sincerely apologise without making any excuse. If you were the one offended, will you let the matter go and forgive him? Too hard to do? Not if you remember: Wasn't it Jesus who first approached you to save you? Wasn't it Jesus who first loved and forgave you?

Thought: Do I harbor anger and hatred in my heart?

Prayer: Father in heaven, forgive me for I have sinned. I pray that you will help me to make peace with those I have offended. Please fill my heart with love and help me to control my anger. In Jesus' name, Amen.

TRUSTWORTHY WORDS

Everyone likes a trustworthy person. You know you can count on him to do his part and he will never let you down. He means what he says and lives up to his word. A trustworthy person has proven himself over time. In contrast, a person who is not trustworthy has a reputation for breaking his word. Eventually he may say something that is true but everyone has learned not to believe him. They think he is joking, or giving empty promises. Which reputation do you have?

Jesus tell us let your yes be yes, and your no be no. To add anything more is evil. Those are harsh words! Why did Jesus put it that way? It is evil because the person starts to swear. When people doubt an untrustworthy person and ask "How do we know you're telling the truth?" He tries to reassure them by adding things like "I swear in God's name that it's true!" God's name is used falsely. It pollutes His name. How would you like it if someone uses your name without permission to buy or bargain for something? Don't you think that person is using your name falsely, and taking you lightly? What about God who is who almighty and powerful? It is to literally take God lightly and flippantly. By swearing in His name is to take it in vain and breaks the third commandment which says –

Thou shalt _____

_____ - Exodus 20:7

It is also evil because it shows he is not trustworthy. He has no intention to do what he says. He only says it at that time to please the listener. But if something happens at his inconvenience, he can change his mind or give an excuse later not to keep his word. Man can swear by God, by the heavens and earth, and even by himself. However, does it mean that by swearing the person automatically becomes trustworthy? Of course not!

Jesus says "swear not at all". Only say what you really mean and nothing more. Let your word be like a seal of trust. Once you have told God, your parents, teachers or friends that you will do, or even not do something, keep to it and perform it. Be a trustworthy person that people can count on!

Thought: A reputation of trustworthiness is built up over time. Start today!

Prayer: Father in heaven, may the words of my mouth be always truthful and honest. Help me to be a trustworthy person, because I worship a trustworthy God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SUFFER LOSS, DO GOOD

Jesus teaches us two things here. Don't take revenge and make every effort to do good. All our natural instincts say otherwise. When someone hits us, we hit back. Doing good must be kept at our convenience, and not create too much trouble. In fact, to do what Jesus is telling us seems out of reach! Won't the world see us as pushovers? Won't people laugh and take advantage of us? When we think this way, the truth is we are putting self first. We want to protect our name and our rights, but not the name of Christ. We want to make sure we don't lose to others, but in the process our Christian testimony is lost. Then what's the point?

To suffer loss is not to hit back when injustice is done against us. Children are quick to fight back. This is not what Christ would have us do. Even if we suffer personal injury or loss of our possessions, He tells us not to retaliate. We are to bear it patiently and leave it to God to judge and punish the offender. Of course, it is not to say you allow yourself to be bullied to no end. You should report the case to teachers or parents to discipline the person. But don't take matters into your own hands and take revenge. Or else what difference is there? Can people see the love and mercies of Christ in your life? As long as the offence is personal, let's learn from Christ who endured all kinds of injustice for our sake. People will see that our faith is real, and the difference is Christ.

To make every effort to do good is to help someone even at our own inconvenience. It's easy to help someone if it's comfortable for us. Maybe your friend asks you to help her with her homework during school hours. But going the extra mile means to offer to continue helping her beyond school hours. Going out of your way to help someone will take a lot more time and effort. It will be at the expense of your own convenience and probably disrupt your routine. But when someone approaches you for help, recognise that God is giving you the opportunity to show him Christ's love. Don't brush him away. Make every effort to do good!

Think of one person that you would like to help this week.

How can you go the extra mile for him/her?

Thought: Suffering loss and doing good are practical ways to show Christ in our lives.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray that my life may reflect the love of Christ. Help me to show compassion and kindness to others, that the name of Christ may be lifted up for all to see. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Jesus doesn't deny that we will have enemies. There will always be people who want to make things difficult for us. They may swear at us, hate us, take advantage of us, and even persecute us for being Christians. Are you experiencing something similar in your life? Maybe there's a school bully, or even someone in your family who is making things difficult for you. As hard as it may seem, Jesus says to you - love them. Love is not a warm feeling in your heart, or a feel-good emotion towards someone. Love is unconditional, and shows itself in truth and in action. Jesus tells us we should bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. What does this mean?

To bless our enemies is to speak well of them and to be courteous towards them. It's so difficult to be courteous and friendly to someone who hates you. How easy it is to talk behind their backs and make them seem like great monsters! But to bless them is to speak kindly to them and not let their actions affect you to sin. This shows them the unconditional love of God.

Doing good is where our actions speak louder than words! Instead of being cold and avoiding them, if there be any chance at all to help our enemies we should. The Bible tells us in Romans 12:20 that "if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." Heaping coals of fire on his head doesn't mean that we do good to make them feel bad as a form of revenge. Rather, by our good works they may see the sinfulness of their ways, feel the pain and shame over their sins, and cause them to repent. The way to peace is through doing good!

To pray for them is to pray for God's forgiveness to be upon them. It is to pray for their salvation. We should never wish for our enemies to go to hell, but that they may know Christ and live a transformed life. Will you pray for your enemies' salvation?

It's easy to love those who love you. Anyone can do that. But loving your enemies? That's something that only the children of God can and must do. If God so loved us while we were yet His enemies, do we have any excuse not to love ours?

Thought "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray that the love of Christ will motivate me to bless my enemies, do good to them, and to pray for their salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WARNING: DON'T BE A HYPOCRITE!

Jesus warns His disciples not to be like the Pharisees - hypocrites! A hypocrite is a person who lives a double life. Appears one way in public but is another person in private. He wants to impress others, like the Pharisees! They loved to pray in the open so that men could see them. They wanted them to see that they were fasting, praying, and giving donations to the poor. All of their deeds were to impress people and to get them to think highly of them. Jesus says that they will be rewarded for such hypocrisy. This is not pleasing to God because He is more concerned about our heart condition.

How is your relationship with God? One way to tell is to examine our private lives and what we do behind closed doors. That's the real test, isn't it? The Pharisees failed the test because they do everything for a show. In their private moments, they are totally different. Their motivation was to gain the approval of men, but they had no true belief or communion with God. If your life behind closed doors was examined today, would you be found as one who is close to God, or one who is a hypocrite like the Pharisees?

Jesus tells us that we should go into our rooms, close the door, and then start to pray. Cultivate this discipline of being quiet and alone before God to do your quiet time. We need to check ourselves and make sure that our private lives behind closed doors are pleasing before God. What we do in public must be a result of who we are in private. That's the only way to keep ourselves from being hypocrites. Don't confuse activities and service with holiness and spirituality. It must come from a real and personal relationship with God, in quiet prayer and reflection on His Word.

Rephrase the below verse (1 Sam 16:7b) to see what matters to God!

for man looketh / for the Lord seeth / but the Lord looketh on
the heart. / on the outward appearance, / not as man seeth;

Thought: Am I the same person in public and in private?

Prayer: Father in heaven, search my heart and see if there be any wicked way in me. May all that I do come from a heart that longs for Your approval and not man's. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHERE IS YOUR TREASURE?

Jesus says, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” To lay up is to gather, keep and store up. Why does Jesus tell us not to store up treasures on earth? Two reasons.

Firstly, they are temporal and will pass away. Our precious toys, big houses, and latest gadgets are part of this earth and won't last. They will either be taken away from us, or snatched from us suddenly through theft or robbery. To lay up treasures on earth is to work hard towards gaining possessions that will not last. Jesus says, don't do that! We ought to put our focus and efforts in laying up treasures in heaven that will last for eternity. What are these treasures in heaven? Rewards that God gives to His children for the good works they have done in His name. He rewards those who faithfully serve Him. God knows everything that you have done for Him, even the things you do quietly behind the scenes. He will reward you openly one day! These are the treasures that will last for eternity.

Secondly, laying up treasures on earth will cause us to forget God and depend on our riches. Instead of loving and serving God, we start to love and serve our riches and possessions. Pride fills us as we delight in our achievements. It is a slow but sure backsliding away from God. Don't you know that God can take away all your earthly possessions at any time? He can even take away your life. Then what will become of the treasures you have worked so hard for? Ask yourself, “Is my treasure in heaven or on earth?” That's where your heart is. If you seek after the things of heaven and eternity, God promises to reward you for your faith and hope in Him! But if your desire is for the things of the world, here is what Jesus has to say to you today:

Fill in the blanks and commit this verse to memory!

And he said unto them, “Take _____, and _____ of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth _____ in the _____ of the things which he _____.” (Luke 12:15)

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

(Matthew 6:21)

Prayer: Father in heaven, turn my eyes towards You so that the things of this world will grow dim and dull. Cause me to always be attracted by heaven's glory, and not the passing glamour of the world. Help me to live by faith, and not by sight. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU

What reassuring words of comfort we read today! It is good to slow down sometimes and open our eyes to enjoy God's creation. Our Creator God teaches us important truths through His creation. When you wake up in the morning, don't just stumble out of the house in a sleepy daze! Look out for the birds that are getting their breakfast. Jesus wants us to ponder this picture in our hearts. It is a picture of God's care in feeding the birds.



They do not work, or keep a store of food like we do. They simply fly out every day and collect the food that God provides. If He provides food for them, He will surely provide for you. Are you not much better than they?

Next time when you're in a park, or walking along a road, pay attention to the flowers. Go a little closer and observe how beautiful they are. They do not labour to clothe themselves. It was God who clothed them so beautifully. They have greater beauty than a king's clothes! If God clothes the lilies and the grass of the field which are here today and gone tomorrow, He will clothe you even more. Don't worry about what you will eat, or drink, or what you will wear, God promises to provide.

What are the things you worry about? We all have our different sets of cares and worries. He knows our every thought and sees our every need. In our worry, we tend to forget or even doubt that God cares for us and He is in control of all things. But that doesn't change who God is one bit. He is still our Heavenly Father. God never changes and He is faithful. We are the ones who are of little faith and are easily overwhelmed with the cares of life.

What should our correct response be? Not to indulge in self-pity or worry, but to seek God first. This means that God is first in your life. Whatever happens tomorrow is out of your control. But your trust is not in tomorrow. Your trust is in God and His perfect plans for you. Seek Him first and always, and you will see how He will supply your every need.

Thought: To worry is to have a lack of trust in God.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for providing for my every need. When I start to worry or be anxious about the future, grant me greater faith and trust that You are in control. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GREAT FAITH FOUND!

As Jesus entered Capernaum, a Roman centurion, one of the commanding officers of the army, pleaded with him to heal his dying servant. The centurion had a tender heart for the people around him, and this servant was close to his heart. Jesus agreed to go. He would use this miracle to show us what great faith was and where it could be found.

The centurion knew that Jesus was near, he sent his friends to Jesus to tell Him not to go any further but to say the word and his servant would be healed. He felt unworthy to approach Jesus. Jesus was amazed at the faith of the centurion! He called it great faith that he had not found in Israel. What was great about his faith?

Unlike the rest of the Jews, the centurion recognised that Jesus had authority and power as the Son of God. As a centurion, he knew believed that whatever Jesus commanded would be done instantly. The centurion also believed that Jesus had power. With Jesus, nothing is impossible because He is God. If Jesus wanted to heal a person, nothing could stop Him! Jesus rewarded the centurion for his faith and healed the servant that very same hour. Faith believes that Jesus is God and that He has authority and power over all things. Compared to the rest of Israel that did not believe this, the centurion's faith was indeed great! What about you? Do you believe that Jesus has power over all things, even that which is close to your heart?

Where can great faith be found? In the hearts of those who believe in Jesus as their God and Saviour. The Jews may be God's chosen people with their heritage in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But because they reject Jesus, they will die in their sins and end up in hell. On the other hand, the Roman centurion was a Gentile (a non-Jew) but he truly believed in Jesus! He is the one who will join Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in heaven. Dear reader, faith is not found in the churches we worship, the religious things we do, or in the faith of our fathers. It is found in Jesus alone. Have faith in Him!

Thought: My faith is in a Saviour who has great power and authority.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I praise You for You have power and authority over all things. You know everything that troubles me and is close to my heart. Help me to put my faith in You alone. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

“WHY ARE YE FEARFUL?”

As the multitudes of people grew, Jesus and His disciples withdrew from them and took a boat to the other side of the sea. This was supposed to be just another quiet and uneventful trip. Nobody expected a great storm! As the winds and rain beat down on their boat, and the waters covered it, the disciples grew more and more afraid. Although many of them were fishermen, they never experienced such a frightening storm. They were so afraid that they would die!

Maybe you have felt this sort of fear before. You look around you and all you can see are difficulties. Things just don't seem to be going well. Maybe you're not doing well in school, fallen very sick, or perhaps there is a difficult situation at home to deal with. The problems seem so overwhelming and you feel at a loss. Who do you go to for help? The disciples cried to Jesus in desperation, “Lord, save us: we perish”. Cries of helplessness and desperation are simple and short. Whenever you face problems and feel very afraid, do you ask the Lord to save and help you? He is just a short prayer away!

Jesus rebuked the disciples saying “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” Dear reader, that's what Jesus says to you too when you are feeling afraid - “Why are you afraid of the problems in front of you? Are you staring at the problems, or are you focusing on who I am, and what I am able to do for you?” We show little faith in Jesus when we fix our eyes our problems instead of on Him. That's the real problem that makes us afraid!

Jesus arose and commanded the winds and waves to stop. Suddenly there was a great peace and calm! A stormy sea immediately became calm, peaceful waters. When we look to Jesus to save us, He is able to replace our fears with calm and peace. Look at who He is! He is the Son of God who has all power and authority. Look at what He is able to do! He commands creation by His word. Jesus is able to still the storms in your life. Will you commit all your fears to Him in prayer and trust Him?

Psalm 56:3 tells you what to do when you are afraid.

Write the verse below!

Thought: The biggest problems will become very small when we trust in God!

Prayer: Father in heaven, I praise You for You are the mighty Creator. All the storms of life are in Your control. Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

BEING A FRIEND TO THE FRIENDLESS

There are people who are looked down upon in society, in school, and maybe even in church! Do you know of people who always sit alone because people talk behind their backs and make fun of them? Nobody likes to be around them or be seen eating with them. In Jesus' time, it was the tax-collectors and prostitutes. Everyone despised them because of their jobs and would stay far away from them. They must have felt very lonely. How would you like it if everyone didn't like you and stayed far away from you?

Jesus was not like everyone else. He sat to have a meal with the tax-collectors and prostitutes. Everyone looked down on them and didn't want to be their friends. Even though He knew that people were watching His every move and would criticise Him, Jesus still went. Why? That's because Jesus cared for their souls. We tend to judge a person based on who he is on the outside. Yes, he may be a little different from us, but inside we are all in the same state! All of us are sick in sin! There is no exception. It doesn't matter how much money you have, which school you attend, or what your age is. We are all sinners who are equally in need of God's grace.

How did Jesus respond when people started to whisper behind His back? He told them that it is the sick that need a doctor, not the healthy. The only way for sin-sick souls to be healed is for Jesus to heal them. How will He do this? Jesus said He will have mercy on them. He will not punish, instead He will show kindness to the souls of men. That's why Jesus sat with the tax-collectors and prostitutes. He came to call sinners to repentance! That's what made Jesus go all the way to the cross to die for our sins. He came to save us!

Jesus alone is the Great Physician who can heal our souls. He doesn't want us to be sick in sin, condemned under God's wrath and be bound for hell. He wants us to be healed with His forgiveness and to enjoy peace with God. Jesus loves you as much as He loves the tax-collector, the prostitute, and all who are despised by men. Will you also show kindness to those around you who have no friends and are despised by others? The best way to do that is to follow Jesus' example. Sit down with them for a meal, and share with them God's love in your life. Will you?

Thought: I want to be a friend who cares for the souls of others.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for saving my soul. Thank you for making me whole in Christ. I pray that You will use me to be a friend to the friendless, to share the good news of God's love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

AS YE GO, PREACH!

So far, Jesus was the one working the miracles of healing, casting out devils, and raising the dead. All these miracles confirmed that He was the only begotten Son of God who had come to be the Saviour of the world. However, Jesus only had a very short time of ministry on earth. What would happen after He ascends back to heaven?

Jesus chose for Himself twelve disciples to carry on His work. They were men from all walks of life, but had received the common call to follow and serve Jesus. To train them for the ministry ahead, Jesus sent them out to preach the kingdom of God. This was the first time that the disciples were given the power to do the miracles that Jesus had been doing! The purpose was not to create an atmosphere of wonder and amazement to surround the disciples. Rather, with the power seen in these miracles, it was to drive home the point that their message was of heaven, from God.

The disciples were told “as ye go, preach”. This is our calling as followers of Jesus. It’s not just for the twelve disciples, but for us too. As we go along our day to day lives, we are to preach! The world sends out messages that have to do with enjoyment and entertainment, but we are to “preach saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” We are to tell our friends and loved ones of Christ’s message of repentance and faith.

The disciples were given power from God to work miracles in order to confirm their message. How about us? How do people know that we are the disciples of Jesus? We may not be given this power of working miracles, but we too are given the ability to do good unto others! As we have freely received many blessings from God’s hands, so we are to be generous and free in doing good to others. As your family and friends start to see your good works and labour of love, they will recognise you as a true disciple of Jesus! So as you go along your daily life, preach with your words and with your works!

May each word spoken for Christ my Lord, be never made in vain.

For behind those words, my works must show, to bring honour to His name.

Thought: People will know that I am of Jesus when my actions match my message.

Prayer: Father in heaven, as I resolve to live for You each day, help me to look for opportunities where I may do good unto others and to share with them the gospel of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

GO TO JESUS!

Are you weary and heavy laden with a load of care? Some of us are entangled with the affairs of this world. We are so busy with our studies and enrichment activities. Still some of us are tired from our struggles with sin. We try to be good to make our parents happy, but we still fall short and end up disobeying them. We have bad habits and sins that we easily succumb to. This daily struggle also makes us very tired. How can we find rest?

Firstly, Jesus says “Come unto me”. If you have been working very hard and using your own strength to cope, He bids you to go to Him. But you have to make that first step to go to Jesus and believe in Him. Our instincts will call to us to look for comfort from our friends, and very often worldly music and entertainment. But all these will not give your tired souls peace and rest. They only make things worse. True rest is only promised in Jesus.

Secondly, we experience this rest by taking on the yoke of Christ. A yoke is a wooden beam placed between a pair of oxen to help them work together as they pull along a heavy load behind them. When we carry our own yoke, we want to pull through life on our own strength, and carry our sins and affairs on our tired backs. It’s only a matter of time before we will be crushed under its load! Jesus says that His yoke is easy, and His burden light. It is easy because we no longer pull it with our own strength but by His strength. It is light because He takes away our baggage of sin and sinful influences. We are free to serve Him without the weight of sin on our backs! When we trust in Jesus and simply obey His commands and directions, we find that life become so much simpler.

Thirdly, Jesus says to learn of Him for He is meek and lowly in heart. This speaks of a humble and submissive attitude. When we gladly humble ourselves and submit to God’s will and leading, we find that we can truly rest. The future is in God’s hands and whatever happens we know that all things will work together for our good.

Write Isaiah 26:3 here and memorise God’s promise of peace for your encouragement!

Thought: Only Jesus can provide true rest and peace for my troubled heart.

Prayer: Father in heaven, make me humble and to take the yoke of Christ upon me. Grant me heavenly peace and rest in You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

YOU CAN HAVE MY LUNCH

As Jesus the busy day healing the sick, the sky turned dark. The crowds must have been very tired after a day of looking after the needs of the people. However, Jesus did not have the same plan in mind. Even though He must have been tired, His work of service had not ended. Jesus saw the great crowds and the need to supply for their physical needs.

But what could they give to feed more than 5,000 people? They found this boy with his small lunch of 5 barley loaves and 5 small fish. Here was this boy with very little in his hands. He had no idea how his lunch would help Jesus, or if Jesus would think lowly of what he had. What could a small child possibly offer to a mighty Lord?

Often times we ask ourselves “What can I possibly offer to God? He is so big and mighty and He has the power to do anything! What can I bring to Him that could be of use?” Do you find yourself thinking this way too? You may think to yourself “Oh, I’m not good enough to do it because... I have no time, or I can’t speak well, or I can’t really sing, etc” Look at what Jesus teaches us today!

Jesus used whatever the boy offered in faith! The boy’s heart must have skipped a beat as he saw how his lunch was miraculously multiplied to feed more than 5,000. The boy had little to give, but he gave it all to Jesus and didn’t hold anything back. Jesus is able to use the little you have to offer too. You may not think much of your gifts and resources, but Jesus will not despise what you bring to Him in faith. All He wants is that you withhold nothing from Him and give to Him your best and your all.

What is one thing you can to offer to the Lord to use?
Could it be your talents, time, or treasure?

I want to offer to the Lord my _____

Thought: God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the example of this small boy. Help me to have simple faith like he had, that I will serve You with all that I am and all that I have. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

YOU ARE PRECIOUS TO JESUS

Sheep spend most of their days eating grass, sometimes getting into dangerous situations without knowing it. They can wander down steep cliffs and even get lost. When Jesus spoke this parable, everyone understood it well. Sheep are prone to wander and shepherds would go after them. Every day, he would count all his sheep and examine them for any infections or wounds. Every sheep is precious to him. If one goes missing, this shepherd would leave the 99 sheep and go to look for that one lost sheep. There is no hesitation! He knows that when it is alone, it is vulnerable to predators and getting itself hurt. He will not stop looking for it until it is found!

We are rightly described as sheep - we get ourselves into harmful situations and need Jesus, our Good Shepherd to bring us back to safety. Do sinful attractions capture your attention? It could be a sinful addiction to computer games and television shows, or other sinful desires that draw us away from God. For one more minute of sinful indulgence, you risk the harm that it can cause you, and the danger of straying further away from God.

You are precious to Jesus and He knows you intimately and personally. Jesus knows that you are lost in sin and He will keep calling for you. Don't be lost in sin any longer! Jesus calls out to you today, to turn away from these dangerous sinful attractions, to His arms of safety. As the shepherd rejoices when he has found his sheep, there is great rejoicing when a sinner comes to believe and trust in Him! It is His desire that you do not perish in your sins.

*"All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."
(Isaiah 53:6)*

Who has God laid the punishment of our sins on?

Thought: I am so precious to Jesus!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for reaching out to me while I was lost in sin. Thank you for the Lord Jesus who gave Himself on the cross to save me. Help me to keep close to You and no longer stray away. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CAN I EARN ETERNAL LIFE?

A young man asked Jesus what he should do to have eternal life. In response, Jesus told him to obey God's commandments not to murder or commit adultery, not to steal or lie, and to honour his parents and love his neighbours. The young man proudly answered that he had done all these since he was a child, so he asked Jesus, "what else do I lack?" He thought that by his good works and through his own righteousness, he could earn points to get to heaven. I used to think this way too. I was quite sure that by attending church and obeying God's commandments, I would have eternal life in heaven. What else is there to do?

If you have this same question, Jesus' answer to the young man will speak to you too. Jesus told him to sell all his possessions, give the money to the poor, and after that to follow Him. Does it sound like a lot to sacrifice? The young man was very rich and owned many things! He went away very sad because he couldn't give up everything and follow Jesus. But is Jesus also expecting us to sell all our belongings to follow Him? Of course not!

Jesus' reply to the young man tested his belief in God and revealed his heart. The young man loved his riches more. He appeared to be a good man but he did not truly believe and trust in God. His trust was in his riches, and his belief was in himself and not in God.

Dear reader, eternal life is from God. Doing good works will not earn you eternal life. Examine your faith before God. How do you know if you truly believe and have eternal life? You would confess you are a sinner with no strength to save yourself from sins, and that only believing in Jesus can save you. You would also be willing to give up what is most precious to you, because now you cherish the treasures of heaven more.

Fill in the blanks to learn how we are saved:

"For by _____ are ye saved through _____; and that not of _____: it is the gift of God: Not of _____, lest any man should _____." Ephesians 2:8-9

Thought: Do I still trust in my own abilities to gain eternal life? Am I willing to trust in God and give up what is most precious to me?

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me to examine my heart and grant me the faith to believe that Jesus alone can save me. I cannot save myself. Help me to love You above all else, with all my heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SELFISHNESS

Today's passage reveals an ugly side of human character that is in every one of us- selfishness. People are generally selfish. They think of themselves before others. They place themselves above everyone and even above God. This is sin.

Today's text introduces us to a woman, also the mother of 2 disciples of Jesus - James and John - Mrs Zebedee. She approached Jesus and asked Jesus for a big favour. What was that? It was to elevate her 2 sons to the most important positions when Jesus rules. Is that a godly request? What does that request show?

It was not godly in a few ways. First of all, she doesn't understand that the rule of Jesus was not to be on earth, to free the Jews from the Romans. Mrs Zebedee didn't understand the kingdom of Jesus is a spiritual one, and not a political one on earth. And what does this request show? It showed her selfishness. Although she didn't ask anything for herself, by asking for her 2 sons, she was putting them ahead of all others. Did Jesus accede to her request? Of course not!

We may be like Mrs Zebedee in many ways. Perhaps in the way we pray - sometimes we pray we would top the class. Or that your parents may be wealthy. These are not prayers that God would like to hear for they show we are thinking only of ourselves. It is good and necessary to study hard, but God doesn't want each and every one of us to top our class. What God wants, in our studies, is to try our best and still honour God in the process by being a good Christian while studying hard. And how about wealth for parents? That is also wrong. You could pray for God to bless your parents' work or give them strength, but we should not seek wealth on its own, for we know the love of money is the root (cause) of all kinds of evil.

As you pray, pray right. Even as you study, study right. Don't be a selfish child!

Thought: Am I selfish?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder to not be selfish. It is so easy to think only and first of myself and I must try to stop doing that. With Your help, it would be easier. This is my humble cry. In Jesus' name, Amen.

RIGHT KING; WRONG INTENTIONS

Today we read of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in His last week of human existence. The crowds were excited and happy as they flocked to see him. Many would have heard of how Jesus could perform miracles and surely they wanted to see for themselves this man! The Bible tells us a "very great multitude" came, so we are talking about very many people who gathered along the way, eagerly anticipating a glimpse of this miracle-worker Jesus. Jesus was the right king, for He alone is the Lord of lords and Creator of the universe. However, many did it for the wrong intentions.

Many thought, like the Mrs Zebedee we read about yesterday, that Jesus could offer them freedom from the Romans and continue to provide them with miracles of food and healing. They must have thought, "How useful would such a king be, able to free us from the hated Romans and poverty and illnesses!" That is also why in a few days' time after Jesus was betrayed by Judas, many of the same people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem quickly turned and condemned Jesus, wanting to see him crucified! What a drastic and quick change of mind? How did it happen? Because with wrong understanding and intentions, they were not able to realize the truth that Jesus was teaching.

At the gates of Jerusalem, they were shouting the right things – "Hosanna to the Son of David, Hosanna in the Highest!" But although they were saying the right things, they were not able to understand that Jesus came to save them from sins, not from the Romans or from poverty. Dear child, how about you? Do you understand what you say and pray? Do you understand that Jesus came to save us from our sins, not from that nasty neighbour, or failing grades, or an inconsiderate brother.

If you seek to understand more of what Jesus came to do for you and like help, talk to your Sunday School teacher or Christian parents who may be able to guide you further. Don't be like the crowds at Jesus' entry to Jerusalem, saying the right things but not fully understanding them.

Thought: May I understand more of God's Word and will.

Prayer: Gracious Father, You know at times I don't fully understand the Bible or some of the songs we sing in church. Please help me to think more deeply about spiritual things, to be more serious about the Bible and my spiritual life. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

THE 2 GREATEST COMMANDMENTS

The religious leaders hated Jesus. They tried time and again to put him down, to discredit him and to corner him hoping Jesus would be tricked. But these men were fools, thinking they could outsmart Christ, the Almighty God!

A “lawyer” then knew there were many laws in Scriptures. So he hoped to corner Jesus and asked a tough question – which is the greatest commandment of them all? He and his evil companions must have been stunned when Jesus promptly replied that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul and mind. Wow, is that not true? If we really God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, we would also have the strength and wisdom to obey all the other commandments in the Bible. Then Jesus went further and said there is yet another commandment, the second greatest. What is it? It is to love our neighbour as ourselves. “Neighbours” here does not literally mean someone who lives next to you, but whoever God puts in your life, wherever this person lives! It is not to be selfish. It is to treat other people the way we want to be treated.

This brilliant summarising can only be done by God, the one who wrote it Himself. These are such precious commandments for us. Jesus ends by telling them on these 2 commandments hang “all the law and the prophets” which means the entire Old Testament.

Dear child, do you love God? To love someone is to want to spend time with that someone. Your mother and father love you, and you can see that love in their wanting to spend time with you. They will want to talk to you, and know how you feel. They will want to do the things you like, as long as they are not wrong or naughty. In the same way, when we say we love God, we must want to spend time with Him and talk to Him in prayer. We will want to know how He feels and that is through a consistent studying of the Bible. Dear child, start with this daily Junior RPG and slowly build up your knowledge of the Bible and of God and follow Him closer each day!

Thought: Do I love God?

Prayer: My God of love, I thank You for teaching me that I must love You so much. I would never be able to do it on my own so please help me gracious King. This is my plea in Jesus’ name, Amen.

ARE YOU A GOOD WATCHMAN?

If you have an older brother who is serving in the Singapore Army, he would be assigned duties and one of these may be to guard his army camp. As a guard or watchman, he would have to be alert and observant. He would have to know what to look out for – the signs of a potential burglar or intruder. Ask your brother whether he can relax or sleep when he is on duty, and he would give a definite “No!” In a way, this is what our text teaches.

Jesus is not teaching us to be watchmen or guards for any physical building, but asking us to be watchmen in the spiritual sense. Here, Jesus is using the analogy of a goodman (or owner) or a house guarding his home from burglars. Had he been alert and observant, no burglar would have been able to break in.

Then Jesus comes to the conclusion of this passage in verse 44 with, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” What does that mean? Jesus was saying that He would be coming back to earth again one day, and we are to live our lives in a godly way. Living our lives in a godly way is also to know we should live for Jesus, to be a good Christian boy or girl, to apply whatever lessons we have learned to our spiritual lives.

In Singapore, many parents and children think the most important thing is for children to do well in school, get into the best universities, and then get the best jobs. There is nothing wrong with getting the best jobs. But some parents and children sacrifice so much to do that. Some children do not spend time reading God’s Word or doing their quiet time. Some study way too much or on Sundays as well. Dear child, there is nothing wrong with excellence in school. But let that not come at the expense of living a good Christian life.

You and I have to be good watchmen, to be aware that Jesus will one day return for us. No matter how wealthy our parents are, or how successful we are in school, all these would not matter when Jesus comes back for us as He would bring us to heaven and whatever we have on earth would be left on earth!

Thought: Am I a good watchman?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn well today’s lesson to be a good watchman, to live a life not for myself but in anticipation of Jesus coming back to earth for me. And thank You for the reminder that there is nothing on earth that I can bring to heaven. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.

LOVE IS GIVING!

Jesus was in the house of a man called Simon for a time of thanksgiving. In it was Mary Magdalene. She was demon-possessed but freed from them by the power of God. In gratitude, she did something no one had thought of: she took a small bottle of very expensive perfume, and poured it on the head of Jesus, anointing his hair with it. That act of love is an act of giving. When you say you love someone, you show it by love.

God is the best example of that. In the famous verse John 3:16, we are told that God loves us so much that He, what? Gave us beautiful sunsets? Wonderful oceans? Fully working human bodies? Of course, God gave us all that. But above all, God loved us so much that He gave us His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. That is love. Love is giving in action.

When mum and dad say they love you, they show it by giving you something. It need not always be a physical item such as toys; it could be time spent reading a book with you or just having a simple meal with you at McDonalds. It could be dad taking time to prepare the family devotion and giving you and other loved ones a good lesson from the Bible. The thing is – when we love someone, we give something to that someone.

2 days ago on 23rd June, we talked about loving God and our neighbour. If you truly mean what you say, you could demonstrate your love to God by giving Him more time in doing your quiet time or Bible lessons. You could demonstrate your love toward your neighbour, that is anyone that God puts in your life, with a kind thought or word. Give him a real smile to brighten his day or an understanding moment when he needs to talk to you. Remember, to love someone is to give to that someone.

Thought: Since I say I love God, what do I give to God?

Prayer: Gracious God, it is such a precious lesson that I have today that when I say I love You as God, I must show my love by my action. I want to spend more time reading the Bible and most of all, putting into practice what I learn from the Bible. This I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE: BARABBAS OR JESUS?

It was the custom in those days that the governor was allowed to release a prisoner of the people's choice on a special occasion like the Passover. Pilate the governor knew that Jesus was an innocent man. At the same time, he also knew Barabbas was a notorious criminal, for the Bible tells us in verse 15 he was a "notable" prisoner – a prisoner notorious for his crimes. Between the Saviour of the world, an innocent man who did the people only good and Barabbas, a seasoned criminal, who would the crowds choose to set free? You know the answer: they chose Barabbas.

What if you and I were in that crowd? Who would we choose? Of course, we would want to give the model answer – we would choose to release Jesus! We would want to say we would be strong enough to withstand the pressure of the crowd, the prevalent thinking of the people as well as the teachings of the Pharisees and religious elite and that we would dare to be different from them and choose Jesus. Really?

Although you and I will never have a chance to choose between Barabbas or Jesus, we have a choice to choose between the things of the world or Jesus. Every day, we are faced with choices. These are not choices that need us to choose between 2 condemned to die as both Barabbas and Jesus were. These are choices perhaps to follow what Jesus taught or what the world wants us to do. It could be as simple as choosing to be angry when we know we should not be or to remind ourselves to not sin by being angry. It could be to choose whether to give in to your sister or brother over who gets to take a larger slice of that yummy cake than to say the bigger piece is yours because of whatever reasons you may have in mind.



What is your choice?



Thought: May I choose wisely, daily.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder to choose wisely. I know I may forget at times to choose and do the right thing so please help me gracious Lord to always be aware of the need to keep close to You and to do things that would be pleasing to You. This is my humble cry in Jesus' name, Amen.

THE PERFECT LAMB OF GOD

When animals are slaughtered, they often make loud or disturbing noises. But sheep or their young, lambs, are different in that they lay still and silent as they are slaughtered. That is seen in this passage as our precious Saviour was condemned to die. Read the 6 verses again and recount the terrible things they did to Jesus, the perfect Lamb of God. What did they do?

Starting from verse 26, we read that they scourged him. To be scourged is to be whipped severely using a multi-thong leather lash often with bones tied to the leather thongs. Scourging is often on one's back and someone scourged has a back that is torn and bleeding and often that person is in shock due to the extreme pain. But did they stop there in punishing Jesus? No! We read they did many other terrible things to the perfect Lamb of God. They stripped him and mockingly put on him a scarlet robe as they ridiculed him. They also forced a crown of thorns on his bleeding head and bowed to him in disdain hailing him "King of the Jews". All this time, they were laughing in scorn and they also hit Jesus on the head. Further, they spat on Jesus. In return, what did Jesus do? Nothing. The sinless Lamb of God exhibited what lambs do as they are led to the slaughter-house, he meekly accepted the punishment. Had he wanted to, he could have easily overpowered them for Jesus was God. Or he could have asked for angels to come and destroy some of these enemies in a show of his infinite ability. But he did none of that.

Dear child, as you read this passage, be touched with the meekness and gentleness of our precious Lord. Remember how much Jesus suffered for you and how in turn, you should learn to love and appreciate him more. Although what you read in this passage is already a lot of unjust punishment for an innocent Saviour, more terrible things await him at the cross.

Thought: May I love Jesus more and more.

Prayer: Gracious Father in heaven, thank You so much that You gave Jesus to me. I am so grateful for this most precious of all gifts and I ask that I'd learn to be a better Christian, and to love him more and more. This I ask in his name, Amen.

UNBELIEF TO THE VERY END!

For the next few days, we want to examine what death by crucifixion is like. The Romans introduced this form of punishment so that others who saw may be frightened for crosses were usually on hills or elevated ground so that people miles away could see. That is why the cross of Jesus was on the hill of Calvary. And it was humiliating for only the worst criminals are punished with crucifixion as they were very drastic forms of death penalties.

In such a public setting, many could see Jesus on the cross. Verse 39 tells us they “reviled” Jesus. That is a word to mean the people mocked and scorned Jesus. They also, according to the same verse, were “wagging” their heads. This was done with condemnation and what came out of their mouths proved it as they taunted, jeered and teased Jesus, asking him to save himself if he was really the Son of God. Was Jesus the Son of God? Yes. Why then did he not defend himself? Because it has been prophesied that Jesus had to die on the cross, and that he, according to Isaiah 53:7 did not defend him, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

How about the religious teachers at that time? Surely they knew more could understand what was happening? No. The chief priests, scribes and elders poked fun at our dying Lord. There was unbelief until the very end. The people and religious leaders, all of whom Jesus would die for, were standing in unholy judgment and undisguised contempt.

What about you? Do you believe that Jesus came and died for you? The easy answer is “Yes, I do!” But are you sure? Do you still harbour unbelief, although perhaps going to church with mummy and daddy since there is nothing else to do anyway at home?

Dear child, if you are sure you have repented of your sins and committed your life to Jesus, that’s wonderful! If not, think seriously. We know that if a person does not repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, he goes to hell when he dies. Only someone who had given his life to Jesus would spend eternity with Jesus in heaven. What would you choose?

Thought: Am I a true believer in Jesus?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray I won’t be like the people of those days who remain unrepentant and unbelieving until the very end. I know I’m a sinner and pray you would forgive me of all my sins. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

HOW LONG WAS JESUS ON THE CROSS?

Death by crucifixion was a slow and cruel death. Jesus was hung on the cross at 9am (called the third hour in their method of calculation), according to Mark 15:25. Then at the sixth hour which is 12 noon, something unusual happened. Verse 45 of Matt 27 tells us darkness was over all the land. That would have been a strange sight, for the sun was shining and then suddenly it disappears at the time when it was supposed to be brightest! Why was there darkness?

This physical darkness or the lack of light is symbolic of the spiritual darkness the place was in. They had the incomparable privilege of having the Son of God in their midst, teaching and helping them. They were able to have God the Son walking in their midst, healing the lame whole, making the blind see, restoring those who were ill, casting out demons. And even raising some from the dead! Yet, they wanted to kill him. That is why there was this darkness that fell upon the land. During this darkness, thousands must have wondered what happened. It was not an eclipse of the sun for no solar eclipse lasted that long. It was God's supernatural act as His precious only begotten Son was experiencing his last hours on earth as a man. This darkness lasted 3 hours until the ninth hour (or 3 pm), when Jesus died. So how long did Jesus hang on the cross? 6 hours.

6 hours was how long it took to kill Jesus. Some others who are crucified may take shorter or longer, but in any case, it was a cruel and slow death. That is why crucifixion is banned; no country allows death by crucifixion today. Now that we know Jesus was on the cross for 6 hours, we want to ask ourselves another question. Was it only during these 6 hours that Jesus suffered? Of course not. Jesus suffered even before he hung on the cross. He willingly bore the taunting, mistreatment, physical pain even before he went up to the cross. Such a wonderful Saviour Jesus is! As we examine this other aspect of death by crucifixion and realise it is such a slow and cruel death, let us draw nearer to God and thank Him even more for the precious and unsurpassed gift of Jesus.

Thought: O how I love Jesus!

Prayer: Great God of heaven, thank You for teaching me how terribly slow and cruel death by crucifixion is. Cause me to now want to love Jesus more and to be more grateful to Him who died for me. In His precious name I pray, Amen.

OUR SAVIOUR IS RISEN!

Death by crucifixion was certain. The person who was crucified could die from a few possibilities. A doctor, Jeremy Ward, at King's College London puts it this way, "Suffocation, loss of body fluids and multiple organ failure. It wasn't pleasant. The weight of the body pulling down on the arms makes breathing extremely difficult. In addition, the heart and lungs would stop working as blood drained through wounds."

So Jesus really died after 6 hours on the cross. Some unbelievers claim that perhaps Jesus did not die on the cross but managed to stay alive and somehow escaped after that. However, the Bible tells us clearly that Jesus died. More than that, today's passage tells us some loyal followers of Jesus went to the tomb three days after Jesus died, on the first day of the week (Sunday) and were shocked to experience an earthquake. They were even more terrified when an angel appeared to them! This magnificent creature rolled the huge boulder (big rock) away from the opening of the cave where the body of Jesus was laid to rest. And he did it to show that the tomb was empty, Jesus was no longer there, for Jesus had already risen!

If the death of Jesus is the end of the account, our entire faith would be useless. If Jesus died and stayed dead, there is no point being a Christian. Did you know that our faith, Christianity, is the only one where our leader is resurrected? Leaders or founders of all other religions died, and stay dead. What a privilege it is to know Jesus rose from the dead! That is why Paul the Apostle teaches in 1 Cor 15:14, "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Christians celebrate Good Friday to remember the death of Jesus. However, after today's lesson, you would know why we also celebrate Easter Sunday, for if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith would be in vain. So where is Jesus now? He is heaven with God the Father waiting for us to be with Him forever and ever.

Thought: Thank God, Jesus is resurrected!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is so good to be reminded we serve a Lord who is risen from the dead. And where He now is, I would be too, someday. Please teach me to continue to continue to be a good Christian child and to be so grateful Jesus is alive in heaven! In His wonderful name I pray, Amen.

DO THE LORD'S WORK!

Jesus commands His disciples to continue to do the Lord's work. That was a very uncertain time for the disciples as they know they would not have Jesus by their side as they had for 3 years. How could they cope with the evil religious leaders and people who even killed their Lord? Knowing their thoughts, what does Jesus do? He encourages them in these 3 verses with four "Alls". Can you find them?

Firstly, there is "All power" (v 18). God is omnipotent – He has limitless power. Then, He commands that the disciples teach "all nations" (v 19). They were to spread the good news to people other than Jews. The third all is v 20, when Jesus told them to teach the others to observe "all things" that Jesus taught - to teach the entire Bible, not just the few verses we may have learnt, or favourite Bible passages. The last all is when Jesus told them He would be with always (v 20). This great truth is realised as God the Holy Spirit is with us Christians as He lives in us. So with these four "alls", Jesus commands that we do His work.

To you, a student, what does it mean to "do the Lord's work"? Study in a Bible college, or give all your possessions to the poor? No, God is not unreasonable! He knows you are a student and you need to spend time studying, spend time with your parents, and also spend time with good leisure. Doing the Lord's work means to honour God in whatever you say and do and think. It could be as easy as being kind to the poor canteen lady whom many students in school pay no attention to. It can be as simple as being genuinely nice to the maid at home for those of you who are fortunate enough to have a live-in helper. It is to be grateful to mum and dad for all the sacrifices they have made. It is to accommodate your brother or sister and not to fight over things.

God has reminded us in these few verses of the 4 "alls" and we must be strengthened by them so that we can do His work as often as we can! He knows it is not easy, that is why he encourages us that He has all the power to help us. Therefore, to Him we must go often in prayer and seek His help.

Thought: May I be God's worker!

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, thank You for giving me the opportunity to work for You! Teach me to remember I may draw on the strength of Jesus and that I must go to you in prayer often so that I would not rely on my own abilities but always on Yours. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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