
2 MILLENNIUM OLD LETTER

Well, not exactly 2000 years ago (One millennium is 1000 years) but close to it. The book of Romans was written around AD57, which worked out to how many years?

2013-57 = _____ years ago.

There was a person called Dr John Edward Simpson wrote a letter to his mother while he was on board the Titanic in 1912. He did not make it home because the Titanic sank. But the letter did – after 100 years!

It sends a thrill down our souls to read of something so ancient - Two millennium ago! Wouldn't you be curious of its content?

First, it was written by a very educated man called Paul. He was personally called by God to be an apostle. God called Paul in a very incredible manner. You can read about it in Acts 22.

What was an apostle then? The word means “one sent forth”. An apostle was a believer who had met with the Lord Jesus Christ face to face and received special commission to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. And he could perform miracles!

While Paul wrote this letter, it was God the Holy Spirit who moved him to write every single word of it. It was written in the Greek language. Paul's mother tongue must be Hebrew since he was a Jew but Greek was the language spoken by many nations at that time, just like English today. It is always good to learn more languages so you can be of greater use to God. So, the next time you struggle with your English or Chinese spellings, don't complain. God is molding you to serve Him.

It was written to Jewish and Gentile (non Jew) Christians in a place called Rome. At that time, there were prejudices between the two groups of people and different understanding of salvation. This letter was to teach the truth of God.

Let's begin our 2 MILLENNIUM OLD adventure!

Thought: God preserves His Word through the ages for me!

Prayer: Father in heaven, I thank you I heard of the gospel of Jesus Christ because of faithful man like Paul. May your Holy Spirit teach me to understand the Word of God. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

A PROMISE OF GOOD NEWS

If a mummy promises to bring her children for a nice holiday in December, would the children not be excited? Day by day, they see the promise unfolding. Air tickets are booked, their hotel rooms shown to them online, winter clothes started coming in.

In verse 1 & 2, we read that God had promised the gospel (means 'good news') to the holy prophets in the Old Testament. Do you know how many verses of such a promise were made? More than 300, all pointing to the good news!

Now, what is the good news? It is the coming of One who is above all – the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to earth. At the right time, God fulfilled His promise. All God prophesied in the OT came true in the NT. How thrilled the people of God was during Paul's time, to be able to receive the promise that God made.

That is how Jesus (the name means "saviour") Christ (means "anointed") came.

- He was made of the "seed of David"
- He was declared to be the "Son of God" with power
- He rose from the dead

You may know of people who break their promises or somehow cannot fulfill them. But God, your heavenly Father, will keep all the promises He makes!

Thought: Thank God for His wonderful promises!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for fulfilling your promise in sending Jesus Christ into this world to save sinners as I. Help me to receive Him as my Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

EXCUSE ME, ARE YOU A CHRISTIAN?

Before going into the differences between the Jews and Gentiles' understanding of the gospel, Paul praised them for their faith, which was 'spoken of throughout the whole world.'

There are two kinds of faith – Objective Faith refers to the BIBLE with all the teachings. Subjective Faith is our obedience to God, based on what is in the bible.

There was the true story of the great faith of this Indian lady - Esther. When Esther first believed in Jesus, she was badly treated by her sister, for the family was deep into idolatry. Nonetheless, Esther prayed for the salvation of her sister. Years passed and they got married and raised families. Still Esther prayed and continued to show love to her sister, suffering ill treatment with patience. Then one day, after 32 years of Esther praying, her sister called her on the phone and said, "Tell me about this Jesus you worship." What perseverance in prayer and a life of godly example for the sister to see, just as Jesus has taught.

How do people know of your faith in Jesus Christ? By your behaviour, of course! James said in Jas 2:7 Even so, faith, if it hath not work, is dead, being alone.

What about you? Do your classmates and relatives know of what your God is like, what is Christianity all about, through your life?

Thought: Our behaviour will either lead people away from or to God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me so many commandments to be a lamp unto my feet and for my good always. Help me to obey you so people can know of the Lord Jesus Christ through my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

Today's verse is one of the most important verses in the book of Romans. It tells us that if we are just, or true Christians, we must have faith in God and live by faith.

Nothing and no one can be more powerful than God. We see His power in creation - He made all things out of nothing in 6 days. Today, He still shows His power in salvation. Long ago, I used to think to myself, "It is impossible for my mother to come to believe in Christ!" Then God showed me His power to save, through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And she came to know God at the age of 55, after decades of idolatry! "Saved from what?" you ask. From the power of sin and the punishment of sin.

Dear child, do you live by faith? Do you believe in the truth of the bible? As you learn from your bible and these Junior RPG notes, do you believe in Jesus, whom you have never seen? And no one you know has ever seen Jesus or God too. How then can you believe? The only true objective way is through the bible.

Of course, we can see the power of God in the things around us. Look at the sun, the moon, and the stars. You know there although the sun is a lot larger than the earth we live in, there are many other stars much larger than the sun. And there are many other galaxies out there, all orbiting in outer space in perfect harmony. Surely there must be a God!

But dear child, most of all, trust in the bible!



*NASA, ESA and the Hubble Heritage Team
(STScI/AURA)-ESA/Hubble Collaboration.*

Thought: May I live by faith

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the great salvation I have in Jesus Christ. Please help me to live by faith and to trust more in You day by day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WITHOUT EXCUSE!

Long ago, when someone asked me, “What is your religion?”, I replied, “Atheist”. Atheist is someone who does not believe in any god. I cannot see God with my eyes, so how can you tell me there is a god? Then the question continued, “the beautiful rainbow you are admiring now, who made it?”

In this chapter, Paul pointed out the sins of the unbelievers. They stood condemned before God and would be sentenced to hell. Why? God declares in verse 20, “Creation alone tells you that I exist and I have power. Yet you still refuse to worship me!” **NO EXCUSE!** You are condemned!”

Can nature talk? In a way, yes, day by day, night by night in ALL languages man knows - English, Mandarin, Korean, Tamil, Swahili, French, Russian, etc, shouting loudly , “God made me!” This is because through nature, man must know there is a Creator behind the order and beauty they see.

But yet many think themselves wise, and instead of being thankful and worshipping the Creator, come up with ideas to worship gods of their own imaginations. The creations of God, even a single-celled amoeba, is complex and well designed. It cannot come by accident. But men don't want to acknowledge there is an all wise and powerful Creator. They come up with many theories to explain away God. They say, “we made ourselves... by accident... billion of years ago a big bang occurred... evolution took place... our ancestors are apes.

God simply calls them **FOOLS!** Psalms 53:1 The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.

Thought: May I share about God with friends!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for showing me you made me and the world. Help me to tell my friends this. It is not easy and often I am afraid but precious Master, please give me courage. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE WORLD IS GETTING WORSE!

Ever heard someone say this phrase – “The world is getting worse”? Is it a frustrated feeling of someone or is it a fact?

A week before Christmas 2012, a 20 year old boy in America took his mother’s guns, killed her at home and went on to a school and sprayed bullets at teachers and students, killing many.

Fifty years ago, homosexuals (men who commit sin with men, women who commit sin with women) hid their shameful and sinful identity. Today, they march the streets championing “GAY PRIDE”, telling the world they are proud homosexuals.

We have read in Singapore of terrible sins of committed by principals, teachers, politicians and famous people. And consider this: One little girl in China was hit by a car. No one came to help. Two more cars rolled over her. The world was shocked.

In a class which I taught, a P5 boy blurted out, “What’s the point of being good, my parents are divorcing!”

What is happening to this world? Will it get worse?

YES. It will because GOD GIVES UP on the unbelieving world which knows of the existence of God yet does not worship Him as God. God allows them to be carried away by their own wickedness.

Dear children, you know of this God. Worship Him as God. Receive the salvation He offers freely through His Son Jesus Christ. If you harden your heart and continue doing evil, God will “give you up”.

Thought: It is scary when God gives people up!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me a heart of flesh to love you, worship you and obey you all the days of my life. I know the world is getting worse and I can easily be affected by it. So gracious Father, please teach me to keep so close to You. This is my prayer in Jesus’ name, Amen.

I AM BETTER?

Paul in chapter 1 highlighted the sin of the Gentiles, or those who are not Jews. God uses His creation to judge them for their sin. The words repeated were "without excuse".

The Jews must be happy to hear that. They were the special people. They had the right place of worship, they knew the law of God very well. They were definitely better than those Gentiles, they thought! They despised the Gentiles, considering them to be unclean, to be dogs. They used the law of God and pointed out the sins of the Gentiles quickly, condemning them.

But Paul used the same words "inexcusable" to condemn the Jews in today's text.

The more we know what sin is, the more we are condemned when we sin. The Jews taught against doing wrong, but committed that wrong.

How about us? Christian children, you may think you are better than some naughty children in your school. You know you cannot steal. Perhaps you shake your heads at some kids caught stealing in class but you may borrow things from friends without returning; that is stealing. You say a classmate is a terrible liar but you exaggerate when bragging to your friends; that is lying. You read from papers how some children were wicked towards their aged parents and echoed, "So terrible children"; yet you shout at your parents at home. You frown at friends who do not go to church on Sunday while you do, but perhaps you don't mean what you pray and sing during services?

Paul said God will judge according to truth. Whether you are the son of church leaders or a daughter of good Christian parents does not matter; you have to be a Christian yourself. So be careful to check if we have sinned first, before condemning others' sins.

Thought: Don't think you are better than others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to see my sins clearly and confess and forsake them. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

I SIN BUT I AM NOT PUNISHED?

John, eight years old, loved small model cars. Every day after school, he would enter a minimart on his way home. Many students crowded the place to buy tidbits at this hour. The lady serving them was overwhelmed by the many small hands pushing money at her. So one day, John stretched forth his hand quickly, took a car and pocketed it. No one in the crowd noticed. So he continued this sin of stealing for a month until he was caught.

Children, do you know that every sin deserves death? If John had been struck dead after stealing his first car, he would be a strong warning to all of us.

Why doesn't God strike you and I dead and send us to hell the moment we sin?

Paul said it was because of the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering, God is giving us time to realize our sins and repent and find forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He is not willing that we should perish but to have eternal life.

But when we continue sinning, it means two things:

1. We are despising the goodness of God
2. We are storing up against ourselves the WRATH of God.

This was the case with the Jews. Paul warned the Jews strongly not to incur God's fierce anger (wrath). The Psalmist trembled as he thought of God's anger in Psalms 76:7, "Thou, even thou, art to be feared: and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?"

Dear children, Paul's words warn you today. If you have sinned, stop that sin immediately. Repent and ask God to forgive you. He has given Jesus Christ to take your place and face His wrath in your place. Believe on Him and thou shalt be saved. Once you are God's children, you will have victory over sin.

Thought: The church would be empty if each time we sin, we die!

Prayer: All merciful God, thank you for your longsuffering towards me, a great sinner. May I be thankful and stop sinning against you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

LISTEN TO THAT CONSCIENCE

Sylvia's heart was thumping so hard she thought she would collapse. She stared hard at a row of very beautiful, colourful wallets in the gift shop. Blood gushed to her face as she breathed hard. Her cold, clammy hand trembled as it stretched forward and took a purple wallet. Then a very loud voice rang in her head, "Stop! You will be caught!" With horror, she dropped the wallet and walked hastily out of the shop.

Who or what shouted? It was her CONSCIENCE. Sylvia was not a Christian. She has never read Commandment 8 of the Ten Commandments: Thou shalt not steal. Yet how did she know what she did was right or wrong?

Paul taught that God gave conscience to the Gentiles. They did not have the Old Testament law like the Jews but they had the work of the law written in their hearts, helping them to do the things contained in the law. Today, all non Christians have conscience too. But their conscience may be seared, or damaged to such an extent that it no longer serves as a moral compass to guide them. This is one sad fact. The conscience can become weaker. If Sylvia had ignored or reasoned with her conscience and shoplifted, her conscience would shout softer the next round. Then, her conscience may only whisper. And soon, she will be a seasoned thief. In the day of judgment, to her horror, her conscience will stand up before God the Judge as a WITNESS against her, telling God all the secret, sinful things she has done.

Thank God, Christians have something stronger than the conscience. It is the Law of God. It will not compromise or change its standard of right and wrong no matter what the world says. Stealing is a sin and that is it. But beware. You who know the law and yet continue in sin, God will judge you with the Law. In the end, you will still stand condemned.

The only way to escape condemnation is by grace.

Thought: Is my conscience seared?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to hide your law in my heart so that I will not sin against you. In Jesus' most precious name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S NAME IS BLASPHEMED!

Paul said God's name was blasphemed – “blaspheme” means “rail at, speak evil against”. The people behaved as if they were so holy, condemning others yet they commit the same sins.

A few years ago, a pastor tried to cheat by making changes to his parking coupon to avoid paying for parking. He was caught and he ran with the coupon, trying to swallow that piece of evidence. In 2012, church leaders were hauled to court for allegedly cheating a church of a lot of money. Non-Christians say, “If Christians really do this, I don't want to be a Christian!!” Many think this way and it is such a shame.

Lynn attended church since she was young and her friends knew her as a Christian. In school one day, girls huddled together during recess. Lynn was there - they were planning to cheat during their Chinese spelling. Surprisingly, they were not caught! The teacher did not know these few girls cheated. After school, they walked happily home but suddenly, one girl turned to Lynn and said in Singlish, “Christians can also cheat meh?”

What about you? You call yourself a Christian. Yet if you lie, cheat during tests, gossip, read questionable literature, always forget to do homework, get addicted to hand phone games, talk rudely to your teachers and parents... then your friends and classmates will not think your God is good at all. In fact, they may even think, “What good is it to worship such a God!”

Because of you, God's name is blasphemed among your unbelieving friends and relatives!

Thought: Do I put God's name in shame?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive me for bringing shame to your name because of my sins. Help me to be a good testimony so I will bring glory to your name. It is very difficult for me to do it so gracious Father, please help me. In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

I AM BAPTISED

Once, I asked an elderly lady from a Catholic church, “Are you saved?” She replied, “I am baptized.” Somehow, she believes baptism could save. No, baptism does not save. The Jews have similar problems. Every Jewish male child 8 days old was circumcised, to mark them out as God’s special people. They seemed to think that circumcision saves - trusting in some OUTWARD form of behaviour.

But Paul said this outward cutting of the foreskin would not save them. By now, Paul had already pointed out their hypocrisy – they did not do what they preached.

On the other hand, the Gentiles obeyed God’s law. They were circumcised ‘in the heart, in the spirit’.

Dear children, are you bound for heaven? What makes you think so?

- “I go to church, I know the bible very well”
- “I give offerings”
- “My parents are Christians”
- “I give out tracts and invite classmates to church”
- “I was baptized as a baby”
- “I asked Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour”

These are outward behaviour. Jesus make a scary comment in Matthew 7:21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Dear children, on that day, would you be the ones who cried ‘Lord, Lord’ or the ones who is doing the will of the Father now? Even though you may ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior, you must desire to do God’s will and obey Him. Otherwise, asking Jesus to be your Lord may just be words without meaning!

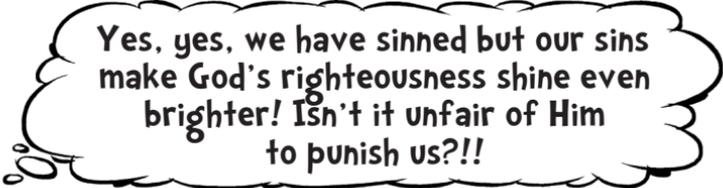
Thought: Man look on the outside but God looks on the inside.

Prayer: God, I want to be a Christian in my heart. Help me to truly repent of my sins and own Jesus as my Saviour and obey Him from my heart. In Jesus’ Name I pray, Amen.

RIDICULOUS EXCUSE!

By this time, Paul has proven that both Gentiles and Jews were sinners. So, what's the point of being a Jew? The Jews had a very special privilege – they were made guardian of the bible! Such an honour, Paul highlighted in verse 1-2.

But by then, because they were told they were sinners like Gentiles, many Jews started thinking in their hearts:



**Yes, yes, we have sinned but our sins
make God's righteousness shine even
brighter! Isn't it unfair of Him
to punish us?!!**

My jaw dropped when reading this. What about yours? Yet many times, we do make many unreasonable excuses for our sins!

Jack is envious of his younger brother James. James is always the good boy before Mummy's eyes. But the fact is true. He is more obedient than Jack. One day, after Mummy scolded Jack for doing something wrong, he shouted, "Yah! I WILL be ' badder 'so you can still have your goody boy (James) with you!"

Dear children, when our sins are pointed out,

- do not be angry and do not make excuses
- repent and pray for forgiveness from God
- make right

Be like David, when Nathan pointed out his sin of adultery and murder: 2 Samuel 12:13, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die."

Thought: May we recognize our errors and repent!

Prayer: God, give me a meek and teachable heart to admit my sins and repent. Often I am too proud to admit I am wrong, so gracious Father, please help me to be humble. In Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS MAN LIKE?

You get different answers to the question “What is Man like?":
“Mm, man is born good but influenced by the environment and turned bad”

“Babies are so cute; they have no sin”

“Man is worse than animals!”

In verses 9 and 10, Paul concluded that both the Jews and the Gentiles have sinned. “There is none righteous, no, not one.” What a sentence! It has with triple negatives – none, no, not. Surely the message is very clear!

I once tried to evangelize to a dear old lady. She singlehandedly brought up 9 children by taking on many jobs. Even when she was poor, she would still share the little she had when someone asked for help. So, when I told her ‘all have sinned’, she raised her voice angrily at me, “Sin? What sin do I have?!”

Indeed she was a responsible mother and compassionate friend. It was very difficult for her to accept what God said about her. There are many like her, who are responsible, kind people and have never committed any crimes in their entire life. Yet Paul is teaching us that all have sinned!

The first step to salvation or believing in Jesus is to know we have sinned. If we do not think we have sinned, we would not want to seek forgiveness, and if we don't seek forgiveness, we won't be forgiven or saved.

Thought: May I acknowledge my sins before God

Prayer: Father in heaven, help me to see myself as a sinner before you who needs the Saviour to save me from my sin. I know I need to be cleansed and I pray that on a daily basis, I will stay faithful to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

RIGHTEOUSNESS IN MY ACCOUNT

The Jews were proud of Abraham their father and so Paul used him as an example to teach that Abraham was not saved by doing good works. Abraham believed God and God imputed (put into his account) righteousness to him.

Little Peter was all excited. He was going to the OCBC bank with his mummy. His mummy was going to help him start a “Mighty Saver” Kid’s account. At the bank, the polite cashier said he needed to put in a minimum sum of money to start his account. Peter looked dismayed. He had no money. Then Mummy drew out a \$50 note and gave to the cashier. The cashier typed something and took even took Peter’s fingerprint. Peter finally walked home with that little book tightly in his hand, gleaming from ear to ear. He opened it and saw \$50 to his name. “Wow! I am now rich,” he said to himself.

Peter did not earn the money nor saved it himself. It was put into his account by his mother. Likewise, Abraham did not do any good work to earn any righteousness. Christ put His righteousness into Abraham’s account. With Christ’s righteousness, Abraham could go to heaven.

All these happened BEFORE Abraham was circumcised. So again, it was not the circumcision that made him righteous.

Salvation is all of grace. It is God who shows His grace to us by giving us faith to believe that Christ came and died on the cross, bearing our sins. He not only take away our sins when we believe in Him, He also imputed His righteousness on us so we can qualify for heaven.

Thought: We do nothing to save ourselves, for Christ did it all.

Prayer: Thank you God, for your giving me faith to believe in you so that my sins are forgiven and Christ’s righteousness is imputed onto me. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

NO SIN IN MY ACCOUNT!

Peter was afraid. He has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour since he was 7. He acknowledged his sinfulness, knew that the wages of sin was death and that he could not do anything to save himself. He knew only Jesus Christ could as He took his sins upon himself and died on the cross. He Is the only Way, the Truth and the Life. But somehow, he still sinned even after he repented of his sin. He was worried he will go to hell.

Then he read Romans 4:7-8 and found the peace.

In these verses, we learn that All our sins - past, present and future- are forgiven the moment we believe. God will never put any sin into our account each time we sin on earth. That's why "blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Romans 4:8) Even if it is just one sin in our account, we are doomed. Instead, God sees us as totally without sin all the time. This is called positional holiness.

But a Christian still commit sins on earth and he must suffer earthly consequences for them. If you lie, you still get spanking from your parents but you will never lose your salvation because God has forgiven this sin. He will not bring it up again on the day of judgment. What you need to do now is to confess each time you sin so you will find the joy and peace of God again.

Peter grinned from ear to ear when he understood this.

Do you?

Thought: I am so glad Jesus "paid it all"!

Prayer: Thank you God for my Lord Jesus Christ who died to take away ALL my sins - past, present and future. In Jesus' name I give thanks, Amen.

HOW STRONG IS YOUR FAITH?

God said Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Just how strong was his faith? Why was he called the father of faith? Consider these...

- Romans 4:18, He, against hope, believed in hope.
- Romans 4:19a, He was not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead.
- Romans 4:20, He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;
- Romans 4:21, And being fully persuaded that, what God had promised, he was able also to perform.

Do you have this kind of faith? When everything seems hopeless, you still do not lose hope?

This faith goes beyond earthly, physical strength. Abraham and Sarah were probably older than your grandparents yet Abraham still believed God could fulfill His promise through their old, unfruitful bodies to give birth to a baby. Dear child, your physical strength is small, you need to look to God, just like Abraham, to claim God's promises.

'Staggered' means 'separated or withdrew'. Abraham did not separate himself from the promise of God. Instead, he clung tightly to this promise day by day, not once unbelieving, for 25 long years! For you and I, our faith waver from day to day. We must not waver, even when things seem to go against us, or when the hope is too far away, we must still believe, giving glory to God.

Finally, Abraham was FULLY persuaded in his heart that when God makes a promise, He is able and He will keep it. No one needed to speak to him to convince or persuade him. He knew the character of God very well, that God cannot lie and that He is omnipotent to fulfill all promises He made in the bible.

Thought: The church will be very strong if we have many like Abraham.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, increase my faith. Also let me discover more promises in the bible so I can lay hold on them by faith and claim these promises. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DIE FOR MY ENEMY?

Mr Brown has a nasty neighbour. He destroyed Mr Brown's vegetable garden, poisoned his chickens, stole his eggs and even killed Mr Brown's old, faithful dog Patch. One day, this neighbour was attacked by some violent gangsters. Mr Brown sent his teenage son over and said, "Go and protect him with your life!" And his son was killed while saving that nasty neighbor.

What do you think of this story? Mr Brown must be crazy! Why bother to save a wicked enemy?!

Similarly, this is how God loves you and me. By nature, we hate God: we do not like to worship him, to read His Word; we break his laws day and night and even hate those He sends to tell us about God. In Old Testament times, many prophets were killed. Yet God's Word said, when we were _____ we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Romans 5:10).

Using human logic, we would not be able to understand why or how God loves us, despite our sin. But in Romans 5:8, we read "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet _____ Christ died for us."

Yet another verse said, when we were yet _____, in due time Christ died for the _____.

We cannot understand! Why did God do it? John 3:16 gives the answer: For God _____, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Thought: How great God's love is!

Prayer: Thank you God, for loving me when I was your enemy, a sinner, ungodly, without strength to save myself. Please help me to love you more and more. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DEATH BY SIN

Humans have a representative in Adam, the first man created by God. He was made perfect and holy, i.e. without sin. He was put to a test, but he failed and as a result, sin entered the world. But thank God He is gracious for God killed an animal and gave the skin to Adam and Eve to cover themselves when they realized they were naked. That was the first death in the world. And the death of that blameless animal is an indication of the death of our sinless Jesus who died on our behalf. However, sin has its penalties and it is death. Today, we see the impact of that failure of Adam.

I once went to a cemetery in Choa Chu Kang to see my father-in-law's tomb. As I walked about, I came upon a tombstone. On it were a few small model cars. I sighed to see the picture of a little boy of about 5 years old on the tombstone. Yes, sin entered into the world when Adam took of the forbidden fruit and death passed upon all men, even you and I.

So, even that little boy of about 5 had to die. And sometimes even babies die.

But praise be to God! Christ rose from the dead and has victory over sin and death! That's why He said in John 11:25-26 "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Thought: Do you believe in Jesus?

Prayer: All merciful God, thank you for your Word of life which warns me of the danger I am in. Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who can deliver me from this death. I pray I will be faithful to Him and to live a life that would please You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DEAD TO SIN

My cousin's dog Yo-Yo just died. My cousin can shake it, call its name, throw its favourite ball at it, put its favourite snack near its mouth, but Yo-Yo will never respond. He is dead to all these sights and sounds and touch and pleasures of this world.

God's Word says that when we repent and believe in Jesus as our Saviour, we are dead to sin. Sin is no longer your master. You do not need to obey sin when it comes knocking on your heart's door. As Yo-Yo does not respond to my cousin's temptations of a ball or snack, so we Christians should not respond to the world's temptations. Is it possible? Yes. But is it easy? Frankly, no.

"I can't help it, I'm always like this", a boy excused himself when his hot temper was pointed out. "Ah! But you are now a Christian! You cannot say 'can't help it' anymore! You don't have to obey your sinful temper!"

Dear boys and girls, are you a Christian? If you are, you are to be dead to sin. You must have the great desire NOT to sin. When you fall into sin, you will quickly confess to God and NOT wish to sin this sin again. You will NOT give up fighting against this sin that comes to tease you again and again. Tell yourself that you are dead to sin!

My PLEDGE TO FIGHT AGAINST MY SINS

I, _____, WILL NOT
(list your common sins)

SIGNATURE: _____

Thought: Christian boys and girls are in a battle everyday, against sin!

Prayer: Lord, give me strength to fight this battle daily, for it is not easy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHY THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?

Long ago, I asked my children, “How do you go heaven?” One answered, “By keeping the 10 Commandments.” Another quipped, “Be a good boy.”

This was the Jews’ way of thinking too. Can keeping the 10 Commandments save you? “Yes, if you are able to keep it PERFECTLY”



A young ruler once came to Jesus and said, “Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?” When Jesus listed out the 5th – 9th commandments, he said proudly, “All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?”

But Jesus saw that he has broken the first commandment – to have no other gods before the Almighty Lord – because this rich young ruler loved and worshipped money way above any love for God. He was already very wealthy, perhaps also coveted for more riches and was not willing to let it go. He went away sad and mostly importantly, unsaved.

So, what’s the use of God giving us the 10 Commandments? It is not so much to save us but to show us our sins! We see how weak we are, how sinful we are because we keep breaking them though we try. The law condemns us to hell each time we sin.

Death is the punishment for sin but instead of us dying, God the Father sent His Son to die on our behalf. We are saved NOT by keeping the law but by GRACE through faith in Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins and His resurrection.

Thought: Heaven will not be filled with proud people boasting how they have kept the law. Heaven will be filled with humble people who know they have sinned but saved by the grace of God.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank you for freeing me from the condemnation of the law by sending your Son to die for my sins. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

WAR IN ME!

Sarah came back from school crying. “What happened, dear?” asked Mummy.

“Mummy, that naughty Tommy grabbed my storybook. I was angry. I tried to remember not to be angry but in the end I pushed him to the floor and both of us got punished!” sobbed the girl, “I know God doesn’t want me to get angry and fight but...”

Dear children, do you have this same struggle too? Things you know God says you must not do, you end up doing. Things you know God wants you to do, yet you do not do. Guess what? Paul, the great apostle and writer of so many epistles of the bible, also faced the same problem as you!

It is like a war inside you. Your sinful nature is the ‘old man’. It cannot do anything but sin. Since you become God’s child, His Holy Spirit lives in you. So, anytime your ‘old man’ wants to do evil, the Holy Spirit will tell you it is wrong. He says He has given you this power to overcome the ‘old man’. When you obey God the Holy Spirit, you win the war. When you decide not to listen to Him, your ‘old man’ will win and you end up doing something wrong, and you feel VERY lousy after that.

“What must I do to win the war?” Sarah asked, rubbing her tears away.

“Pray. Pray every morning before you go to school, that God will strengthen you. Any time you feel the war coming, pray again. Even if you fail, pray for forgiveness and be prepared to win the next fight again.”

Thought: May I be led by the Holy Spirit to do more right!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, lead me not into temptations but deliver me from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

ALL THINGS FOR GOOD

Dear children, do you use words like ‘luckily’, ‘bad luck’? If you do, you have to stop now. This ‘luck’ means an accidental event that turns out good or no good to you. But to Christians, there are no accidents. God causes all things to happen in our lives with a good purpose.

I share a story of a boy from Vietnam. Cong Tuan was from quite a rich family with land and pig farms. He was sent to study in an International School in Ho Chi Minh City and after two years, he was preparing to go to America to further his studies and his goal was to earn lots of money. But before he could go, disaster struck. Cong Tuan fell sick and doctor said he had blood cancer! He was only 17! The people in his home town said it was a ‘generational curse’ and he was the ‘unlucky one’.

Today, he praises God.

Why? Because through his illness, his mother and sister brought him to Singapore to get treatment. For the first time, he heard of God the Creator and our Lord Jesus Christ who loved him so much that He came to earth to die for his sins. He believed. His sister also believed and both were baptized in our church in 2012. Slowly, his mother, who was initially feeling very hopeless, also came to know



God. His father fell ill sometime ago and he finally also accepted Jesus as His Saviour. What miracle upon miracle!

So, he can say, “I know my family’s loss of wealth and my cancer work together for good, because through it, God saves me and my family”.

Thought: When bad things happen to me, is it because of my sin or because God is using these to increase my faith?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I will not fear no matter what happens to me, because you will make all things work out for my good. I praise you in Jesus’ name, Amen.

[Written with permission from Nguyen Cong Tuan, on 21 Jan 2013. He was called home to the Lord on 24 February 2013]

GOD, SAVE MY AH MA!

Paul had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart” for his own people, the Jews. The Jews were the privileged people. They were given the law, the love and protection of God and most of all, Jesus Christ came from the Jewish line! YET, they did not believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Paul wished he would be cursed in order that his people might be saved. What great love he had for his own people, and the salvation of their souls.

What about you? Do you have great concern for the souls of your family and relatives and friends who do not know God?

Li En heard in Sunday School that all had sinned and it was appointed unto men once to die and then judgment. Without Christ, they would end up in hell! She was very troubled. She turned and tossed in her bed and wept for someone dear to her, “God, save my Ah Ma!”

Ah Ma worshipped idols for years. Even Mother could not persuade her to go to church. Li En made up her mind she would try to invite her. Every week, she asked, “Ah Ma, can you go to church with me this Sunday?” “Ai ya, I have to go market”. But Li En did not give up asking. Ah Ma said, “I have to play taiji with my friends... I have to go for dim sum with them...”

This went on for a few years. Li En kept asking but by now, Ah Ma stopped answering because she ran out of excuses.

One Sunday morning, Grandma woke up in a bad mood. She also had a tiff with Grandpa and wanted to get out of the house. She picked up the phone to call Li En, “What time is your church service?”

God rewarded Li En’s perseverance! Ah Ma was welcomed by many people in church. “Will you come again?” they asked. “See first, lah!” was her reply. But the next week, she came again! And again! She was finally baptized and when she died years later, Li En was comforted, because she knew she would see Ah Ma in heaven one day.

Thought: How many of us really pray and cry for the souls of our family, relatives and friends before God?

Prayer: Father in heaven, give me a burden for the souls of my family, relatives and friends, that I may pray and invite them to church. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

ELECTION

Many people think God saves those who are good or kind. Does God choose to save good children, or those of a special ability? What do you think?

Paul revealed something astonishing - God has already elected (chosen) who to save even before we are born! EVEN before the world was created! Wow!

Our character does not influence God one single bit in His choice! Rom 9:11 tells us this : “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil...” Paul gave the example of two children: God elected the cunning rascal, Jacob, and not the gullible Esau. So, if you are a believer, don’t be too proud of yourself! Don’t ever think God chooses you (and not that school bully) just because that you are obedient to the bible and you are a good boy.

“Unfair! Unfair!” shout some.

This part of the bible teaches us the SOVERIGNTY of GOD. He is God, He is King, He is the Creator, He can do everything according to His good pleasure and who are we to question His actions? Did you ever play with clay modeling or play-dough? Have you ever molded a beautiful thing and an ugly one? Can the ugly one stand out and scold you and say, “Why do you make me so ugly?” If it ever did, you would just crush it flat to silence it. How dare the dough speak out against me!

Instead of saying “unfair”, you who are a Christian should say, “Thank you God, for choosing me to know Jesus as my Saviour and be saved.

Thought: Thank God He chose me, so to Him I must ever be grateful.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for saving me out of the millions in this world. I pray that I’d learn to be a better Christian every day and to accept your power over all. In Jesus’ name I give thanks and praise. Amen.

FAITH COMETH BY HEARING

Dear children? How did you come to know about Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world?

“Mummy read the bible to me”. “Someone told me”.

God says the **NORMAL** way someone becomes a Christian is “...faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Paul knew the importance of this too, which was why he tried his best to tell people the Word of God. Today, let us focus on how children **HEAR** the Word of God. You attend Sunday School. What is in your mind each time you hear the Word of God?



How should you listen to the Word of God?

1. Be attentive

Satan doesn't like it at all whenever God's Word is preached, because he didn't want you to be saved! If you are not attentive in class, this is what Satan will do: Luke 8:12 "...then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

2. Have faith in the bible

Hebrews 4:2, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."

Thought: The Word of God is so important for my soul!

Prayer: All merciful and gracious God, please give me attentiveness and faith each time the Word of God is taught to me. I know often I stray and even daydream, so gracious Father, do please help me. In Jesus' Name I pray, Amen.

A LIVING SACRIFICE 1

When I was a young non-Christian, I saw how my mother killed a live chicken by cutting its throat with a knife. Blood spurted out. She threw it into a pail and covered it. The chicken squawked and bumped about in the pail, making a lot of noise. Finally it became silent. Mother boiled a huge pot of water and poured into the pail. Most of the feathers came off. She cleaned it further until it was white and clean. The chicken was steamed, ready to be eaten. But it was not placed on our dining table yet; we had to offer it to an altar full of idols. The chicken was first presented to these idols as a sacrifice to feed them. A dead sacrifice. Are we surprised that sacrifices are dead? No, all sacrifices are dead!

The first 11 chapters of Romans contain wonderful and profound doctrines and they help the believer understand the great truths of Christianity. However, doctrine alone is not enough; we have to be sure we live out what we say we believe. So Paul introduces in this chapter the practical aspects of the Christian faith, and starts by giving a concept that is new to man: a sacrifice that is alive. How can a sacrifice be alive?

The passage relates to the Old Testament concept of sacrifices and these sacrifices are all of animals. However, the saints in the Old Testament were not confused; they knew that the physical sacrifices were an outward symbol of an inward reality that they were to offer their spiritual lives to God.

In this passage, Paul tells us to offer ourselves? What does it mean? First of all, let us remember these verses were given to Christians. A non-Christian would find these 2 verses illogical, and they would not be able to offer themselves to God! So dear child, as we look into these 2 verses for 2 days, this is the first and most important point – that it means our soul is offered to God – that means we are saved.

Are you saved? Are you sure you are saved? Does your life show that you are changed? Is your temper better? Are you more helpful to others and more obedient to parents? You see dear child, it is pointless to say you are saved unless you see that you have changed!

Thought: May I be sure I am saved.

Prayer: Father in heaven, please help me to be sure I am saved. I remember that being saved is not just to say “I am saved”, but to know I have sinned against You and that I need Jesus to come into my life, and to see a change in my life away from sin and selfishness. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

A LIVING SACRIFICE 2

Yesterday we learnt that for someone to offer himself as a sacrifice, he must first be a Christian. Today, we want to explore 2 other concepts. The first is that the Christian must offer his body to God. This is quite clear from the verse for it tells us that we are to “present your bodies a living sacrifice”. What does that mean, though? It is to honor God with our bodies, to not sin with our bodies. Dear children, it is so important to make sure that we do not just say we are Christians, we must be certain the lives we live demonstrate the presence of the Holy Spirit and that is why Paul tells us to “present or offer our bodies” to God. You will remember that the Christian’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. So if the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we must surely be controlled by Him. What you say and do are so very important, after knowing the wonderful truths of the bible.

The second concept we learn today is that we are to offer God our minds. Read verse 2 and see that it says, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”. Before our minds are renewed, we read first that we are not to be conformed to the world. That means we do not follow the thinking and practices of the world. You may already have heard of other children who like to dress in expensive clothes, who boast of their parents’ wealth, brag of the beautiful places they go to for holidays. Instead, our minds need to be filled with the things of God. Our minds need to be filled with the wonderful teachings of the bible. We need to remember the bible lessons your JW teachers have given. You should be able to recall memory verses learnt. We need to put into practice the lessons of humility, contentment, forgiveness. There are just so many other lessons we can see more developed in our lives!

Thought: May I be a worthy sacrifice for God!

Prayer: Thank You heavenly Father for reminding me of the precious lessons in these 2 verses. I know that often I fail to present my body as a living sacrifice or to have my mind renewed. Teach me gracious Lord to always go back to You in prayer, to always go back to You and seek Your help. Hear this my humble cry, for I ask in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

HE'S MY ENEMY!

Yang En came back from school crying. He had an ugly bruise on his left cheekbone. Mum was naturally concerned and wanted to find out why. "Daniel punched me!" Yang En sobbed. "He threw my badminton racket on the floor during recess... I pushed him away and he punched me..."

Since that incident, Yang En kept gossiping about Daniel, "... teacher scolded him today... Daniel mixes with those bad upper primary boys... he will be a gangster ...his father came to school today... he will get a bashing from him, I'm sure ...no, I won't invite him to church, he will bully everyone."

Do you think Yang En's attitude is what a Christian should do?

What does God say about our enemies? "Recompense to no man evil for evil" (Romans 12:17). It means we do not give tit for tat. Yang En dared not fight back the bully after that black eye incident because the bully was stronger. But in his heart, he hated the bully and wished the bully would get into trouble. He was secretly rejoicing in his heart when Daniel was punished. Perhaps he might be on the lookout to report Daniel to the discipline master anytime Daniel misbehaved.

God does not want us to take revenge. In fact, He will take revenge for us. He will see to it that the bully is suitably punished. We do not need to plan for our enemy's downfall. Instead we must do the opposite! We must love him. If he is in need, we must help him! We must overcome evil with good!

"Impossible! No way!" you say.

Mother taught Yang En that he should pray for Daniel. With God's help, all things are possible, even doing good to our enemies. They will see the love of God through your behaviour and may even come to church!

Thought: If God can forgive us, why can't we forgive others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today's lesson. I know I have never done it but today, I'd like to pray for someone I don't really like (insert names _____) Help me to be kind to them and forgive and love them like how you love me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SUBMIT TO AUTHORITIES

In this chapter, Paul taught Christians they must submit to the government. During this time, the Jews were under the rule of the Romans, and this instruction must have been a very tough one for the Christian Jews to follow.

Interestingly, He did not tell them to overthrow the Romans. The reason given is: God's power to rule is passed to different groups of people. To the country, He passes the power to a government; to a family the parents; to a school the principal and teachers; to a church the Board of Elders. To defy and rebel against these people in power is actually to rebel against God!

What lesson can you learn today? That you are to submit and obey your parents, your teachers, and your leaders in church. Often, we tend to obey our teachers more than our parents. That is wrong. As children, learn to appreciate and love your parents, and one of the best ways to show appreciation is to obey them!

So the next time you feel like murmuring and complaining against these groups of people, remember, you are murmuring and complaining against God!

Instead, we must pray for them, that they will have the fear of God in their heart and have the wisdom to rule correctly.

Are your parents Christian? If yes, thank God. If not, pray for their salvation. If you are the only Christian at home, God has given you the opportunity to witness to your parents and the best way to do so is to obey them, willingly!

Thought: May I learn to obey and appreciate authorities!

Prayer: Almighty God, Ruler of this whole wide world, may you give people in our government the fear of God in their hearts to rule wisely and not sin against you. For my parents, I pray they will be godly people and for me, I pray that I will learn to love and obey them more. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DON'T JUDGE OTHERS



“And Joab, always raising his hand during Sunday School class. He is trying to win the teacher’s favour!” This is not uncommon. Children may gossip about each other, and make judgment of someone too quickly without thinking.

Paul was teaching the Romans not to think too highly of themselves even as they judged others whom they thought were weaker in their Christian faith. By doing so, they would discourage (or stumble) these new Christians.

The reason given was: Everyone will answer to God for himself one day.

Whether I wear smart clothes or beach wear to church, I would have to stand before God one day to answer for my actions. Whether I raise my hands during class or dream in class, I would also have to answer to God one day for my actions. Instead of judging others, I had better check myself, that I do not sin.

Do you have new classmates in Sunday School? Newcomers or young Christians do not know many of God’s commands. We should befriend them with sincere hearts, show them patiently from the bible where they need to change, encourage and pray for them and with them. We don’t gossip about them.

Thought: When was the last time I did something to encourage the faith of someone?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive me of my sin of judging others. Help me to be an encouragement to someone instead. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HELP POORER CHRISTIANS

The Christians in Jerusalem were in need. They were persecuted for believing in Jesus Christ. Many lost their jobs and some men were put into jail, leaving wives and children without care. When the gentile Christians in Macedonia and Achaia heard of this, they immediately raised funds to help their poorer Jewish brethren.

I knew of this Christian lady. She did not have much. She had a daughter and was pregnant with another and she had to work to help support her family. When she heard a church member had cancer, she immediately gave of her earnings as a love gift to this fellow Christian.

Even a little child like you can help. Each week, when the offering bag is passed around, a little girl called Faith would drop a brown envelope into the bag. She didn't have much, maybe \$1, but she would remember this poor and sick Christian and give to him. She heard of his need from her mother and decided to give part of her pocket money to him each week. Sometimes, she would ask her siblings to put their money in together with hers into the envelope too.

God wants us to do good to all men and especially fellow Christians. Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Here's homework for you:

1. Get hold of a brown offering envelope.
2. Read the names of people and churches to whom offerings were given.
3. Ask your parent or JW teacher to find out more about them.
4. Give to them using the brown offering envelope as God moves your heart.

Thought: May I help others in practical ways.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for always providing for all my needs. Help me also to be sensitive to those who are in need so that I can help them. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

MEASURING TAPE

Peter looked up from the scale model of an old castle he was building. He grinned at his father who had come into the messy living room in their Ang Mo Kio flat. "Hi, Dad. I was just measuring the roof to make sure it will fit well," said Peter. "My castle looks great, don't you think?" Dad went over to look at the tiny buildings. "Yes, it does," he agreed.

"I can't wait to see it all painted and finished," said Peter, "but there's still a lot to do first. I have to measure carefully to get everything the right size." Dad watched a little longer. "Before you get too involved here," he said, "I think you should do your lesson for the JW meeting. Or have you already finished that?"

"No." Peter sighed. "I really want to finish of this tonight," he said. "I know, but..." Dad paused and picked up the measuring tape Peter had been using. "Do you really need this?" Dad asked. "You could get done faster if you'd just guess how big to make each piece instead of taking time to measure them." Peter shook his head. "Then it wouldn't turn out right. The pieces wouldn't fit together like they should. You have to use a tape," he insisted.

Dad nodded. "We need another kind of tape to use in our lives," he reminded Peter. "We need something to tell us how God wants us to live. It wouldn't be good to guess at the measurements for your buildings, and it isn't good to guess at how God wants you to behave in your daily life, either."

Peter shrugged but didn't look up from working with his building pieces. "So... what do you suppose the measuring tape for life is?" Dad asked.

Peter stopped working and looked up at his father. "It's the Bible, isn't it?" asked Peter. Dad nodded. "So you're saying that by doing my Bible lesson I'll be learning things about God and how I should act?" Again Dad nodded. "Well... okay," agreed Peter. "I'll go and finish the lesson. I guess my model castle can wait one more day."

"Right," approved Dad. "And whenever you learn something God wants of you, be sure to do it."

Thought: Do you use the measuring tape – the Bible - God provided for your life?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You I am able to Sunday school or some other Bible study. Help realize the Bible is my "measuring tape" in life, that it gives principles and lessons to guide my behavior in my daily relationships with family, teachers, and friends. And it helps me know what pleases You and what does not. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ARE YOU GROWING, SPIRITUALLY?

"You're growing really fast!" Mark's mother stood with tape measure in hand. She had just checked to see how much he had grown since the last time they measured. "Almost two inches," she announced. "Wow!" Mark was impressed with himself. "Hey, Mom, what makes kids grow?" he asked.

"Well, a healthy diet, good exercise, and plenty of rest are important," Mom replied. "Of course, it's really God who gives life and has made our bodies so that they will grow." "I wish I were as tall as Dad," said Mark.

"Someday you may be taller," replied Mom with a smile. "Sometimes kids grow taller than their parents. But if you don't grow that tall, that's okay, too." "William says he hangs by his hands from a bar every day, hoping he'll get taller," said Mark. "I say he'll just get long arms if he does that."

Mom laughed. "He'll probably just get sore arms," she said. "Like I said, how tall you grow isn't terribly important, and there's not a whole lot you can do about it anyway." Mom paused and she patted her son's arm. "There is one kind of growth that you can do something about, though."

"What kind is that?" asked Mark eagerly. "It's your spiritual growth. The food you eat helps you grow physically, and the Bible is like food that helps you grow spiritually," replied Mom.

"Oh, right." Mark nodded. "We had a memory verse that called the Bible milk." "Yes, that's in First Peter. It says we should want the milk of the word, and like you said, that's referring to the Bible. Like new born babies we must crave the milk of the Bible and then, we can grow spiritually as we apply what it says to our lives," Mom explained.

"My Sunday school teacher says a new baby is cute, but if it never grows, there's something wrong," said Mark. "He says that's true of new Christians, too. They should keep growing as the months and years go by." "That's right," agreed Mom.

Thought: Are you a growing Christian?

Prayer: Gracious Father, I know my spiritual growth has perhaps been slower than my physical growth. Teach me to be more focused on my spiritual growth and to believe and trust You more fully as I learn more of the Bible. As I accept and obey the Bible, surely You would use it to help me grow spiritually. This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

JESUS UNDERSTANDS US!

Ling scrunched her nose against the viewing window of the hospital nursery. Her baby brother was just five hours old. He lay snuggled in a blue blanket and was wearing a tiny knit cap on his fuzzy head. He whimpered a little and nuzzled into the blanket.

Dad walked up behind Ling and squeezed her shoulders gently. She smiled up at him. “So how does it feel to be a big sister?” Dad asked. Ling answered by doing a complete twirl on her tip-toes, right there in the hall of the hospital. “It feels great!” she said.

A little later, Ling and her father walked hand-in-hand to the MRT station as they had to go to church for Ling’s bible study on the book of Luke. “Dad, when Jesus was born, do you think he was as little as our baby?” asked Ling thoughtfully. “Maybe even smaller—our little guy is a pretty big boy,” replied Dad. “And you know, babe, the Lord Jesus didn’t have a nice, modern hospital and nice, little bassinet to sleep in, like our little baby Kok Seng has.”

“No.” Ling shook her head. “Mrs. Ang, my Sunday school teacher, told us Jesus was born in a stable, far away from home,” she said. “Yes,” Dad replied. “He didn’t have all the comfortable things today’s babies have.”

“Mrs. Ang says Jesus knows just what it’s like to live and grow like we do,” said Ling. The MRT’s stream of cold air made her shiver a little, and she huddled closer to dad. “I guess He knows what it’s like to feel cold, too.”

“That’s true, honey,” said Daddy. “Since He came as a baby and grew up on earth, it helps us know He understands everything that happens to us—both the problems and the good things. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Ling nodded. “Then He knows what it’s like to have a baby brother,” she said with a little bounce. “When my very own baby brother gets big enough, I’m going to make sure he knows all about Jesus being a baby, too!”

Thought: Do you realize Jesus understands all you’re going through?

Prayer: My God of love, thank You for the most precious gift of love in Jesus and that He came as a little baby and grew up on earth just like me. And He understands my problems—temptations, tiredness, loneliness, and everything else. And He can help me go through them! Thank You in His precious name, Amen.

BEST FRIEND

When Anthony returned home for dinner, he came in whistling a happy tune. Mom smiled. “You certainly are in a good mood,” she said. “Of course, I just spent the whole afternoon with my very best friend in the whole wide world,” replied Anthony. “Tong Leng and I had fun today.”

“I see,” said Mom. “What makes him your very best friend in the whole wide world?”

Anthony thought a moment. “Well, we always have fun playing games or talking or just hanging out,” he explained. “We help each other, and we cheer each other up if one of us feels bad about something.” Anthony nodded. “We’d rather spend time together than with any of the other guys. That means we’re best friends,” he declared.

Mom nodded. “You know what?” she said in a quiet, gentle voice. “You just described my relationship with my best friend, too—except for one thing. My best friend did something extra special for me a long time ago. Something no other friend could ever do.”

“Really? What did your best friend do for you?” wondered Anthony. Mom smiled. “He loved me so much that He died for me so I can spend eternity with Him,” she said. “Oh! You’re talking about Jesus, aren’t you?” asked Anthony. “I never really thought about Him as a best friend.”

“He’ll be your best friend if you let Him,” said Mom. “You can do some of the same kinds of things with Jesus that you like to do with Tong Leng, and He can understand you perfectly not just because He is God but also because He went through life as you and I did! You can include Jesus in everything you do. He’s always there for you, just like a best friend.”

“Yes, He is, isn’t He?” said Anthony thoughtfully. He grinned. “I guess Tong Leng won’t mind much if he’s only my second best friend, especially after I tell him who my very best friend in the whole wide world really is,” he said. “And I’ll tell him I don’t mind if he makes Jesus his best friend, too.”

Do you have a best friend?

Thought: Is Jesus a good friend? The best friend?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for friends for they are a blessing—especially Christian friends. And also thank You for the reminder that even more special is the friendship I may have with Jesus, the most faithful friend I can ever have. In His holy name I pray, amen.

LIFT-OFF

“I wish I could have actually seen a space shuttle launch,” said Peter one evening. “At school today, we had a film about one. It showed a lot of the stuff the astronauts had to do, and we heard clips of them talking to the space control centre. It was really cool, but it’s not like seeing it for real!”

“Well, Singapore will never send a space shuttle up!” said his brother Patrick. “That’s true, but a Singaporean astronaut could fly in a US space shuttle!” replied Peter. “Not me,” chipped in their sister Grace. “I wouldn’t like to wear those special uniforms they have to put on. They’re not very pretty!”

The boys laughed. “Who cares about that?” scoffed Patrick. “I do,” declared Grace, “and I’m not going on any spaceship, either. It might crash right back down to the earth!”

Mom smiled. “Are you kids aware that all Christians will participate in a lift-off someday?” she asked. “They will? Oh... you mean when Jesus comes, don’t you?” asked Grace.

“That’s right,” said Mom. “When Jesus returns, He’ll take all those who believe in Him to heaven. And it is for only those who have repented of their sins and truly have Jesus as Lord and Saviour. It’s called the Rapture, and it’s like a lift-off!”

Patrick nodded. “Without using a spaceship,” he said. “Or those ugly clothes,” said Grace.

“No, we won’t need those kinds of uniforms or spaceships,” agreed Mom, “and it will all happen much quicker than the spaceship launch. It will be as quick as a flash—or as the Bible puts it, in the twinkling of an eye.’ It will be a wonderful event when Jesus comes again.”

“Well, even if I never do get to take off in one of our spaceships, I’ll take part in the lift-off when Jesus comes,” said Peter. He grinned. “Who knows? Maybe I’ll get to do both.”

Thought: Will you take part in the special lift-off that is coming?

Prayer: I ask heavenly Father for You to help me understand how important it is to trust in Jesus as Saviour. I know that when Jesus comes back in the clouds, all who have placed their faith in Him will rise to be with Him. This is such a wonderful promise, and I praise You for that in Jesus’ name, amen.

DARK UGLY LIE...

Wee Kiat paced his room. For a couple of days, he had meant to confess something to Mom. It grew harder to do each day he put it off. I've got to tell her, he thought with a sigh, so I might as well do it and get it over with.

When Wee Kiat reached the kitchen, he saw that the refrigerator was pulled away from the wall. Mom was kneeling behind it with a bucket of soapy water and a scrub brush. "What are you doing?" Wee Kiat asked. Mom looked up. "I'm trying to get rid of all this dirt that's collected on the floor back here," she said. "It's been hidden behind the refrigerator so long that it's really hard to scrub off." She got up and stretched.

Wee Kiat took a deep breath. "I... I have to tell you something." He hesitated. "Remember when my Sunday school teacher called me last week? He reminded me about a class project on Saturday morning. I wanted to go to a basketball game instead, so I told him you were sick and I had to stay home and help you."

Mom frowned and Wee Kiat hurried on. "Then last Sunday, I was really sick, so I didn't go to church and didn't see any of the kids on Sunday, and... well, in school on Monday, Noah gave me a get-well card for you and me from my Sunday school class. I didn't know what to do, so I took it, but I told him you're fine now." Wee Kiat held out the card.

"Well, you'd better call Noah right away!" Mom exclaimed. She looked at the card, and then she pointed to the floor. "The longer I let this scum hide behind the refrigerator, the worse it got." Wee Kiat looked thoughtful. "It's the same with sin--such as your lie," continued Mom. "The longer you waited to confess it, the more difficult it became to do that, right? You lied, and then the problem grew bigger when you took that card and let Noah think flowers would be acceptable. You'll have to repay the money for the card." With a sigh, Wee Kiat nodded. "That's after you confess what you did and apologize to them," Mom added sternly.

"Okay, Mom," murmured Wee Kiat. "I will. And I already confessed it to God."

Thought: Have you ever told a lie and then had to keep lying to hide the truth?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I know I need to confess lies—or any other sin—to You, and there are times when I need to confess to others, too. That's usually hard to do, but please Lord help me not to wait. The problem won't just go away, and in fact will grow worse. This is my humble cry in Jesus' name, Amen.

THE WAX FIGURES

“That looks like fun,” said Renee as her mother showed her how to make candles. Mom had thin sheets of wax and knew how to heat them just right and form special, interesting shapes. “Do you think I could make one shaped like a flower?” “Sure. When you’ve practiced a little more,” said Mom. “Make one or two simpler ones first.” “Okay,” agreed Renee, and she got busy with a new one.

They were interrupted by the telephone ring, and Renee dashed off to answer it. It was Erica, a church friend, and the girls chatted. When Renee returned where she and Mom were, she picked up the candle she had started. “Erica said Mr. Tan died,” Renee told her mother. “Grandpa knew him--remember? Grandpa told us once that he had witnessed to old Mr. Tan for years.” Renee frowned as she looked at the candle in her hand. The wax had become stiff, and it was almost impossible to form it the way she wanted to. “I wonder if Mr. Tan ever did accept Jesus,” Renee added.

“I don’t know,” said Mom. She pointed to the candle. “You know, hardened wax in that unfinished candle reminds me of the importance of giving yourself to Jesus while you’re young-- allowing God to mould your life,” she added. “When people get older, they sometimes become cold and hard—kind of like that wax did. Then they’re often less interested in being saved.”

Renee looked at the cold, stiff wax she was trying to make into a candle. “My JW teacher said that, too,” she replied. “She said there are a couple of reasons why it’s dangerous to wait.” “And what are they?” Mom asked.

“Well, first of all, we don’t know that we’ll live long enough to get old--we could die while we’re still young,” replied Renee. “And second, even if we do get old, it’s like you said--we might no longer be interested in being saved.” She smiled. “I’m glad I already know Jesus as my Saviour.”

Maybe you think you’ll do so later, when you’re older. Remember, when you get older—if you get older—you could become cold and hard toward the Gospel of Christ. Don’t wait. Waiting is dangerous. Make the decision and accept Jesus today. (Click the ABCs of Salvation link at the right.)

Thought: Have you accepted Jesus as your Saviour?

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank You I know I am saved because I have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Thank You for today’s reminder that I must try to witness to friends I have as soon as I have the opportunity! This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

REVENGE?

Derek quickly stepped into his classroom when he saw Jason coming down the hall. He's a big bully, Derek thought. He's always mean to me! He makes fun of me! Derek was right. One day Jason had teased him about his haircut. "You look like a dog," said Jason. The next day it was Derek's shirt. "Only girls wear shirts like that," Jason jeered. "Jason's so mean," Derek complained to his dad one evening.

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Dad. "I guess you'll have to remember that Jesus tells us to love our enemies. I know it's hard, but try to be nice to Jason. Pray for him." Derek sighed.

The next day, Derek and Jason were assigned to work together on a project. Derek wished he could hide. He glanced over at Jason. To his surprise, Jason looked nervous! Why? Derek wondered. Knowing Jason is weak in English, he picked up his English book and walked to Jason's desk.

"You want to read first, or shall I?" Derek asked. "You," Jason said. He put his head on his desk. "Jason, open your book, please," their teacher said. "Turn to page 37. I want you to read the first page." She smiled at Derek and walked away.

Jason's face flushed, but he turned to the correct page. It was about the fishing industry. Derek's eyes widened as Jason started to read . . . very slowly. "The f-f-f," he began. He stopped and started over. "The f-f-f-st..." Jason stopped again, and Derek grinned. "Pay back time!" thought Derek. I never paid attention to Jason's reading group. I didn't know he is so bad! As Jason continued to stumble over the word, Derek chuckled, but his dad's words came to mind: Jesus tells us to love our enemies. As Jason struggled with words, he looked scared.

"Sound it out, Jason," Derek whispered. "Keep the f' sound, and then make the sh' sound instead of st.' I'll help you." Derek couldn't believe what happened next. Jason looked up at him... and smiled!

Thought: Have you had a difficult time getting along with someone at school? A bully?

Prayer: My God, sometimes I feel like getting even with someone who has offended me but sometimes I can't avoid him or her. Remind me that You want me to love my enemies and pray for them. And so please help me to look for opportunities to share Jesus' love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOOD SAMARITAN?

Su Ling squirmed uncomfortably as she sat in her usual place in Sunday school. It wasn't that she didn't like her class; she did. But the week before, the lesson had been about the man known as the Good Samaritan, and someone had suggested that each class member try to be like him by doing something special for someone else in the coming week. Now I suppose everybody will be talking about what they did, and I have nothing to report, thought Su Ling.

Just like Su Ling expected, the kids were excited about what they had done. James was the first to bring it up. "On my way home from school, I saw an old man drop his newspaper on the sidewalk," said James as they waited for the class to begin, "so I stopped and picked it up for him."

"Cool," responded Brenda. "Our neighbor is in the hospital," she added. "She doesn't have any relatives living in Singapore, so I went twice to see her."

Mrs. Poh, the Sunday school teacher, nodded at both James and Brenda. "I'd say you certainly acted like good Samaritans last week, wouldn't you?" she asked the class. Everyone agreed.

James turned to Su Ling. "Did you do something special?" he asked her. Su Ling shook her head, somewhat embarrassed. "I had to hurry home after school every day," she replied. "My mom was sick all week."

Mrs. Poh smiled sympathetically. "Oh, that's too bad! Who took care of your little brother and made meals?" she asked. "I did," Su Ling said. "I just made instant noodles and salads—easy things like that."

Mrs. Poh nodded. "And did you stack the dishes in the sink to wait until your mother can do them?" she asked. Su Ling looked puzzled. "No," she said. "I washed them. It didn't take long."

Mrs. Poh looked around. "All who agree that Su Ling was a good Samaritan, raise your hand." Every hand was raised. "The things you did this week, Su Ling, were every bit as important and special as those done by the others," Mrs. Poh told her. "You helped in the place that's easiest to neglect—home. God is pleased when He sees you helping your family."

Surprised, Su Ling felt a little smile on her lips.

Thought: Do you help out at home?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn well today's lesson it should not be more fun to help a neighbor or a friend than to help at home! Teach me to start being a good Christian, starting from home! In Jesus' holy name, amen.

LOST?

As Rachel stood and looked around the mall, she cried as if her heart would break. “Are you lost?” someone asked her. “Y-yes.” Rachel sobbed as she nodded her head.

She knew the man talking to her was a security guard--her mother had ever pointed him out to her. “If you ever get lost,” her mother had said, “ask a security guard for help. Don’t go with anyone else!” “Will you take me to the lost and found?” asked Rachel through tears.

“Something like that,” said the guard with a smile. Rachel clung tightly to his hand as he led her to the information centre. Then her description was given over the loudspeaker.

Rachel’s mother soon came hurrying down the hallway, tears in her eyes. “Oh, honey,” said Mom as she knelt down to hug her daughter, “I’m so glad to see you! I’ve been looking everywhere for you!” She turned to thank the guard for his help, then taking Rachel’s hand, they left the mall.

“I’m like the little sheep you read about in my Bible storybook last night,” decided Rachel as they drove home. “We both got lost, and that little sheep must have been scared, just like me. I was so scared all by myself.”

“I know,” said Mom. A moment later she added, “You know what? Everyone is a little like you.” “Is everybody lost?” Rachel asked.

“Until they know Jesus, they are,” replied Mom. “The sheep strayed away from the shepherd, and the Bible says everyone has strayed from God--everybody does wrong things. The shepherd went to search for the lost sheep, and Jesus came to earth to find and save lost boys and girls and men and women.”

“After Sunday school one day, I told Jesus I was sorry I was naughty and have sinned and I asked Him to save me,” said Rachel soberly, “and He did, didn’t He?”

“That’s right,” agreed Mom. “And He was glad, wasn’t He?” asked Rachel with a smile. “Just like you were glad when you found me!” Mom smiled, too. “Oh, yes!” she replied. “There’s joy in heaven whenever a lost sheep is found.”

Thought: Have you thought of yourself as someone who is lost? That’s what you are if you don’t know Jesus as your Saviour. But He came to this earth to find you—to “seek and to save” you.

Prayer: Gracious God, it is such a precious lesson that I have today that I won’t be lost anymore, and I’ll never be all alone because God will never leave me. Help me to put my trust in Him today! This I ask in Jesus’ name, amen.

BUBBLES!

“Grandma, may we buy some bubble stuff?” asked Jessica as she and her sister were spending a weekend with grandmother. “Amanda and I can share a bottle.” “We could buy some, but how would you like to make your own bubble solution?” Grandma asked. “All it takes is a cup of water, a tablespoon of dish washing soap, and a teaspoon of corn syrup.”

“That sounds like fun!” exclaimed Amanda. “But what about wands to make the bubbles?” asked Jessica. “I have empty spools you can use to blow bubbles,” said Grandma. “I’ll show you how.”

When they reached Grandma’s home, she helped the girls mix the bubble recipe. Then got the spools, dipped the end of one into the soapy solution, and blew into the other end. A large bubble formed on the end of the spool. “Wow!” exclaimed Amanda. The girls went out on the patio, and soon there were bubbles flying everywhere.

“Look at that huge one!” Jessica called, pointing toward the roof of the house. Their eyes followed a big bubble as it lifted in the breeze, catching rainbows of colour. Then... POP! The bubble burst.

“Aw-w-w,” they all moaned. During lunch, Amanda sighed. “This weekend is zooming by so fast,” she murmured. “Our whole June vacation as well,” said Jessica.

Grandma nodded. “I think the older you get, the more you realize how fast life goes by,” she said. “It reminds me of what God says in James 4:14 ‘Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.’”

“Like the bubbles!” exclaimed Amanda. “Right,” said Grandma. “They were beautiful and fun, but they lasted only a few minutes. I’m so glad you girls both know Jesus and will spend eternity with Him. Life is so short compared to eternity, so let’s spend our time wisely. Okay?”

“Okay,” said Amanda, and Grandma smiled as Jessica echoed her sister’s okay.

Thought: Have you noticed that time goes really fast? How are you using your time?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder that time flies. Help me do that by using the time to bring glory and honour to You in obeying parents, doing good deeds for others, and taking every opportunity to tell friends about Jesus. This is my humble cry in Jesus’ name, Amen.

BURST BUBBLES!

After lunch, Amanda and Jessica wanted to blow bubbles again. “Come with us, Grandma,” said Amanda as they went outdoors. Jessica blew several bubbles, then made a face. “Ugh! Yuck!” She spit and sputtered. “A soap bubble popped in my face, and I got soap in my mouth!” she exclaimed. “It tastes awful!”

Grandma smiled. “It won’t hurt you,” she said. “Just get some water and rinse your mouth out.” Jessica quickly went into the house and came back with a glass of water. Amanda laughed as Jessica rinsed her mouth several times. “Did you say some naughty words, Jessica?” teased Amanda. “I heard of a girl whose mother washed out her daughter’s mouth with soap to help her remember not to say bad things again.”

“Well, I didn’t say anything bad,” protested Jessica, “but I know someone who does. I don’t like to be around Seng Chye. He uses bad words and makes fun of other kids. I think he should have his mouth washed out with soap!”

“The bubble solution left a bad taste in your mouth, and Seng Chye apparently leaves a bad taste in your life,” suggested Grandma. “His words and actions leave a bad impression.” She looked thoughtful. “People remember what we say and do,” she added. “Can you think of things we might do that would give people a bad taste when they think of us?”

“Tell lies,” Jessica answered. “Always want to be first,” Amanda added. “Hog the ball when we play games,” said Jessica.

Grandma nodded. “The Bible teaches that we are to have a good name—a good reputation. In other words, when people think of us, they should remember good things, not bad things. So what are some things we can do to leave a good taste?”

“Help with chores and help kids with their schoolwork,” suggested Amanda. “Be friendly and kind,” said Jessica, “and obey parents and teachers.” “And share our toys and stuff,” added Amanda.

“Good,” said Grandma. “Those things will leave a very good taste in the lives of others and will help them remember us with pleasant thoughts.”

Thought: What will people remember when your name comes to their minds?

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank You for teaching me that I have to be a good example to those around me. And that loving words and deeds often lead to opportunities to talk to others about Jesus. Help me to live a life that will please You and help me to be brave to dare to do the right thing even if others may laugh at me. This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

WATCH IT!

“Everybody loves my watch,” declared Teng one evening. She held out her arm and admired the watch she had gotten from Mom and Dad for Christmas. “I love it myself,” she added with a grin. Dad smiled. “I’m glad to hear that,” he said. After a moment, he asked, “Teng, do you know what an acrostic is?”

“A what?” asked Teng. “An acrostic,” answered Dad. “I’ll show you what I mean.” On a sheet of paper, he wrote the following list and showed it to Teng.

W
o
r
d
s
A
c
t
i
o
n
s
T
h
o
u
g
h
t
s
C
o
m
p
a
n
i
o
n
s
H
a
b
i
t
s

“Oh, you use the letters of the word “watch” for the first letter of some new words,” said Teng. “Right, and each of those words stands for something you should watch,” explained Dad. “The words and actions you use . . .” Dad pointed to the words as he spoke them, “depend on your thoughts.” Dad continued to point to the words about which he was speaking. “Wrong thoughts can lead to wrong words and actions, but right and good thoughts lead to the right kinds of words and actions.”

“Okay,” said Teng. “And how do those things connect with the rest of the words in the acrostic?”

“Well, your words and actions will affect who your closest friends are,” Dad replied. “It’s important to be friendly and kind to all the kids, but closest companions should be Christians. If good words, actions, and thoughts come often enough, they result in choosing good friends and also good habits.” Dad smiled. “When you see the watch on your arm, let it remind you of this acrostic,” he suggested. “That’s a nice and easy way of remembering what God wants, Dad!” said Teng with a grin.

Thought: Ask God to help you in each area described in the above paragraphs.

Prayer: My God of love, I pray that each time I see a watch, may it remind me to ask You for help in making good choices regarding words, actions, thoughts, companions, and habits. And help me to ask myself if all of those things are pleasing to God. This is my plea in Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE NEW LUMP

“Those loaves look so little,” said Joelle as her mother formed the bread dough and placed it in pans to bake. “Shouldn’t you put more in the pans?” Mom laughed. “There’s yeast in the bread dough. That will make it rise,” she said as she set the loaves aside. “Come see them in about an hour.”

Joelle’s friend Audrey came over a little later, and after finishing their homework, the girls were going to relax in the hall. As Joelle walked down the hall, she saw a small bottle of perfume on her mother’s dresser. Perhaps we should have fun with some perfume, she thought. Just a teeny bit. She wasn’t supposed to touch Mom’s things, but she tiptoed quietly into the bedroom. She opened the bottle, and put a little perfume on her wrist. She shared it with Audrey, too.

“Come take a look at these loaves now, Joelle,” called Mom a little later. “They’re ready for the oven.” The girls went to the kitchen and saw that the loaves had risen higher than the top of the pans. Mom sniffed. “What do I smell?” she asked. “Did you use my perfume?”

“N-no,” Joelle stammered.

Just then her little sister Hannah came into the kitchen. “I smell good!” she exclaimed. She held a half-empty bottle, and she definitely did smell good! As Mom began to scold Hannah for using the perfume, tears filled the little girl’s eyes. “Joelle used it,” she said, “so I thought I could, too.”

Mom looked at Joelle. “I... I...” stuttered Joelle. “Well, I... we used such a tiny bit.”

Looking stern, Mom pointed to the loaves of bread. “The small amount of yeast in the bread dough made the loaves grow big,” she said. “Sin is much like yeast. Your sin of disobedience seemed small to you, but look what happened. It caused you to lie to me. It also spread to your little sister who was watching you and followed your example. It doesn’t seem so small anymore, does it?”

Joelle shook her head. “I-I’m sorry,” she murmured.

Mom nodded. “Okay,” she said, “but you’ll have to use your allowance to replace the perfume. I hope that will help you remember there isn’t any such thing as a small sin. You need to get rid of any sin in your life.”

Thought: Did some wrong thing you were tempted to do seem very small?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn well today’s lesson that in the Bible, sin is compared to leaven, or yeast. It takes only a small amount of yeast to affect the dough, and even a so-called small sin affects my life. It needs to be cleaned out quickly. In Jesus’ holy name, amen.

NO EVIL THINGS...

Ling was thoughtful as she listened to Mr. Tan, her Sunday school teacher. "Television and use of the internet have become a major part of most of our lives," said Mr. Tan. "Let's admit it-wicked plots and bad language are often used, and they're things Christians shouldn't willingly see or hear. We should be careful to watch and listen to only things we'd want God to watch with us."

"That's like the song my little sister's always singing," Jackson said with a grin. "Oh, be careful little eyes what you see!"

"Yeah," said Eva. "And the next verse says, 'Be careful little ears what you hear.'"

Mr. Tan nodded. "We all probably think of that as a little kids' song, but it's still a good one to remember," he said. "Let's end today's class by singing it. It has several good verses, but we'll sing just the first one this morning. Think about the words again as you go through the week."

Together the class sang, "Oh, be careful little eyes what you see... for the Father up above is looking down in love, so be careful little eyes what you see!" Then Mr. Tan prayed that throughout the week they would all remember that God is always with them. He prayed that they would be watch only things that were pleasing to God.

The following Saturday, Ling's parents were busy working outdoors when she turned on the TV. For a few minutes, she watched the first show that came on. In it, a lady was trying to steal another one's husband. That's kind of interesting, but I sure wouldn't want God to watch it with me, thought Ling, and she changed the channel.

Ling tried a comedy show next, but several of the characters used God's name in a wrong way, so she switched to a different program. As she tried one channel after another, the words of the "little kids' song" kept playing in her mind-"Be careful little eyes what you see." Finally, Ling jumped up and turned off the set. Finding a show to watch is too much trouble, she thought. Mom said there was a good one coming on in an hour. I'll go out and see if she or Dad want any help until then.

Thought: Do you watch only things you'd like Jesus to watch with you?

Prayer: Gracious God, help me remember that You are actually with me all the time-even though I can't see You. When I watch TV or go on the internet, help me choose shows and sites that don't dishonor Jesus. I know that often it's a good idea to simply turn off the television or leave the internet and find a more worthwhile activity. This I ask in Jesus' name, amen.

BIG SNEEZE!

“Copying is cheating and stealing,” Mom scolded when she caught Emma copying a book report her brother had written the year before. “You will read that book yourself and do your own report. Start reading right now!” Emma knew she should be sorry for trying to copy, but she wasn’t. She didn’t want to read that long, boring book, but Mom made her spend the whole evening doing so.

“Ah-h-choo,” sneezed Emma as she settled down at her school desk the next morning. She felt lousy, but she didn’t want to stay home. She was still too angry with her mother. “Ah-ah-choo! Ah-choo!” Emma sneezed again-and again. “Ah-choo!”

As the morning passed, Emma continued to sneeze. Her nose was so stuffed up! Her throat was sore, too, and she coughed a lot. She noticed that several of the kids sitting near her frowned, and when recess finally came, even her best friends seemed to avoid her.

After recess, Miss Lee called Emma to her desk. “I think you need to go home, Emma,” Miss Lee said. “Your cold sounds really bad!” Emma reluctantly agreed, and Miss Lee sent her to the office with a note. Soon her mother arrived to pick her up.

When Emma was comfortably settled at home, she let out a long sigh. “It’s sure good to be here,” she said. “Everybody avoided me at school.” Mom smiled. “You can’t really blame them,” she replied. “Nobody wanted to catch your cold, so they stayed away.” After a short pause, Mom added, “Your cold reminds me of sin.”

Emma looked at her mother in surprise. “You mean because before Adam and Eve sinned, there wasn’t any sickness?” she asked. “So even a cold is because of sin?”

“Well, that, too, but in this particular case, your cold separated you from your friends, and sin separates us from fellowship with God,” explained Mom. “He always loves us, but when we refuse to do anything about our sin, it spoils our fellowship, or our friendship, with Him.” Emma knew it was true. I need to apologize to Mom, she thought, and I need to talk to God, too, and confess my anger.

Thought: Is there a sin separating you from fellowship with God?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder to be serious about sin and not let my fellowship with You be harmed because of it. This is my humble cry in Jesus’ name, Amen.

WELL PROTECTED!

“Oh, Mom! I don’t feel good,” moaned Natalie one morning. “Can I stay home today?” She sat down and clutched her stomach. Looking concerned, Mom agreed that Natalie could stay home from school.

An hour or so later, Natalie felt much better, and she went to help her mother make cookies. After putting on one of Mom’s aprons, she tried to crack an egg into a bowl. “Oops!” she squealed as the egg broke, slid down her apron, and landed on the floor. “Good thing I’m wearing this apron.”

As Mom helped clean up the mess, she looked at Natalie thoughtfully. “Do you think you really were sick this morning, honey, or were you just nervous about going to a new school?” Mom asked. Natalie sighed. “Oh, Mom, it seems so weird in this school. I don’t have any friends here!” she said.

“It will get better,” Mom assured her. After a moment she added, “Natalie, just like you have that apron to protect your clothes as you work here in the kitchen, you have someone to protect you as you go to school. Did you know that?” “You mean... you or Dad?” Natalie asked. “But you can’t go to school with me!”

Mom smiled. “No, we can’t,” she said, “and I don’t mean us. I mean God. That apron protected your clothes—nothing can get to your good clothes without going through the apron. God is your protector in life. Nothing can happen to you without going through Him. In other words, nothing can happen unless God allows it.” Natalie looked thoughtful. “Yeah . . . but He does allow things to happen that we don’t like.”

Mom nodded. “Yes, but He is with us. He helps us get through them, and He uses them to teach us important lessons,” she said. She put an arm around Natalie’s shoulder. “Let’s ask the Lord to help you remember His promises, and then I think you should get ready and go to school this afternoon. When you feel nervous, remember the apron—and that God’s protection is far better!”

Natalie nodded slowly. “Anna and Lily were really friendly yesterday,” she said. “Maybe I could take a couple cookies for them. Okay?”

HOW ABOUT YOU?

Thought: Are you afraid of something? A difficult class? A bully at school? The dark? If you’re a Christian, God is your protection in whatever situation you face.

Prayer: Gracious Father, Thank you for reminding me that as a Christian, I am never alone. Teach me to be strong and brave and always know that You are a prayer away! This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GLOW IN THE DARK

“Hey, Carla! I need your help!” Abby called to her older sister. “For what?” Carla asked from her bedroom. She put her Bible down, walked to Abby’s open door, and saw her sister on a ladder in the middle of her room. “Come and help me put these glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling,” Abby said. “Please?”

“I can’t. I’m working on an assignment for my Sunday school class,” replied Carla. “I need to think of an object lesson that will teach a principle found in the Bible, and I haven’t gotten very far.”

“I’ll help you later if you’ll help me now!” Abby pleaded. “I need help.” “Well, all right,” agreed Carla, so she went in and joined her sister.

The girls had fun peeling the backs off the stars, climbing on the stepladder, and sticking the stars on the ceiling, one by one. They chatted together as they worked. “My friend Ming has the same kind of stars on the ceiling in her room,” Abby said. “They are so cool! I wonder what makes them glow.”

“I don’t know exactly,” replied Carla. “All I know is they’re made of material that absorbs light-like when there’s daylight or you have the light on in your room. Then when you turn off your light, they shine all by themselves!” “Yeah, so let’s try them,” said Abby as she smoothed the last one onto the ceiling. Carla nodded, and the girls pulled down the shades, shut the door, and turned off the light. “Oh-h-h!” exclaimed Ava. “Awesome!”

“Worth the work!” said Carla. “And now I have to go finish my report. Don’t forget to come and help me as soon as you put away the ladder and stuff.” She turned to leave the room, then stopped. “Hey, Abby,” added Carla with a smile, “I know what object lesson I can use for Sunday school. Your stars! They need to be in the light for a while and take it in so they can shine when it’s dark. It’s the same with Christians. We need to take in the light of Jesus by spending time in prayer and Bible study so we can shine for Him!”

“Hey! That makes a good object lesson!” Abby exclaimed. “See, Carla, I helped you already!”

Thought: Do you realize that if you’re a Christian, you should also glow in the dark—that you should be a light in a world that’s dark with sin?

Prayer: My God of love, as I spend time in prayer and Bible study, I’ll learn more about Jesus and how to be like Him. And then perhaps, I can be like one of those stars mentioned in today’s story! Help me O Father, for this is my plea in Jesus’ name, Amen.

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT!

The bright blue cup slipped from Janelle's hands and crashed to the floor. "Oh, no!" she gasped, and she muttered some words under her breath before adding, "I broke a cup!" "Janelle!" exclaimed Grandma, who was washing dishes while Janelle wiped them. "If you said what I think you did, you should be ashamed of yourself!"

"Oh, Grandma! It's not that bad," protested Janelle as she picked up pieces of the broken cup. "Everybody at school says stuff like that."

"Oh, they do, do they?" asked Grandma. "Well, you're not 'everybody,' so you don't have to do what 'everybody' does. Now... when you've picked up all the pieces of that cup, sit down here." Grandma dried her hands and pulled out a chair. She got a tube of glue out of a drawer and placed it on the table. "I want you to put all those pieces together again." "Put them together!" exclaimed Janelle. "That's impossible."

"Do your best." Grandma held up a hand as Janelle started to protest. "Don't say a thing and don't get up until you're finished," Grandma added firmly.

Janelle worked a long time. Finally, she was finished, but the cup didn't look like it had before. There were cracks everywhere, the surface was rough, and there were many little chipped spots. "Grandma, is this good enough?" Janelle asked. "I can't make it look any better."

"I'm sure you can't - that cup will never be the same," agreed Grandma. "I want you to remember that if you do things just because everybody else does, your life can become messed up worse than the cup. Using that excuse for the way you behave often results in doing things that are wrong-and many sins have lifelong consequences. Can you understand what that can do to your life?"

Janelle glanced at the cup. "I guess it could end up looking ugly," she murmured.

Grandma nodded. "God forgives when you repent-when you're sorry for your sin and turn from it. But that doesn't change the effect sin has had on your life," she said. "Jesus can help you make better choices than those everybody else makes. Trust and follow Him, not the crowd."

Thought: Whose example do you follow? Do I dare to be different and follow God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn well today's lesson to be dare to be different. I really want to be a "follower of God", not a "follower of man"! Please help me make good choices that would make You happy. In Jesus' holy name, amen.

BEST FRIEND?

“Mom, I don’t think I want to be best friends with Olivia anymore!” Kristin announced as she came in from school. “In fact, I don’t know if I want to be friends with her at all.” Mom looked up from the dishes she was preparing for dinner. “Really?” she asked. “When did you decide that, Kristin?”

“Today. You just won’t believe how she acted!” Kristin helped herself to an apple from the fruit bowl and plopped down on a chair. “Olivia hardly talked to me all day,” added Kristin. “During the recess, she played ball with some other kids. Then when we had free time in class, she worked on a special project all by herself. During the whole time at lunch, she talked to the new girl in our class.”

“Maybe something was bothering her,” observed Mom. “You two have been friends for a long time, and I hope you won’t let one day ruin your friendship.” At family devotions that evening, Kristin read the Bible passage, but then she had a request. “Can I be excused from our prayer time tonight?” She put her Bible on a shelf and stood up.

Dad frowned. “What’s the problem?” he asked. “I’m really tired,” replied Kristin. “Besides, I have a test tomorrow, so I need to get my sleep.”

Mom looked up from her Bible. “Remember what you told me about Olivia today?” she asked. Kristin nodded. “Yeah,” she said. “Do you think I should stop being friends with her?”

“What I think,” said Mom, “is that if you skip prayer time, you’ll be acting pretty much like Olivia did. You were unhappy because she didn’t seem to want to talk to you, right?”

“Well, yeah-but what does that have to do with praying?” asked Kristin.

“Since you trusted in God, He’s the very best friend you can have, and He likes you to spend time with Him, talking to Him each day,” explained Mom. “Prayer is one way you do that. Don’t you think He must feel disappointed when you don’t want to pray-pretty much like you felt about Olivia?”

Slowly, Kristin nodded, and she sat down again for their prayer time.

Thought: Do you have a good friend with whom you like to talk every day? God wants to be that kind of friend to you.

Prayer: Gracious God, it is such a precious lesson that I have today that I must pray more. When I say I love You as God, I must show my love by my action and that must include prayer! This I ask in Jesus’ name, amen.

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

As Pete walked slowly along the beach near his home, his thoughts were dark. "I'm a nobody," he said to himself. "Mom and Dad divorced, and I'm bad at schoolwork. I didn't make the basketball team, and my teacher never chooses me to be the class monitor." Pete sighed and tried to hold back the tears as his thoughts ran on. "I can't do anything right!"

Just then an elderly man sitting near a bench caught Pete's attention. That's Kok Leong's grandpa, thought Pete. I wonder where Kok Leong is. Pete watched the old man chip small bits from an old piece of driftwood. "What are you going to do with that?" Pete asked after a few minutes.

"Oh, I have great plans for this old piece of wood," replied the man. "I'm carving a whale." He picked up a simple but beautifully carved dolphin and handed it to Pete. "Here's one I've done," he added. "Wow!" exclaimed Pete. He held up the dolphin and then looked again at the wood the man was carving. "That driftwood you're working on now is so old and... and dirty. It looks worthless!" added Pete. "How can something as cool as this come from junk like that?"

The man smiled. "It takes time, work, and skill to get rid of the dirt and make something beautiful of the wood," he said. "I carve it carefully, sand it, and polish it." He turned the wood over in his hand as he peered closely at Pete. "This driftwood is something like me," added the man.

"Like you?" asked Pete. "How's that?" "There was a time when I felt worthless. In fact, even though I know better now, I still feel that way occasionally. Feel it too?" Pete nodded. "Well, we definitely aren't worthless - not to God," said the man. "In fact, He has plans for us! He can take poor, sinful creatures like us and make them into something beautiful. Have you asked God to do that for you?"

Pete shook his head and settled down on the sand at the man's feet. He was eager to hear more about the plans God had for him.

Thought: Do you sometimes feel worthless, as if nothing you do is any good? As if you could never amount to anything important? Don't believe the lies Satan's telling you!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder that You love me very much. In fact, You love me and the world so much that You gave Your only begotten Son to come and die in our place. What a wonderful God I have in You! How I praise and thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

MOST PRECIOUS GIFT?

Lisa listened closely as her Sunday school teacher began the lesson with a question. "What is the most precious thing you own?" Mrs. Lee asked. "Is it your bicycle? Some jewelry? Money? A pet?" She paused for a few seconds, then added, "Listen and think about it while I read a story to you."

Mrs. Lee picked up a book and began to read. "Queen Helena ruled a tiny kingdom many years ago. She was the last of her family and had no heir to her throne, so she decided to search for a child who loved and served God as she did. 'I am asking God to help me choose the next ruler of this land,' she told her people. 'A day will be set when any child who wishes to become the ruler can bring me his or her most precious possession. It must be a gift worthy to be given to your Queen, and also to God Himself! The child who brings such a gift will be the next King or Queen.'

"The special day came, and many children were ready with their gifts. One by one, they presented them to the Queen. She was offered money, power, land—all kinds of things—but all were turned away. 'They are not worthy,' said Queen Helena. 'It is getting late. I will see one more child today.'

"A young girl came slowly into the room. 'Your Majesty,' she murmured, 'I didn't plan to come, because I am very poor and thought I couldn't possibly offer a gift you would accept. But as I sat praying last night, it seemed that God told me I should come and offer you what I have already given Him.' The girl knelt before the Queen. 'I lay at the feet of my Queen a heart of love and devotion and a life of service.'

"Rise to your feet, my child,' said Queen Helena. 'A heart of devotion and love, a life of service—these are the qualities that can rightly rule a nation. God accepts them, and so do I. You will be Queen, my daughter, for your gift alone is worthy!'"

As Mrs. Lee closed the book, she smiled. "Search your own hearts," she told the class. "What will you offer God? Will you give Him the things that please Him—your love, devotion, and service? That's what He wants from you."

Thought: Do you know what God wants from you? He wants your heart and life.

Prayer: Gracious Father, I now know You want me to love You and faithfully serve You each day. That doesn't mean you can't enjoy things on earth, but they'll become less important to me. Teach me to find real joy in serving You! This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

“We’re going to pass out tracts at Jurong mall next Saturday?” Aaron asked doubtfully. “Will they let us do that?”

Aaron’s Sunday school teacher nodded. “I’ve talked with the manager there, and he says we’ll be fine,” said Mr. Tan. “I know it’s something most of us aren’t used to doing, but it will be a good experience. Almost every day, we meet people who don’t know the way to heaven, and it’s our responsibility to tell them.” He looked around the class. “How many of you can I count on to come next Saturday?” Aaron and most of the other boys raised their hands.

On Saturday morning, the boys were nervous. It wasn’t easy to talk with people about the Lord. It even took courage to hand out tracts, but they did it. They received different responses. “God bless you. I’ll be praying for you,” said one person. “Keep that junk,” said another. And one lady said, “Okay, I’ll read this and think about it.”

Aaron was feeling quite comfortable when he handed a man a tract that said in big letters, “DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO HEAVEN?” The man smiled. “Have you ever been to heaven?” he asked Aaron. “No, but ...” began Aaron.

“So you don’t know the way!” interrupted the man. “You’ve never been there, and you don’t know anyone who has.”

“Well, I... actually, that isn’t true, sir!” said Aaron. “I know Jesus. He was there, and ...” Aaron paused as he remembered an illustration he had heard in church. “I’ve never been to America,” Aaron continued, “but I can get a map that shows me how to get there. Someone who has been there gave the directions. I’ve never been to heaven, either, but I have a book that shows me how to get there. It’s the Bible, and it has directions on getting to heaven. It was written by the God who made the whole world! If we can trust a map that was made by a man, don’t you think we can trust directions given by God?”

The man listened in surprise. “I’ve got to admit that I didn’t think you’d have such a good answer for me,” he said. “Okay, I’ll take your little paper and see what it says about getting to heaven.”

Thought: Do you know the way to heaven? The Bible is the “map” that tells how to get to heaven.

Prayer: My God of love, I thank You for reminding me that the only way to heaven is through Jesus and that I must always read the map – the Bible! This is my plea in Jesus’ name, Amen.

MORE VEGETABLES NEEDED!

“You need to eat more vegetables,” said Ethan, passing the vegetables to his sister. “Here. You haven’t had any of these yet.” Madeline made a face. “I don’t want any!” she exclaimed. “I don’t like vegetables.” Ethan helped himself to a spoonful of carrots. “Everyone should have three to five servings of vegetables a day.” “Since when did you become the vegetable expert?” asked Madeline. “We’re learning about the food groups at school,” Ethan replied. “We need to eat healthy food - like rice, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and meat.”

“No desserts?” asked Mom, pointing to the cake on the counter. “I guess that means no cake tonight.” A chorus of disappointment echoed around the table. “Oh, wait! Hold on!” Ethan rushed to explain. “If you’ve had plenty of good things from the other groups, a little dessert won’t hurt.”

“Wow!” smiled Mom. “So finish your healthy dinner, everybody, and then we’ll have the cake.” Later that evening, Ethan looked at the television screen. “May I play my video game?” he asked.

“Didn’t you already use up your game time today?” asked Dad. “Not all of it, and besides...” Ethan scowled as he plunked down on the couch, “all my friends get more game time than I do. I don’t understand why I can’t have more.”

Dad sat next to Ethan. “Let’s talk about that. At the table, you told us about dessert in relation to the food groups. What did you say?” Ethan looked at Dad in surprise. “I said we need healthy foods from each of the groups, and we shouldn’t eat too much dessert - but some is okay.”

“Yes. Your body needs healthy food, your mind, too,” Dad said. “Fill your mind with good, solid things; then give it dessert - but not too much!” Ethan smiled. “And video games are the dessert?” he asked. “Correct,” replied Dad. “Like cake, having some fun and games is okay, but too much isn’t healthy for your mind. If you fill up on them, you don’t have room for what’s really important in life.”

Thought: Is your mind getting too much “dessert”? Are you watching too much TV or Internet?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn well today’s lesson to use my time wisely and to exercise self-control! Remind me to make sure I’m getting healthy “mind food” first. That might consist of school lessons, stories and lessons from nature, devotionals, and especially the most important food of all, the Bible! In Jesus’ holy name, amen.

BONUS!

“Jacob told me his dad got a bonus at his job,” reported Alex one day. “What’s a bonus, Mom?” “A bonus is something good that you get in addition to what you have earned—something extra,” explained Mom.

Alex liked that idea. “I wish I could get a bonus,” he said. “Well, here’s an idea,” said Mom. “Every day, think of one or two things you can do for other people. Then do them. Try it for a week and see what happens.” Alex was thoughtful for a moment. “You mean I’ll get bonuses for helping?” he asked. “Who will give them to me? Whoever I help?”

“Not always. In a way, they come from God,” said Mom. “The Bible says, Give, and it will be given to you...vpressed down... and running over... For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.’ So the bonuses are actually from God, but they usually come through people. Some may not even come in this life--but the bonuses do come.”

Alex decided to try it. That week he washed his uncle’s car, he was extra helpful in folding clothes, he even tried to help mum cook! “My experiment is going pretty good,” Alex told his mother one day, “but I don’t know that I really got any bonuses yet.”

“Well, think about it,” said Mom. “How do you feel when you’ve done something nice for someone?” As he thought it over, Alex realized he felt happy when he finished a job. “I feel good,” he replied, “and you know what else? When I help people, they smile at me a lot, too.”

Mom nodded. “That sounds like a bonus to me!” she said. “The Bible says Jesus went about doing good, and you’ve been doing that, too. I know He’s pleased with you, and that’s worth a lot.” “I guess so,” agreed Alex, “but once in a while it would be nice to get something I can hold in my hand.”

“True,” said Mom. Opening the freezer door, she added, “Right now you may have the bonus of an ice cream bar for cleaning the table without being told.” Alex grinned happily.

Thought: Have you been “doing good” as Jesus did? Have you been helpful at home?

Prayer: Gracious God, it is such a precious lesson that I have today that I may have neighbors or people around me who would appreciate a little help. Teach me to watch for opportunities to assist others. And as I give of myself to others and be a blessing to them, I will be blessed by You as well. This I ask in Jesus’ name, amen.

WHAT A CHANGE!

“That’s ugly!” declared Lisa when her brother showed her a dry object dangling on a branch. “No, it isn’t,” replied Nick. “It’s interesting. It’s called a ‘chrysalis,’ and there’s a caterpillar in there. Or at least, he used to be a caterpillar.”

Lisa frowned. “I don’t like caterpillars.” As she went into the house, she saw her mother wiping tears from her eyes. “What’s the matter?” Lisa asked anxiously. “I just got a phone call,” Mom said softly. “Grannie died.”

“Oh-h-h!” wailed Lisa. “I don’t want her to die!” Mom smiled faintly. “I know, honey, but Grannie is happy now. She wanted to go home to heaven to be with Jesus and Grandpa.”

Lisa and Nick had never known anyone who had died. They were a little nervous when they went with their parents to the funeral home and walked up to the casket where Grannie lay. “She looks like she’s asleep,” said Lisa softly. A couple of days later, the kids attended the funeral service with their mom and dad, and after the service, they all went to the cemetery where Grannie was to be buried.

Lisa was quiet as they sat in the living room that evening. “I thought Grannie was in heaven, but she was put in the ground,” she said at last. As she spoke, Nick came in carrying the branch with the chrysalis dangling from it. “Look,” he said. “This is just an empty shell now.” He held it up. “It seems funny that this thing was once a caterpillar.”

Mom nodded. “The caterpillar spun a chrysalis around itself. After a while, it burst open and a beautiful butterfly came out.” “Good! I love butterflies,” said Lisa. “They’re much prettier than caterpillars.”

“That’s a good example of what has happened to Grannie,” said Dad. “Remember how crippled Grannie was?” Lisa and Nick nodded. “She has left her old shell-her earthly body-and now it’s like an empty chrysalis. It was buried in a grave today, but the real Grannie has gone to be with Jesus.” He smiled. “God has given her a new and more wonderful body, too.”

Thought: Has someone you love died and gone to heaven? Don’t worry about the old body that was buried in a grave. Remember that the real person has left his body.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I know the Bible teaches that those who love the Lord go to be with You when they die. And You will give them a wonderful new body, a body much better than the old one. I also know that heaven is a better place for us for we will never get sick or experience any trouble there! Thank You for heaven, wonderful Father, thank You in Jesus’ name, Amen.

YOU THIEF!

“Okay, young man! We’ve been watching you. Come with us.” Cold fear chilled the back of Bob’s neck when he heard the gruff voice. The woman who had spoken signalled a big man nearby, who immediately moved to Bob’s side at Jurong Point’s new big candy store. “Where’s Justin?”, wondered Bob. Taking a few candy bars was his idea, and now he’s just disappeared into thin air. Bob’s thoughts raced through his mind as he walked with bent head between the two security guards. Oh, how he wished the floor would open up and swallow him!

“Empty your pocket and put everything on the table,” said a woman when they reached a room. Then, Bob was asked questions about everything: name, address, school, parents, friends. “Were you alone in the store?” they asked. “When was the last time you shoplifted?” They didn’t seem to believe he had never taken anything before. On and on the questions came! “Okay, Bob. I want you to call your parents now,” the lady guard said finally. She motioned to the phone.

“Oh, no, please,” protested Bob. “I promise I’ll never, ever do...” “Call them,” interrupted the woman. When Bob heard his mother’s voice on the phone, he tried not to cry while he explained what had happened. And when she came to the store, Bob couldn’t look at her.

On the way home, Mom spoke gently. “Why did you do it, Bob? You know better.” The sadness of Mom’s tone made him feel even worse than before. “I’m really s-s-sorry,” he sobbed. “I don’t know why they had to tell you and Dad. I told them I’d never do it again, and I never will!” “You’ve made us very sad today, and you’ve made it necessary for us to punish you.” Mum said. “They were right to tell us,” she added. “You’re our child, so you’re responsible to us.” Mom paused. “How do you think God feels about this?” she asked. “You’re His child, too, so you’re also responsible to Him. You need to talk to Him about this, don’t you think?” Solemnly, Bob nodded.

Thought: Do you realize that you’re accountable to God as well as to your parents?

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank You for today’s lesson. Sometimes my parents don’t always find out about sinful things I do, but God You do. As it is hard to face people I know I’ve hurt, it’s also hard and frightening to think about the punishment I know I deserve. Please forgive me for my sins. 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 WHOLE BIBLE NEEDED!

Darrin sat down on the living room floor and dumped out the contents of a box. “I see you’re going to work on your new model,” observed Dad. Darrin nodded and began to fit pieces together. “Dad, there’s something I’ve been wondering,” he said as he worked. “I was at Bob’s house, and his dad was telling Bob’s mom about a man who is really mean to his wife and kids. This guy excused it by saying he was just being the head of the house, like the Bible says husbands and fathers should be.” Dad frowned as Darrin continued. “It doesn’t always work out right when you try to obey the Bible, does it?” “It sounds to me like that man wasn’t really obeying the Bible at all,” said Dad. “He certainly was taking a verse out of context and wasn’t interpreting and using it in the right way.” “What does ‘out of context’ mean?” Darrin wanted to know.

“It means to use a verse in such a way as to change its meaning by not paying attention to what is said in the rest of the chapter or in other parts of the Bible,” explained Dad. As Dad spoke, Darrin sighed and threw down two of the model pieces he had been trying to fasten together. “These things don’t fit into each other right,” Darrin grumbled.

Dad looked at the model more closely. “No? Are you sure you followed the directions?” he asked. “Of course!” Darrin looked at the instruction sheet. “It says right here, ‘Snap section E onto section D.’ I tried that, and it won’t work!” Dad pointed to another part of the page. “Ah! But this says, ‘While attaching E to D, press down on tab C.’” Dad quickly assembled the sections and handed them to Darrin. “Wow! I guess I didn’t read far enough. Thanks, Dad!” Darrin smiled.

“As you just saw, it’s not enough to follow part of the instructions,” Dad said. “You have to read them carefully and make sure you understand them completely. It’s like that with the Bible, too. When people take verses out of context or choose to follow only part of God’s instructions and ignore the rest, they get into trouble.”

Thought: Do some things in the Bible sound strange to you? Have you heard someone claim the Bible says something that doesn’t sound right? The Bible is God’s perfect, inspired and preserved Word, but it must be read carefully and prayerfully.

Prayer: My God of love, please help me understand more and more of the Bible as I study it. When something I read or hear that doesn’t sound right, help me to be careful and to discuss it with an older Christian I know I can trust to help you understand what You are really saying! This is my plea in Jesus’ name, Amen.

GET UP!

“I told you to get up long ago, Matt. Now hurry!” Matt’s mother spoke from the doorway of his room. “We’ll be leaving for church soon!” Matt sleepily opened his eyes. It was so hard to get up in the morning! He put one foot on the floor, then the other. It was cold. He wrapped his blanket around him.

“Matt, are you hurrying?” Mom called from the hallway a few minutes later. “Yep! I’m hurrying,” Matt answered, and he quickly put on his shirt and pants, but then he flopped down on the bed again. In fact, the next time Mom checked on him, he was fast asleep.

“You’re going to have to get to bed earlier,” said Mom with a sigh when she woke him again. “Now get up and get ready, Matt.” Next Saturday was Matt’s birthday, and as soon as he heard his dad and mom get up, he jumped out of bed, too. He didn’t mind that it was early. He threw his clothes on as fast as he could and then ran downstairs.

“Hm-m-m,” Mom said. “How strange!” “What’s strange?” asked Dad. “It’s strange how easy it was for our sleepyhead to get out of bed this morning,” said Mom, “when yesterday it was so hard.” “Today’s a special day, Mom!” said Matt, eyeing the big box standing in the centre of the table.

“Sundays are special days, too,” replied Mom. “Sundays are days we set apart to learn more about God’s Word and to join with other Christians to worship Him.” “Well, I... ah...” Matt didn’t know what to say, so he changed the subject. “Can I open my birthday present now?” he asked. “What is it?”

“You’ll see in a minute,” said Dad. “It’s something we hope you’ll enjoy—but your mother is right. Going to church is a great privilege. It’s something we should enjoy, too. Instead, we take it for granted too often. We forget that Sunday is a special day and should be very important to us!” He handed Matt the box. “Think about that tomorrow, for it is Sunday, okay?”

Thought: Do you have trouble getting up for church?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes I sleep so late on Saturdays that I find it so difficult to wake up on time to go to church. Forgive me, please. May I remember that Sunday is a special day, and that I should get to bed early on Saturday so I’ll be ready to serve and worship You on Sunday. In Jesus’ holy name, amen.

THE PUZZLE...

"I'll help with that," offered Karl when his sisters got out a puzzle. "That's a cool picture." He pointed to the cover, which showed three sailboats out at sea. "There sure are a lot of different shapes and colours in this puzzle," observed Grace as she tipped the box over and the pieces tumbled onto the table. She picked up a piece. "I like the ones with the pretty, sunshiny yellow colour."

Natasha nodded. "I like the reds and oranges, too," she said. "I want to work with them. Those dark-coloured pieces aren't very pretty." "Maybe not, but if all the pieces were red and orange and yellow, we couldn't make a picture like the one on the box," Karl reminded her.

"Just like people," murmured Mom, who was working nearby. The children looked at her curiously. "I don't get it," said Karl. "What's just like people?" "Puzzle pieces," said Mom with a smile.

Grace frowned. "Puzzle pieces?" she echoed. "How are they like people?" "They're all different shapes and colours, but we need them all," said Mom. "People are different, too. Some are tall, others are short; some are thin and others are heavier; some are quick and others slow. But if we know the Lord, we're all part of His family. We look different and have different abilities, but we're all needed."

"Even kids are needed, right?" asked Grace. "Yeah. We need you to wash dishes," teased Karl, "and to be a student in Sunday School! Imagine if everybody were JW teachers - who would there be to teach?"

Natasha laughed. "Or if everybody were preachers, who would there be to listen to them?" she asked. "And who would cook Sunday church lunch for us to eat?" asked Karl. "Food! Trust you to think about that!" teased Grace.

Mom smiled. "Not only is every type of Christian seen in church, we must love and accept other Christians as well" she said.

Thought: Do you wonder what other Christians are not the same as you? They have different likes and styles and personalities? God made all of us different!

Prayer: Gracious God, it is such a precious lesson that I have today that You have placed all types of people in church, and that I must learn to accept all. And where You have placed me in church or outside church, may I faithfully carry out any task You assign to me. This I ask in Jesus' name, amen.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Kevin looked up with a frown on his face. “You don’t look very happy,” observed his twin sister, Jenny. “What are you thinking about?” Kevin hesitated. “About God,” he said after a moment. “I’ve just been wondering if God really hears us when we pray.”

“Of course He does!” exclaimed Jenny. “Another thing... my Sunday school lesson says God is everywhere,” added Kevin. “How can that be? And how can He have no beginning?”

“I can’t believe you’re questioning God,” scolded Jenny. “Better not let Dad hear you do that!”

“Do what?” asked Dad as he joined them. “Come on-out with it.” “Oh ... it’s just that sometimes I don’t understand things about the Bible and God,” mumbled Kevin. “I have lots of questions I’d like to ask, and Jenny thinks that’s wrong.” “Well,” said Dad, “it’s perfectly okay for you to have those kinds of questions.” “It is?” exclaimed the twins in unison. “It’s by asking questions that you learn,” said Dad. “For example, Jenny, you made macaroni and cheese for our lunch last Saturday, right?” As Jenny nodded, Dad continued. “How did you learn to do that?”

“I heard her ask Mom a ton of questions,” Kevin chimed in. “She had to ask how much water to use and what temperature to set the burner on. And she asked how long it had to boil.” He turned to his sister. “You saw Mom make it a million times, Jenny, but you didn’t know anything when you tried to do it yourself.” “Well, I could do it now,” replied Jenny.

Dad smiled. “I think you could,” he agreed. “Asking questions helped you learn what to do. And that’s one reason God doesn’t mind when you ask honest questions-He knows it helps you learn. You’ve watched Mom and me try to follow God and live for Him, and you’ve imitated what you’ve seen us do. But as you grow older, you may have questions about God and living for Him. Don’t be afraid to ask them, even if they’re hard ones. Getting answers to your questions will help you really know what you believe. I may not know all the answers to your questions, but I’ll promise to find out!”

Thought: Are there things you don’t understand about God? You’re not the only one, and it’s okay to ask questions.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the clarification that it is OK to ask genuine questions. Sometimes I am afraid to ask so please give me the courage to ask my parents, Sunday school teachers, or any good Christian adult I feel I can talk to. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

LETTER FROM PRISON

Prison - none of us has ever been locked inside a prison. Must be sad to be locked up, and not have families and friends around. Food in prisons must be yucky and living conditions terrible. Prisons are dark and dreary. What types of people can you find there? Mostly bad characters, vulgar and violent. Others would have bodies may be marked with tattoos or scars probably from fights. A prisoner is a person who has done something wrong and has broken the law of the country. In all likelihood, anyone who ends up in the jail has somewhat committed an offence or a crime.

Where was Paul when he was writing Ephesians? He was in jail! Did he do anything wrong or bad? Definitely not! How did he end up in the jail? It was for the gospel's sake. Paul was God's servant to bring the good news of salvation to people but there were some who did not believe in God and so would do anything to stop him. This was how he was captured and put into the jail.

In such circumstances, Paul did not blame God. He knew God's will and willingly obeyed God. Despite being in prison, he thought of fellow Christians in churches he started. They needed encouragement and comfort. Since he could not be present with them, the only way of encouraging them is by writing letters. He hoped to build up their faith and confidence in God through his letters. Paul was a good writer. By writing, he could share God's love and grace with others. He simply loved to tell the story of Jesus. There was no stopping him from telling others of Jesus.

Did he only write one letter while in prison? Besides the letter to the church of Ephesus, he wrote three others. One was to a friend whose name was P_____ (IEOMNHPL - the first letter is given). The other two were to the C_____ (SSSOOCLNAI) and the P_____ (SIIPPPHLAN).

(This month begins our devotional study on the prison epistle to the Ephesian church.)

Thought: Will you write a card or letter to a friend to encourage him in the faith?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the Bible. Thank You that Your servants wrote the Bible for us to read. It is through their writing that we can know You and all the wonderful things You have done for us. Help us love to read the Bible so that we know how to love You because You first loved us. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE TIE THAT BINDS

What good is a pastor if he does not love the church, God's people? Apostle Paul was not just a good preacher, but a good pastor. He cared for people. He loved those who were not just lost without Christ but also Christians weak in their faith. While in jail, he thought of this church because the Christians in Ephesus were dear to him.

Paul, their pastor spent almost three years in Ephesus building up their faith. Over time, his love for them gradually grew strong and deep. Their love for their pastor was not any less. Strong ties were built. Feelings for each other grew deeper. Paul made his farewell speech to the elders as they knew that it was going to be the last time they would see each other. It was a very emotional moment. Such should be the love between a good pastor and the church. This song aptly expresses the love among God's people.

*Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.
Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent pray'rs;
Our fears, our hopes, our aims, are one, our comforts and our cares.
We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear;
And often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.
When we asunder part, it gives us inward pain;
But we shall still be joined in heart, and hope to meet again.*

How about you? What is your relationship with other Christians like? Do you have close friends who are Christians so they can better your trials and temptations? Dear child, remember to have good Christian friends so you can encourage each other in your spiritual walk.

Thought: Does this song describe the love between you and your Christian friends? If not, do something about it.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for Christian love. Thank you for Christian friends. Help me spend more time with other Christians so that we can mutually help and support each other in our Christian lives in the way pleasing to our Heavenly Father. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REACTION TO THE GOSPEL

When Paul first stepped into Ephesus, he found out that the people did not know God and were doing all kinds of wrong things which were abominable. Abominable means very bad or offensive in the eyes of God. If these people would not repent of their sins, they would end up in hell. Paul was not going to stand there doing nothing. He felt pity for them and the only way to save them was to preach Christ and His power of forgiveness. He must reach out to them who had been living in sin and darkness. Two groups of people heard the gospel and had two different responses.

What were the two groups of people? One group was magicians. Are you amazed by magic? These are different from modern magicians. Nowadays, magicians do tricks with hats, sticks, cards etc. Maybe you see them at parties, and these are magicians who are illusionists and seemingly make people or things disappear. These magicians are entertainers. But, in the Bible, magicians gained power from demonic forces. Magicians pretended to have great knowledge or tell future. You may recall that in the book of Exodus, Pharaoh's magicians could counterfeit God's plague on Egypt. After hearing the gospel, what was the magicians' response? The right reaction - they repented of their sins, turned away from their old ways and turned to the Lord Jesus. The proof of their conversion was by burning up all the magic books. What was the value of all their burnt magic books?

Let's look at another group of people - silversmiths. Famous in Ephesus was the Temple of Diana. It was a very huge shrine, dedicated to Diana whom the Ephesians worshipped as goddess. The silversmiths made their living by making and selling miniature replicas of Diana's shrine. When more people become Christians, the craftsmen began selling fewer shrine models and so were earning lesser. To them, money was very important and to them, making money was perhaps like their god! Instead of accepting Christ as Savior, they stirred the people up to a riot forcing Paul to leave the city. The reactions of the magicians and silversmiths to the gospel were different. Which people do you think did the right thing in the eyes of God? Answer: _____

Thought: Is your heart hardened like the silversmiths?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gospel of salvation. Soften my heart to believe Jesus as my Lord and Savior. Forgive me of my sins and help me to follow Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SOURCE OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS

Gifts! Children love them. Your parents may buy you gifts on your birthday. On Christmas Day, you exchange gifts with friends. You feel happy receiving a present. The Bible tells us that there is another kind of gift. What is it? Spiritual blessings - gifts from God. We see God is the Giver of all things from the quote 'who hath blessed us'. Only God is the source of all things we have. Everything comes from God. In verse 2, we also read that from God we receive g_____ and p_____ (first letter is given). Spiritual blessings are enjoyed by some people (find out more in tomorrow). There are earthly blessings which all people enjoy but not in the same amount. Earthly blessings are blessings which God gives to men and women simply because they live on this earth. Consider the sun - the sun rises on both the evil and the good. And the rain falls on both the just and the unjust. But, some farmers have a better harvest than others. Some countries are richer than others for example Switzerland is rich while India has millions of people living in poverty.

Who gives earthly blessings? Also God! God gives us health and strength. It is He who gives us our clothes and possessions, employment and leisure, family life and fun, our interests and abilities, and all that we enjoy in this life. God is the only Giver. We should constantly remember this fact. But these blessings are for this life only. When we finish this life, we leave them behind. We have them while we are in this world and because we are in this world.

But there are some people who don't believe that earthly blessings are from God. They don't believe God exists. Psalm 53:1 tells us that a fool says that there is no God. Fools don't believe God exists. These are unconverted people. They think only of earthly blessings and do not care from where they come. They believe what they have and can do come from their own efforts and hard work, not God. Their thoughts are taken up with money, health, friends, family, travel and ambition. These are the things that matter to them. Generally, they consider wealth to be most important because with it, they can get other earthly blessings. What is the destiny of these fools? Read Matthew 16:26. They will l_____ their s_____. Fools will end up in hell.

Thought: Are you a fool?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me who was once a fool and for giving me many spiritual blessings. I pray I will continue to be faithful to Jesus, and it is in His precious name I pray, Amen.

BLESSINGS OF GOD

Is the letter to the Ephesians only about earthly blessings? Clearly not! It is about spiritual and heavenly blessings. There are some people, who besides living in this world, belong to another world. Christians are to live like this. Christians live in two worlds, but belong more to the other world than to this. You see, this world to Christians is only a passing world, but the other world, to which they belong, is an eternal world. You see, the eternal world is an invisible world where they enjoy spiritual blessings. It is to know they are in fellowship with God. They are aware of God, and love Him. They read the Bible and think of the things in the spiritual world, of Christ and of the holy angels. They are also aware of the spiritual wickedness.

Since Christians have all these spiritual blessings, do they not enjoy the blessings of this present world? Christians also enjoy the blessings of his present world as much as anybody else. We walk, run and swim like others, listen to music, appreciate nature, and are glad to be alive. Are there other things in the physical world you enjoy and what are they?

- _____
- _____
- _____

God wants us to grow spiritually, so that our spiritual walk with God will be richer and fuller. Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and can you think of what blessings God gives to Christians?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Only Christians can enjoy spiritual blessings of God. If you are not a Christian, you do not have these blessings. Come and believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Repent of your sins and ask Him to forgive your sins.

Thought: With God's blessings, I'm rich spiritually, even if I'm poor materially!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for all the spiritual blessings You give in Christ Jesus and I can enjoy them. I am never poor spiritually. I thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

SPIRITUAL RICHES

All the spiritual blessings heaven has are in the hands of Jesus Christ. So when a person receives Christ as Lord and Savior, he receives all that heaven contains. He is blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. The Bible tells us that we who have received the Lord Jesus Christ are very rich spiritually. How do we explain this? Let's hear a story. There was a man who was able to explain Bible truths in simple ways to children. Once, he brought into a class a set of large colored wooden bricks of different sizes with the smallest one fitting nicely into the second smallest brick, so that the whole set could be contained inside the biggest brick. The smallest brick was called 'perseverance', and he inserted it inside a larger brick called 'sanctification'. He explained there is no perseverance without sanctification. He told the children that we continue to the end (perseverance) because God makes us holy (sanctification). The 'sanctification' brick was then put inside brick – called 'adoption'. We would not be holy if we were not adopted children of God. God had adopted us, therefore we became holy. 'Adoption' was then fitted into 'justification'. How can anyone be a child of God without first being right with God?

At this stage, the teacher had only one last brick, the very last one - the largest brick. Written on it was 'The L_____ J_____ C_____'. He did a recap: going over what he had taught, showing how each blessing was in another. In conclusion, as he was about to identify the largest brick, a boy raised his hand up and called out, 'It's the Lord Jesus Christ!' Yes, every spiritual blessing is in Christ. Once a person has received the Lord Jesus, there is nothing more precious for him to receive.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be richly blessed with all spiritual blessings in Christ! We are indeed very rich, is there anything we lack? In Christ, God has bestowed us with the riches of heaven. What are you waiting for? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and receive God's blessings in Christ.

Thought: Where can you find every spiritual blessing in heavenly places?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who has secured all the spiritual blessings for me to enjoy. He died on the cross so that I can become rich with the blessings You gave. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHY ME?

Sally is intelligent, hardworking and is well-liked by teachers and classmates. Her father is a successful businessman and they live in a large house. They travel to exotic places for holidays. Everyone in the family is nice, kind and always ready to help those in need. They always volunteer at orphanages and old folks' homes, spending time with the less privileged and bringing them food. Sometimes, they give money to those who need it. Sally is a non-Christian, so are her parents. Unlike Sally, Jan is opposite. She has to work doubly hard to achieve good grades as she is a slow-learner. Father and mother are hawkers at the Clementi Food Centre and she helps them out at times. Home is a small flat and they work hard to make ends meet. There is another, and supremely important difference between Jan's family and Sally's. Jan and her parents are faithful Christians.

Because Jan and parents are Christians, God has richly blessed them with spiritual blessings. Such blessings come to them as Christians and not to all men and women. Why? Why not Sally or her parents? Since you are a Christian, you may have asked yourself, "Why me?" Every believer has asked this question some time or other. Many of us have family members and friends who are not yet in Christ – meaning not yet Christians. We know we are no better than they are. We may not be more intelligent or kind or deserving. They may have qualities in their characters which could shame us, like Sally and family willingly helping the disadvantaged. How is it, then, that we have come to possess the spiritual blessings while many others live and die without ever knowing such things?

The answer is clear - GOD CHOSE US. The reason lies in God, and not in us. What a wonderful truth! God never does anything last minute. God's salvation plan is no last-minute affair. It was decided before the foundation of the world. God chose us before the foundation of the world.

So, dear child, think it through. Before Adam fell, before the world was made, when there was nothing, God had kind and lovely thoughts upon you. God had decided to save you. God had chosen you. Wow, isn't it marvelous? Aren't you lost for words to thank God?

Thought: How wonderful to have been chosen by God!?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for showing me the truth that You have planned to save me even before the foundation of the world. What a privilege I have in Christ. Help me remember Your words and be always thankful to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS GOD TO US?

Parent-child relationship, brother-sister relationship, grandparent-grandchild relationship, teacher-pupil relationship are different types of relationships. Can you think of others? Answer: _____

_____. To you, what relationship is the most important?

John 1:12 tells us – ‘As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name.’ Apostle John taught the same thing as Apostle Paul in today’s text. Both tell us that the relationship which we have to the great God is that of children to their Father. God is our Father. We are God’s sons and daughters. God in heaven is our Father. This privilege is not enjoyed by anyone, except Christians because they have received the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sonship which Christians have is by adoption. What does this mean? We all have natural birth parents. Some parents adopt children as well. By spiritual adoption by God, what it means is God our Father made us His children even though we were born in sin. He has declared us ‘not guilty’, for the guilt of our sins has been taken by His only Begotten Son – Jesus. This is the meaning of justification. If we are not right with God, there is no way we will have the blessings of God. Justification is the key that opens the door to God’s blessings. In our case, not only did God the heavenly judge justify criminals like us, He took the criminal home and adopted him into his family, put his name upon him, gave to him all the pleasures and benefits of his own home, and being a father to him. This is what God has done to us in Christ. So, the simplest definition of a Christian is that he is someone who has God as his or her Father. Do you have God as your Father? If not, pray to God and receive the Lord Jesus Christ into your heart to wash away your sins.

By adoption by our God, God adopts us ‘criminals’ or sinners. God does not need to adopt people of worth or ability; He adopts people who are repentant and know on their own they are sinful and cannot go to heaven on their own; He adopts us by grace. Thank God for adopting us into His family!

Thought: Through Christ, what are the promises we have?

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

JESUS PAID IT ALL!

The apostle says that 'we have redemption through his blood'. 'Redemption' is a big word. What is the meaning? This word means to 'buy back' or to 'repurchase'. People who leave their articles such as jewelry or valuable items in the pawnshops can 'redeem' them later. In the Old Testament, if a man was in need of money, he could sell his land, and when he had sufficient money, he had a right to 'redeem' the land or buy it back. Men and women who were slaves could do the same or be redeemed by someone else paying the required sum of money. The slaves then became free with the paying of a price.

Why did Jesus Christ come to the world? He came to redeem us. Hear His words – 'For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give _____ a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45). We have been redeemed! We have been bought back! The price has been paid! Christ paid the price when He shed his blood on the cross.

Up to now, we have learnt that Christ has paid the price to redeem. To redeem what or who? To redeem us, sinners. There is a price to be paid for breaking the law of God. We have rebelled against God by our sins and have to be punished. As we are the wrongdoers, God's justice demands that we pay the price, to be punished and to be sent to hell. But the Savior came to pay the infinite price. He has completely paid it. There is nothing left for us to pay. We have no debt. We are free. We are forgiven of our sins.

The English hymn writer Frances Ridley Havergal wrote :

*Nothing to pay! Ah, nothing to pay!
 Never a word of excuse to say!
 Year after year thou hast filled the score,
 Owing thy Lord still more and more.
 Hear the voice of Jesus say,
 Verily thou hast nothing to pay!
 Ruined, lost art thou, and yet,
 I forgave thee all that debt!*



Thought: How is sin forgiven?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross to forgive us our sins that our sins are pardoned and washed away. Our debt of sin is paid by Jesus. I have nothing to pay. Thank you, God. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FUTURE INHERITANCE

You may have heard of earthly inheritances. An inheritance is given by someone who has passed away to people he loves. These are usually the dead man's children, wife, and other loved ones. God promised His children an inheritance. However, these inheritances are different from earthly ones in many ways.

For one, God will not die. And He will give us His inheritances everyday including today! God will provide for us and protect us. Secondly, the greatest inheritances from God are given to us when we go to heaven, unlike earthly ones which people have only on earth. Riches in future await God's children! Are you not excited about the future the Bible speaks of? We shall be with Christ! What can beat that? This is our future; our inheritance! Our bodies will be resurrected to be like his glorious body. Our characters will perfectly holy, and therefore we will be perfectly happy. Sin will be gone. And pain too! No more toothaches, fevers, nasty coughs and all other illnesses. We shall be where there are no more tears. Death will be no more, nor will there be any sorrow or pain. We shall enjoy perfect fellowship with Christ, with his elect people and with the holy angels.

Now take a look at verse 13 of Eph 1. Count the number of times the word "ye" or "your" occurs. How many did you find? Should be 5! And the repetition of this idea is to remind us that our inheritance is really ours, as long as we are really true believers in Jesus!

We must remember that as Christians, our real and better home is in heaven to be with the Lord. We should look forward to going "home" in heaven to glory. And God is looking forward to having us there. We shall be immeasurably rich by being there. We, God's adopted children, shall have our inheritance; that inheritance is glorious, because it is God's.

As for now on earth, we live by faith. When we shall see Jesus, our faith shall turn to sight. What a hope! What a future! Are you looking forward to your inheritance? Don't lose sight of your inheritance. It is this hope that keeps us going, even when you encounter storms in your life. God will keep His inheritance and shall give to us when we are faithful to the end.

Thought: What inheritance has God promised His children?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for your inheritance and keep me faithful to the end that I might not lose my inheritance. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PASSPORT TO HEAVEN

Seeing that countless millions are going to be welcomed into the final glory, is it possible that God might overlook me? Surely NOT! None of God's people will be forgotten. When someone you love has died, you will mourn. After some time, you may not remember that person so clearly. However, God's children are never forgotten. We never have to fear that God will forget us because our entrance to heaven is secured. We have the passport to enter heaven. Every believer is guaranteed.

Something wonderful happens to each Christian the moment he believes. God puts a mark on him. Paul says in verse 13, "ye were _ _ _ _ _ ." When Paul said this, the Ephesians understood well. The seaport at Ephesus was very busy; many ships carrying cargos came into the city. Cargos belonging to different merchants were marked differently; this was to tell apart which cargos belonged to which merchants. As countries have their flags, every merchant then had his own distinctive sign or seal. As Christians, we have been sealed. Having believed, we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. God gives the Holy Spirit and He dwells inside us. The fact that He lives inside us is proof we belong to God!

This is the role of the Holy Spirit. At the moment of believing, He is given to us. We are in Christ, we are given the Spirit. It is to show that all that have been promised by God will surely be ours. In fact, we are the possession that God has purchased. The Lord will return for us and take us home. When the Lord sees the mark of the Holy Spirit on us, He will take us home. We who has the seal will not be overlooked or missed out. But, those who do not have the mark will not be glorified. They are not his. Are you God's child? Are you God's possession? Do you have the Holy Spirit inside you?

If you are being asked if you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit, it is the same as being asked if you are a _____ (EEEIRVBL). A Christian is guaranteed of his final entrance into the future inheritance which is heaven, living with Christ forever. You will not be forgotten because you have been marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

Thought: What guarantees us entry into glory in heaven?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sealing with the Holy Spirit when I received the Lord Jesus Christ. With the seal, You have guaranteed my future inheritance –life in heaven. Thank You for all spiritual blessings in Christ. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE THANKFUL ALWAYS

People are happy and thankful for different things. Some people are glad when they are wealthy, even if it is by cheating customers. Others may be happy when they have been able to destroy an enemy in the office. How about you? When are you happy and thankful?

The Apostle Paul was thankful in this epistle, even though he was in prison. Was he mad? No! he was thankful because he knew there were people in Ephesus who were getting saved. What do you do when you hear of someone receiving the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul gave thanks. Even though he was in the prison, when he learnt of what was happening at Ephesus, Paul thanked the Lord.

When you hear somebody has come to the Lord, you do not go up to the person and thank him for becoming a Christian. There is nobody to thank, but God. Salvation is God's work. The whole work of salvation is God's, and no human or angel has any part in this wonderful work. At Ephesus, some unbelievers had become believers. Satan's followers had turned to God. God's grace had been seen in action. Lives had been changed. Do you recall that magicians gave up their crafts after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? Love now reigned among those who were once unkind and unlovely. What marvellous news! When such news reached the ears of the imprisoned apostle, he went to his knees and gave thanks.

Thought: How often should we give thanks to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me a joyful and thankful spirit to thank you ceaselessly for all the blessings you give to me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT DO YOUR EYES SEE?

Does today's title "What Do Your Eyes See?" make your eyes blink? Of course, you may think, my eyes see what is on this page! Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers to see beyond the obvious. He prayed that all believers see "the hope of his calling". It is important that we set our eyes on Heaven. In this world, Christians sometimes become very disheartened. They often wonder if they can keep going. But when they catch a glimpse of the heaven all their courage returns!

If you lose sight of heaven, you will be swamped by other things. Sin will affect you and your Christian life will sink. Study Lot and his wife. Lot was a believer, but a very weak one. He and his wife were worldly. They loved the nice things of this life far too well. Ungodly people in this world only look around them, never up or beyond this life. They want to get things and fun out of this life.

Lot lived in the city of Sodom. He was well-known in the city and was rich too. He did not look at the things of God but at business and how he was going to make more and more money.

One night, Lot had two guests - both angels. The angels told the news of the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. They led Lot and his family out of the city and warned that they should not look back. However, Lot's wife's love was for Sodom because she has invested so much in it. She loved that wicked city. She disobeyed the angels, and died immediately! The Lord rained the salt of the cities on her and she became a pillar of salt. Lot's wife not only loved the riches of Sodom; she loved its wickedness much more. Lot's wife would rather go to hell than obey God. Wicked people always do. When we are sinful and want to disobey God, think of these words that Jesus said, "Remember Lot's wife." (Luke 17:32). What happened to Lot? HE escaped, but only narrowly.

If only Lot and his wife would look to heaven. Only eyes that look up to heaven can stop worldliness to take over us. We are to set our affections on things above. When we do this, we have no trouble enjoying all that is good and helpful in this present life, for nothing now distracts us. With such riches before us, how could we ever want to be like people of the world?

Thought: How not to be like the people of the world?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me heed your warning 'remember Lot's wife', not to love riches nor wickedness of the world. Help me set my affections on heavenly things. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DEAD AND DISOBEDIENT

Before we are Christians, we were dead spiritually. Perhaps we hear His Word in Sunday School, or church, but we would not be able to understand. Or perhaps we did not want to listen to Him. We did not hear him, desire him or choose him. We could not do it. We sinned, constantly failing to meet God’s standard. And we did not care. It meant nothing to us for we were dead in trespasses and sins. The truth was announced to us but it was impossible for us to see it. It was impossible for us to hear the divine voice at all. We were dead. God’s Word met with silence. There was no response from us – WE WERE DEAD, spiritually!

Spiritually dead people have a certain way of walking and their lives go a certain direction. Before we are Christians, we lived our lives opposing God. God was not in our lives and we did not want him to be. We walked with the crowd but we didn’t walk with him. WE WERE DISOBEDIENT!

We lived as we wanted to. What past sins did you have before you became a Christian?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Why did we live the way we lived when we were not Christians? As you see around you, why do unbelievers live in trespasses and sins? There is a spiritual power that makes people disobedient to God. This power is of the world, the flesh and the devil. The world that we live in is our human society that operates without God. Murdering, cheating, fighting, jealousy, etc are committed every day. The devil is God’s sworn enemy. Unbelievers are on his side, rejecting God’s rule over them. He is known as the P _ _ _ _ _ of the world (from today’s text).

Thought: Thank God I am no longer spiritually dead!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me out of the power that makes me disobedient to God. I was once dead, now I am alive. I was once disobedient, now I live in obedience to God. Thank You for your grace and mercy. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

IS GOD ANGRY WITH YOU?

‘Wrath’ means great anger or rage. We get angry when someone hurts or irritates us. Some of us may have a bad temper and can be easily angered. If not controlled, we may burst out angrily. Little children also throw tantrums. But Paul was not talking about human anger; Paul was talking about divine anger of the highest level.

Because of sin, God is very angry with man. Especially after man rejected the way that God has given him – salvation through a personal belief in Jesus Christ. So people who are not Christians are children of wrath. They may also be called children of disobedience. When you see the word “children”, it does not mean these are kids. What it does mean is that these people are disobedient and therefore come under the wrath of God. These are rebels who reject Jesus as the Savior. Because of their sin God is never for them and always against them. They don’t have God as their friend. God is their enemy.

Is God’s wrath over you? Can you fight God? Repent of your sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ! Child, do not underestimate the wrath of God against sin. The world was once so full of sin that God had to completely destroy it. Remember the days of _ _ _ _ (OAHN). What happened then?

During those days, the deeds and thoughts of the people were so atrocious and monstrous making God angry and so he had to wipe out the entire earth which he had created using a flood.

Child, how you should tremble as you look back to the days of Noah? Our lives are in God’s hands. How you should tremble if you are still disobedient and unresponsive? At any moment God could stop our breath and send us to everlasting punishment. But he does not! This is the time for repentance. This is the time to make sure you are NOT a child of wrath of God!

God is patient, waiting for you to turn to him. Turn away from your sin and turn to him lest he pours his wrath on you.

Thought: Is God angry with me?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make me a child of obedience. Help me be sure that I am no longer a child of disobedience and wrath, because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour. Forgive me of my sins. Wash my sins by the blood of Jesus and make me your child. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

AL GLORY TO GOD!

Today's text is well-known by many Christians. Some Christians have it as their life-text. Many Christians have memorized it. Countless preachers have preached on it. It may well be the main theme of the book of Ephesians. Child, try to memorize it.

'For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.' Grace is receiving something you don't deserve. We don't deserve to be pardoned or forgiven of our sin. But God has given his grace – in the person of the Lord Jesus. God has saved us. Saving us is God's plan, God's doing. We don't save ourselves; we can't save ourselves. We are sinners; we can do nothing to earn or deserve God's favor. Read Psalm 53:3 and fill in the blanks. Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become _____; there is _____ that doeth good, no, not _____.

In the act of salvation, we do nothing, absolutely nothing. How can it be? Don't we exercise faith? One must have knowledge of and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and then only can he be saved. Exercising our faith is our doing, isn't it? So we do have a part in our salvation, don't we? No! Listen to the apostle – he tells us that the grace-through-faith way of saving us is 'not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast'.

The act of trusting Christ is part of salvation. So when God gives salvation, he also gives us the faith to believe in Jesus. In the past you could not believe, now you do. You had neglected him, now you accept and trust him. Did you suddenly improve? No, not at all. It is because God is gracious to save you, at the same time giving you faith to believe and receive.

Some people think that they must live good lives in order to be saved. How wrong they are! As Christians, we are to live good lives. But living a good life does not save. Living a good life is a result of being saved! As we are saved, we should live differently on this earth because we know we must live the way God teaches us according to the many wonderful doctrines and lessons in the Bible. He has made us new, so we should live as new people going about doing good deeds.

Thought: How are we saved?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that salvation is God's gift; when you saved me, you also gave me the faith to believe and receive. Thank you for salvation so rich and free. I praise you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHICH HUMAN RACE IS THE BEST?

In the times of Paul, the Jews felt that all people who were not Jews (the Gentiles) were of a lower class. The Jews felt they were special so they therefore looked down on the Gentiles. To the Jews, Gentiles were unwelcome outsiders. So, the apostle had to deal with this problem – were there two different ways of salvation, one for the Jews and the other for the Gentiles?

Paul talked about the temple at Jerusalem. Gentiles were allowed only into the outer courtyard of the temple. From outside, they could admire the Jews' privileges, but could not enter into them. A wall marked their limit. Going beyond the wall meant death penalty. The wall separated and divided Jews and Gentiles. The Gentiles found the Jews arrogant. Jews and Gentiles resented and hated each other. Would this end? Could this end? Thank God that the cross ended it all! The division of the world into Jews and Gentiles by the wall ended at the cross. There is no place to which a Jew can go to which a Gentile cannot also go. When Christ came, there was no need for the ceremonial law. When Christ died, sacrifices became obsolete. Christ ended the Jew-Gentile division.

By his death, the Lord Jesus Christ has destroyed the cause of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Salvation is given to both Jew and Gentile alike; both were cleansed by the same blood of Christ. It is the Lord who made peace between them. Whether a Jew or a Gentile that comes to Christ, they are both saved. Salvation comes by Christ only. There is no more division of the human race. Also, there is no such thing as a better race; all races are sinful and all races need God's forgiveness and grace.

Are you a Chinese boy or girl who may think the Chinese are better than other races? Or perhaps you may have heard racist jokes – jokes that poke fun at other races for whatever reasons? As Christians, we must never take part in them or even laugh at such jokes? Why? Because it is not the right thing to do! Like the children's song goes,

*Jesus loves the little children, All the children of the world
Red and yellow black and white, All are precious in His sight*

Thought: Help me to love children and people of all races.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that when Christ died on the cross, He reconciled God and man as well as Jew and Gentile. Christ is the peacemaker of the human race and best of all, of God and man. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

NO ACCIDENTS WITH GOD!

Paul called himself 'the prisoner of Jesus Christ'. What did he mean by that? Why not say that he was a prisoner of the Romans since the Romans captured and locked him up? Because Paul could see what a lot of people could not see – an invisible hand was behind it all. See what he wrote in Ephesians 1:11 – everything was happening 'according to the p_____ of him who worketh all things after the c_____ of his own w_____ (first letter given). God's hand was behind everything that was happening to him. He is pointing out to us what God's sovereignty is.

Because Paul understood the sovereignty of God, he did not complain or blame God. Many Christians who do not understand this truth become discouraged when faced with problems. However the apostle lived by this truth. He was in prison because the Lord wanted it that way. He was therefore his prisoner. He would remain there as long as his Lord wanted.

At the same time he would live to please God where God had placed him. Humanly speaking, it was very trying and it certainly looked like a tragedy. Who in his right mind would like to live in a rat-infested cold smelly and dangerous place such as a prison? But there are no accidents for God's people in the eyes of God. Everything is part of a divine plan. God's plans and ways are the best.

When you understand the truth of the sovereignty of God, you will have courage and comfort to face problems in life. God knows and he will give you strength and grace. Therefore, with Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm, just like the Apostle Paul.

Are there times in your life you wonder whether God made a mistake? Maybe dad's business is bad. Or parents quarrelling a lot? Or even divorce? Or maybe mummy is very sick? There are times when Satan will place doubts in your mind. Such times are times to go back to the bible and remember that God is absolutely in charge of everything, and that there is no need for fear or distrust!

Thought: Should you be afraid when you face difficulties?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I understand what sovereignty of God means. Help me to live by this truth and remain steadfast in my faith, trusting you always. It is sometimes very difficult but gracious Father, please teach me to remain faithful to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

CARE FOR OTHERS

Paul explained to the Ephesian church not to lose heart. He was not thinking about himself but caring for his fellow believers. He was praying that the Ephesian Christians might not be disheartened by what he (who was once their pastor) was going through. His imprisonment could badly affect others. Their leader was locked up. What could happen to them? They might also be dragged into the jail. He never paused to think about his suffering but was worried the effect that his imprisonment might have on others. He was more concerned with others. In such a situation, he thought of others instead of himself.

Consider this word JOY.

J stands for 'Jesus first';

O stands for 'others second';

Y stands for 'your needs comes last';

When we can put Jesus and others above us, we will be happy. This is the secret to having the joy in the Lord. The apostle told his readers that his time in prison was their glory. He was not locked in the prison because he had done a shameful thing. He was suffering because he had simply preached the gospel to the Gentiles. In history of Christendom, at times the rulers had prohibited the preaching of gospel. Those caught disobeying would be severely punished. Paul was there for a worthwhile cause and the Ephesians should be proud of this fact. They should be speaking positively about it and not be ashamed of Paul. Paul was suffering because he taught the Gentiles who received the Lord Jesus Christ were as much God's people as any Jewish believer. His teaching was offensive to the Jews. Whatever the cost, his only concern was to bring blessings to others.

Thought: May I learn to care more for others!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for the life of Paul. Help me be like him to give myself to serve God and others. Help me to think of other people's needs before mine. I pray I may learn to do this first in my family so that my parents, siblings, and relatives will see that I am a new person because I am controlled by Jesus, and that I now care more for others! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

YOU ARE PART OF ANOTHER FAMILY

Everyone has a family. You have a family. You may also have a brother and sister. Our parents work to provide for our daily needs. They buy us toys and perhaps others things we like. When we are sad and worried, they are there for us. It is wonderful to be a part of a family.

When you receive Jesus Christ, you become a part of God's family. Apostle John wrote in his gospel, saying, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." (John 1:12) Christians are called sons of God!

God has only one begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, God has a great number of adopted sons and daughters! Each one of us would be His adopted son or daughter! Where are God's adopted children? Some of these adopted children are now with the Father in heaven while others are at this moment living on the earth. But whether they are in heaven or on earth, they form a single family, and there is only one Father. Are you in God's family?

A song titled 'A Common Love' speaks of the love that the children in God's family have for each other. When you are a part of God's family, you are never alone. We are to help each other and pray for each other. So the next time you go to church or Sunday School, know how privileged it is to be among a large family of believers!

Thought: Are you part of this big happy family of believers?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for making me a part of your family when I received the Lord Jesus Christ. I am now your child and nothing can separate me from the love of God. Thank you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

IS THE INNER MAN STRONG?

In school, 10-year old James has no Christian fellowship as he is the only believer in class. He does not read his bible regularly and a group of bullies makes him do terrible things. This includes pulling clothes of younger students, pushing the smaller children around and even demanding for their school allowances. They threaten victims and warn them not to report to teachers. James does what he knows to be wrong. Why is that? It is because he is not strong enough spiritually.

We are to learn from the negative example of James to have inner strength based on God. As Christians, we are to be strengthened in the Holy Spirit. That means from our consistent fellowship with God, our daily reading of the Bible, we would be able to know the right thing and more importantly, to dare to do it! One who has received the Lord Jesus Christ has the Holy Spirit inside him to make him to be what he is. This is the prayer of Paul for the Ephesian Christians. Paul prayed that they might be 'strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man'. Are you like James?

In the Old Testament, there was such a man who was being mocked. Not just him alone, but his whole family was being mocked by relatives, neighbors and friends, and even strangers. They were being looked upon with sarcastic eyes, jeered at and all thought they had gone mad. This man and his wife, together with their three sons and three daughters-in-law, were building a big boat. Who was this man? What were the names of his sons?

Answer: _____, _____, _____. God had instructed them to build the boat because sometime in future, he would pour lots and lots of rain to flood the entire earth. The people on earth had turned wicked, that was why God would destroy the world, except those in the boat. The man had preached to the people about the coming disaster but it had fallen on deaf ears. They had not seen a single drop of water falling from the sky and thus would not believe him but instead ridiculed him. He knew in his heart that what he did was right and God would be true to his word, and so he would not be moved. He was strong in the inner man.

Thought: When was the last time you were weak in the inner man? How can you be strong in the inner man?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are times I am being tested, help me be strong in the inner man. May the Holy Spirit strengthen me with might in the inner man. I know it is sometimes so easy to just follow whatever others are doing so precious Father, teach me to dare to follow what You teach me in the Bible. This is my humble cry, in Jesus' name, Amen.

WHAT FAR SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE?

The love of Christ far surpasses knowledge, Apostle Paul told us in this epistle. Christ's love is unknowable! Unknowable? Whatever does he mean? There is no way anyone with his finite human mind who can fully understand how great and wonderful and perfect the love of Jesus has for us.

Someone had used an illustration to explain this. A group of divers are sent to explore an ocean. What is their assignment? They are to find out how wide the ocean is, and how long and how deep. And they are given one hour to do so. After their research, all of them know something about the ocean. Each one knows something that nobody else knows. Each one can tell all the rest something he has found out. But yet there is none who knows everything. What can they do in just one hour? Even all of them put together, they would know so very little of the majestic ocean. In the same way, Christ's love is unknowable. We have only a limited lifespan on earth to know His love. The greatest bible teacher or pastor would not be able to know all of the love of Jesus even if he spent his entire life studying!

However, let's try to describe Christ's love like the divers may describe the ocean. Christ's love is wide. Paul said that his love embraces not only the Jew, but the Gentile as well. "Come unto me, all ye labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," said Jesus (Matthew 11:28). There is a wide invitation to come to Christ. Christ's love extends to all. So, what is the length of Christ's love? It is everlasting. Before the world began, he loved us. Now he loves us, and His love never fails. He loves us forever. What about the depth of the love of Christ? It was his love which brought him to the earth. It was his love that moved him to sit with sinners. It was his love that hung him on the cross. Christ is love, now in heaven interceding for His people.

Thought: May I learn more of Christ's love!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that you will help me know more of Christ's love and experience his love. I know I am but a child but gracious Lord, teach me daily to know more and more of Jesus' wonderful love for me! In His precious name I pray, Amen.

CHRISTIANS ARE ONE!

Apostle Paul tells us we are actually one body. The church is a body, with Jesus Christ as the head. Each one of us is likened to be an organ of the body such as an ear, an eye or a foot. We belong to each other and depend on each other. It is foolish if different parts of the same body do not cooperate with each other. What about setting eye against ear, and foot against hand? Imagine the hand getting angry with the face and slapping the face! Or the mouth not happy with the leg and therefore biting it! There is to be unity in the body as Christians are to be bound together. You and I play an important part to preserve unity of the church. This is by having or cultivating certain attitudes. Read verse 2 of Ephesians chapter 4. What are these attitudes?

- L _____
- M _____
- L _____
- B _____

The attitude we must have is to have the welfare of other people. Do you care for other people in your church or in your fellowship group or your Sunday School class? All the qualities are found in the Lord Jesus Christ himself and we must copy him. In this way, there will be unity and harmony in the church. Is unity automatic? No! Work is needed and we must check our attitudes. Who must make the necessary effort? YOU!

Paul stressed that there is one _____, one _____, one _____, one _____, one baptism, one _____. Can we Christians keep apart from each other? Can you split from other believers? **NEGATIVE!**

Church life is therefore a very important part of your life. It is God's will that you belong to a local church. There are many blessings that God have for his church. If you are not active, you are disobeying God and missing out his blessings of Christian love and support. Do something about your church life if it is dead.

Thought: What attitudes are needed to preserve church unity?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to play a part in preserving church unity and to have an active church life. I know I must learn to work better with others around me. So if I have been a complaining girl, teach me to stop it. If I have been an unhelpful boy, help me to learn to be willing to help other Christians! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DOES CHRIST GIVE ME A SPIRITUAL GIFT?

Members in a church are all one in Christ. That we learnt yesterday. But are we all the same? No, it does not mean that we are all the same. In school, pupils wear uniform, but they are not the same. They vary in ability in studies, duties and natures. So, there is also no uniform for Christians to wear. We are all very different and God wants it that way as He has made us differently and gives different spiritual gifts. Each of us has received at least one spiritual gift from Christ to serve Him.

What is important to know is that Christ gives differing gifts to people in order to meet differing needs. Different spiritual gifts are for the working of the church's good. They work in harmony together to build the church. Nobody must flatter himself or nobody must be jealous of anybody else. We can all do something to help build up the body.

As a young person, you may wonder what gift you have. How can you help build up the body? Read on... After hearing the Word of God, you find your hearts being stirred up, to obey God and to do what He wants you to do. By doing those things you later discover that the Lord has given you other talents. As you exercise those talents, you will enrich other members' lives and be a blessing to them. Then, your church will be even more blessed, and your life as well. To illustrate this, here is a story. A young person was asked to play the piano in the Sunday School Christmas event. He was shy and not sure if he could do a good job. But he took courage, practiced very hard, and trusted God. It turned out that on that day he played the piano very well and everything went on smoothly. That started him to serving God in this ministry. As months went by, he became more confident and was not shy anymore. As he had overcome his shyness, he started to serve in the teaching ministry of the church. He was not afraid of standing in front of a Sunday School class, teaching Bible truths to little kids. Little did he know that he was to become a Sunday School teacher. He had used his talents given by God to be a blessing to other members in his church. Won't that be wonderful if you could in the future be that boy who first tried to serve God and was willing to work hard for God's glory?

Thought: How will you use your spiritual gift to serve God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me spiritual gifts. Help me to exercise the gift to enrich other people in my church and be a blessing to them. And please help me in my serving You to also give all glory to Your Holy name! This is my prayer, in His name, Amen.

CHRISTIANS ARE DIFFERENT!

Paul was concerned for the Ephesian Christians because they were not living their lives according to the teachings of the Scriptures. After we become Christians, we must “put off” the way of living which we had before we accepted Jesus. We are to stop doing the wrong things we did. And instead of the “old man or self”, we are to put on the new man at conversion.

Christians must be different from their old selves for they now have given their lives to Jesus. Every believer is to speak only truth. No lying is allowed. Do you lie? Lying is not just telling something untrue, it includes exaggeration, half-truths and white lies. Child, do you have the tendency to lie?

Paul tells us the reason that we are not to lie. What is the reason? It is ‘we are _____ one of another’ (Ephesians 4:25b). A minister once explained it like this – if the eye sees a snake, does it deceive the foot? If the tongue tastes something bitter, does it deceive the stomach? When the eye sees a snake on the ground, it does not lie to the foot which is about to step on it. It does not say that it is just a walking stick. It tells the foot to turn away and run the other way. What happens if the eye tells lies? The snake bites and the person is hurt. Let’s switch to the tongue. If the tongue tastes poison but then tells the stomach that it is a sweet snack, both the stomach and tongue will suffer. What is the lesson for us here? Every time we are untruthful, we destroy not only the person we are talking to, but ourselves too, for we are members of one another – assuming we are all Christians.

Besides putting away lying, we must also put away other types of wrong behavior. What are they?

- A _____ (Ephesians 4:26)
- S _____ (Ephesians 4:28)
- C _____ C _____ (Ephesians 4:29)

After a person has received Jesus Christ, his life is changed. He is a new person and must live a different life. His behavior is different. What about you?

Thought: Are you a new person?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me put off the “old man” and put on the “new man”. I know that at times I will still sin but I must try my best to change my behavior. Help me, gracious God, for I pray in the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

OUR CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A LONG WALK

The Christian life is a long walk. The apostle has in other writings described the Christian life as a run but in this epistle, he spoke of it as a walk. The different words are used to highlight different aspects of the relationship we have with God. What is wonderful about walking is that it is steady. Walking is consistent. You keep the same pace. There is no hurrying in the pace. What God wants is that we must be steady, consistent, always the same.

Verse 2 teaches us that we are to “walk in love”. That means we are to walk in a way that will show we love God. We are to live our lives in a way that will put God first. So we’d be faithful to do our Quiet Time, reading the bible and this Junior RPG, and pray. Reading the bible and doing QT is not to be some mechanical exercise, but something we do because we love God. Then our lives would be slowly changed to be more and more like what God wants us to be!

Verse 8 teaches us that we are to “walk as children of light”. The idea is in whatever we do, we are to act as Christians, because Christians are “children of light”. That would mean we do not do anything that will bring shame to God. No lying, no unkindness, no rudeness to parents, no selfishness. Would it be easy? No! That is why we constantly need God’s help!

Thought: May I remain faithful in my Christian walk!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to walk faithfully. I know it would be a long walk and often, I may be distracted. So precious Lord, help me to focus on You and Your Holy Word. Help me to keep walking all the way with Jesus. In His blessed name I pray, Amen.

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Paul tells us to be filled with the Spirit. What does that mean? That means a Christian is so conscious of God in his life that whatever he says and do, he will try to do it in order to please God. That Christian would be so aware of his own weaknesses and not depend on himself, but always be relying on God.

But how do we get filled with the Spirit? That means he would be faithful in learning God's word so much so that his thinking and views and actions would be guided by the Holy Spirit.

To be constantly filled with the Spirit, we must constantly "drink" of the spiritual goodness. Here is a list of things that would help you "drink" spiritually:

- Pray
- Listen to teaching of the bible
- Study God's Word on your own, for yourself
- Attend Christian fellowship groups

Are you doing these things?

As you are involved in every form of spiritual and devotional activities, the Holy Spirit living in you does his work in you. You will become closer to God. And the closer you are to God, the more you can know of His power to help you fight sin and temptations!

Thought: I want to be filled with God's teachings and power!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me the Holy Spirit. Set my heart and mind to engaging in the right things to "drink" spiritually. And help me to press on! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU AN OBEDIENT CHILD?

The Christian life has to be lived at home. Some children may claim they are Christians but at home, they are selfish to siblings, rude to parents, unkind to others. These children are putting up a front – or they are not themselves. That is a terrible sin for that is pretending to be what they are not!

Sadly, this is true of many Christians. Are you one who says you are a Christian but not behaving as one? We are like that once before. When Christians are with believers, they seem to be living godly lives. At work, in school, they put on the best behavior and appear to be true Christians. But what are they like at home? There they relax, with their defences down. Their life at home is a disgrace. It is very different to the way they live outside. So much of it is unchristian.

Do you do any unkind or unchristian things at home?
What would these be?

- _____
- _____
- _____

Paul tells children to obey parents. They must do what their parents tell them. They must do it because this is what the bible teaches! When your parents tell you to do your homework, do it. Often you will say, “May I first play the computer?” or “Can I watch the television?” “Can I go out and play?” Obey mummy and daddy, and obey them immediately!

When you are asked to help mother with household chores, do you hesitate or give excuses such as ‘I have school assignments’, ‘I have not practiced my piano’, ‘I have tummy ache’, etc. That is wrong. Give your mother the due respect and obey her willingly. Love your parents. Obeying them is a form of love and your parents will see that is the best way to live a Christian live at home.

Thought: Am I an obedient child?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please forgive me for not living the Christian life at home. Help me to give to my family instead of expecting something out of family. Help me love my family more and more, especially to obey my parents. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SPIRITUAL ARMOUR 1

Most of us don't like cockroaches and want to get rid of them. But cockroaches are not afraid of you; they are afraid of Baygon or some other insecticides. To be effective against a cockroach, we usually have to use insecticides like Baygon.

In the same way, the dark spiritual forces on the side of Satan are not afraid of us! So what are they afraid of? Jesus and God! And what has God given us to fight these spiritual battles? The spiritual armor! We will learn more about different aspects of the armour tomorrow.

Christian living is definitely not easy. It is, in fact, a real battle. It is true that none of you has ever been in a battle. You are all too young or not born yet when world wars happened. But in the early 1940s, our country was invaded by Japan and there were real battles in the land. What is the life of a soldier at war like? He carries his weapons day and night. His every waking thought is to look out for the enemy and to fight when he sees one. His eating, sleeping and relaxing are to serve one purpose- to strengthen himself for war. There is no time he ceases to be a soldier.

A Christian must be strong. Paul encourages the Ephesians to 'be strong in the Lord'. The strength is divine strength, not physical strength. It is the strength that is from the Lord. Having strong muscles don't make you a strong Christian. Christians have something to _____ against (Ephesians 6:11) and _____ against (Ephesians 6:12). When darts which are fiery are shot at you, you are to stand the ground. When enemies charge at you with swords, you fight back with arms.

The Gospel is under attack. The world does not like to think that only Jesus saves, and think God loves everyone and will save anyone no matter what religion as long as he does good deeds. The world likes to think that all ways lead to God and to Heaven. This is not the Gospel.

It is a fierce battle. What shall we do? What can you do, young reader? Around you are your unbelieving parents, relatives and friends. You can win the battle with the strength from the Lord.

Thought: How to be a good Christian soldier?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I have relatives and friends who are not saved yet. They do not know you and the gospel of your saving grace. Help me to pray for them and reach out to them. God, have mercy on them and give them your grace. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SPIRITUAL ARMOUR 2

Paul likened the armour of God to what a Roman soldier wore at that time. The first piece of the armour is the belt of truth. The belt is made of thick leather and from it hangs metal plates, perfect in protecting the lower body. God's Word is the perfect truth and it is to protect us from errors and falsehood by bad and deceptive teachers. Are you reading God's Word daily?

The Roman soldier also has a breastplate. This is his body protection. Likewise, we are to put on the breastplate of righteousness. We are to live a life that is right so that we will not be weakened by sins and backsliding.

Another piece of armour is good and firm footwear to give the soldier a firm footing in battle. As Christians, we are to have our "feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace". That means we are to be aware of our responsibility to share God's Word and to try our best to tell others about Jesus.

Carrying a shield is to protect from enemies' shooting darts and arrows at us or to bash them in contact battles. Christians have faith as shields. Where there is faith, there is nothing to fear. Faith is believing what God has said, so we accept His teachings, obey them, heed His warnings and lay hold of His promises! Trust God and His Word.

The last piece is the helmet. It protects the head. We are to remember that as saved ones, we will have the final victory over Satan because Jesus had already conquered death and sin by His death and resurrection.

To have an armour for protection is not enough; Christians have two attacking weapons: the Spirit's sword and prayer. The Spirit's sword is the Word of God which is powerful to subdue the devil which controls people's mind. God's Word can enlighten minds, change lives and convert unrepentant hearts. We must declare God's message to the world. Prayer is our secret weapon and we must pray without ceasing for the battle is fierce and ongoing. We are to intercede for believers everywhere and to pray for salvation of lost ones. The gospel will advance in this world if we will use the weapons God has given to us. Will you join in the battle? Will you put on the armour of God?

Thought: What comprises the armor of God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that I must put the armor of God on to fight in the battle. There are many problems and troubles in the world, especially my loved ones are not saved. I must fight in this spiritual war and please help me to obey, my Commander. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

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