
GOD MADE ALL THINGS (I)

The beginning - have you wondered how everything you see around you came about? It is very, very important for you to know your roots. The Bible tells us our roots, our beginning. There are many theories saying things opposed to the Bible. Don't be swayed by wrong teachings, read on and find out for yourself how all things began...

Imagine you are having the yummy fried chicken your mum makes for lunch. You ask yourself, where did all these come from? Before your mother cooked them, she most likely bought fresh chicken from the supermarket. Before the chickens reach the supermarket, they were alive and perhaps running around in the coops. The chicken were obviously chicks which grew. But where did the first chicken come from? According to Genesis, from God!

Look at the homes you live in. The walls are made from bricks. Bricks came from the clay of God's ground. The wooden furniture such as the chairs, tables and cupboards came from the wood of the trees which God had created. Everything came from God because God made all things.

When did God make all things? "In the beginning..." According to bible history, that is slightly over 6,000 years. In the beginning, the earth was "without form and void", empty of the wonderful nature and oceans and wildlife of today. It was also totally dark and so God created light - the sun, and God also created the moon. As we measure the hours of a day by the rising and setting of the sun, we may say that God made time this day. Heaven, earth and light were created on the first day.

How did God create? When you make a birthday card for your friend, you take time to make it. You write on it, color it, paste stickers and a host of other stuff to make it nice and lovely. However, when God made things in the 6 days of Creation, He just needed to speak, and things came into existence! By speaking, God created. Amazing, but true. God had created everything out of nothing. When you make the card, you need things to make it but everything that God had created came from nothing. This is just so, so amazing. Wow! Think of it, God's way of creating things was simply stupendous!

Thought: God is the Creator of all!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for making all things. Because You are the Maker, You are in control of all things. So I can put my trust in You. Help me simply to trust in You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD MADE ALL THINGS (II)

God was not finished with the work of creating the heavens and the earth. How did God create the sky? How about the earth? And the sun? Dear child, are you eager to find out what God did on the next 3 days of creation?

Day 2 - the waters and sky were not as the waters and sky as we know them today. The bible tells us that God separated the waters above from the waters below and put the firmament between. The firmament was the sky, and so there was some form of a huge water cushion in the sky as well. From your science books, you don't learn about this. Neither from your school teachers. The atmosphere then was very different from now. It is most probable that the atmosphere in ancient days was conducive for dinosaurs to exist and responsible for the very long lives of man, who could live for hundreds of years! Perhaps it was this water cushion that protected living things then from harmful rays of the sun. It was a very different atmosphere then.

Day 3 - God gathered the waters together into one place, and let the dry land appear. Now, you could see lakes and brooks. As for the land, God did not let it remain dry and barren. It was ready for plants. God made a great variety of plants and trees, and they were created all full-grown, not as seeds. The land was lush and green straightaway! Forests, meadows and gardens occupied the land. It was simply incredible!

Day 4 - God made things and placed them in the sky. What were they? They are sun, moon and the millions of stars in the skies. They give light to the earth. They also "rule" in that the sun shines during the day and when it rises, it tells us to wake up and work. When it sets, it tells us that the day is over. The moon rules the night to tell us the time to go to bed and gives light in the dark night. The stars also give light to our night and a starry night is simply spectacular! But, you may wonder, "I don't see them at night." In countries like Singapore where building lights, street lights, car lights and all sorts of artificial lights are everywhere, it is hard to see the sky-filled natural lights except the moon. How then can you see these God-made lights? Do you have a clue? Answer: _____

Isn't our Creator an amazing God full of wonders?

Thought: Every time I see the sun or moon or stars, I should thank God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are the God of wonders. All the things that You have made are full of wonder and beauty. I praise and thank You, in Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD MADE ALL THINGS (III)

Do you love animals? Do you love visiting the zoos and bird parks? What would the world be like if there were no living things? God is not done yet with His creative work. On Days 5 and 6 God made living things that breathe.

On Day 5 God created fishes and birds; on Day 6 He created land animals. Again, God simply spoke, and all these creatures came into being. Now there were sheep, cats, lions and all kinds of birds flying in the open sky. In the seas, all kinds of sea creatures were swimming; big and little ones. What a beautiful world!

Here are some simple facts. When God made living creatures, there were laws for them or else they would die. They were created after their own kind, that is, each of them had its place. The fishes have to live in the water and the animals in dens or woods on land. Can a fish stay alive on land or a bird live in water? So, it is not possible for one kind of living creature to slowly evolve into or become another kind. A small cat simply cannot become a lion over time because all animals are made after their own kind.

Another fact is about reproduction. The Lord created the fish, bird and animals so that each would bring forth its own kind. What does it mean? A mother cat will have kittens, not baby mice. Fishes will have baby fishes, not chicks. A lioness will not give birth to puppies. The Lord made birds such that they know how to make nests, and how to feed and care for their babies. When a mother bird finds worms, she returns to the nest and feeds them to her chicks. What about lions? In the cold, the cubs all huddle with their mother. When hungry, the lioness lie on her side and the cubs suckle milk. God blessed His creation. God blessed these living creatures and told them to multiply – to have babies and grandbabies and great-grandbabies! Thank God that He had created all the animals, big and small.

Refrain:

*All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful, The Lord God made them all.*

Thought: How do you feel knowing God had made all these living creatures?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for creating such a wonderful place to live in with all these interesting and lovely animals. I praise and sing of Your mighty works. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

NO EVOLUTION!

Where does man come from? Man did not evolve from some ape-like being. Charles Darwin invented the theory of evolution and many people believe in Darwin's theory. Many of your school teachers may believe it – but you **MUST NOT**. Why? Because the Bible, God's Word, states that God created man from dust and not through a slow process involving an ape-like being; Adam, the first man, was a fully-grown fully-developed man the very second he was made!

By the hand of God, Adam was created from the dust of the ground. How interesting, it was different from the making of the animals. Adam was personally made by God. Not just this, God breathed into Adam the breath of life. The best part is this – God made man in His image. In other words, man was made like God. Unlike animals and birds, Adam has a soul and could communicate and fellowship with God.

God gave the entire earth to Adam to enjoy and use – all the plants were food for him and the animals. At that time, were animals carnivorous (meat-eating)? Answer: _____. At that time, there was no sin, so there was no death, no dead animals and therefore no meat and therefore no meat-eaters. Deer and tigers could live together side-by-side. All animals lived together without fighting or hurting each other.

God told Adam to multiply – to have a big family of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, etc. God wanted many people on the earth. How could Adam have children without a wife? God had to do something...

When God made the animals to pass before Adam, Adam gave them names. He saw that there were both male and female animals. But, Adam was all alone. God saw how sad and lonely he was. God cared and so He made Adam go into a deep sleep. As he was sleeping, God took one of his bones, a rib, and from it He made a woman. What do you think when Adam saw his wife? What name did he give to her? Answer: _____.

Remember there is no such thing as evolution. Many in the world may believe in it and may laugh at you for believing the bible. Dear child, you have the faith to trust in God and not in man.

Thought: Evolution is an evil lie!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You made man and that there is no evolution. I pray I will have the simple faith to believe in Your Holy Word – the Bible. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SIN CAME INTO THE WORLD (I)

God created Adam and Eve perfect. Ever thought what it is to be perfect? Never to think wicked thoughts? Never to speak hurtful things and tell lies? Adam and Eve could do that before they sinned. However, sin came into the world...

Eve was alone. A sly serpent came to Eve and talked to her. Satan transformed himself into a serpent, previously one of the most beautiful and powerful angels created by God. Because he was so dominant, he became proud and wanted to be like God! He fell, and brought with him angels who were then transformed into demons that follow Satan.

What Satan did with the angels in making them sin, Satan wanted to do the same with Eve. He was so evil. Not only did he sin; he wants as many people to sin with him as well. So, knowing that Eve was alone, he crept up to Eve.

First - what did Satan do? He spoke to Eve; he placed a wrong thought in her mind. The first thing to learn is not to have any wrong thoughts. Anything from Satan is evil and we must never allow that to happen. As soon as we sense that a wrong thought is coming, stop it. Pray for help from God. Wrong thoughts today can come in the form of selfishness, or anger, or impatience, or ingratitude. The list is quite endless!

Second - what did Satan say? His words were, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" That seems like an innocent question. But Satan is never innocent. Behind those words was the wicked intent to make Eve question God. Never fall into the trap of questioning God's Word. Satan probably knew what God said, and God did not say Eve cannot eat of every tree.

Third - Satan was putting a suggestion into Eve's mind that perhaps, he was more concerned of her welfare than God was! Sometimes we may feel that way and think there are so many rules to follow. Dear child, never think that way. God loves you and the rules in the bible are given to protect you from harm!

Thought: Beware of how sin can creep slowly into your life!

Prayer: Gracious Father in heaven, I pray that I will be more careful not to let Satan place any disobedient thoughts in me, and please keep me so close to You by reading and loving the Bible. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SIN CAME INTO THE WORLD (II)

After Satan succeeded in placing thoughts into the mind of Eve, she coveted. And she in turn influenced her husband – Adam – and he also coveted. To covet is to want something that does not belong to you, and should not be desired by you. God has warned Eve and Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but they disobeyed. God’s warning was clear – if you eat of that tree, you will surely die.

The serpent tricked Adam and Eve to eat the fruit from the tree which God had forbidden. Their eyes were sinful, they took a look at the fruit and instead of instantly fleeing from sin and sinful thoughts, Eve continued to indulge and liked what she saw – that the tree was good for food and that it was nice to look at! What did it look like? We won’t know, but it must have been a beautiful and attractive fruit! It was not that there was some magic with the fruit; it was more the disobeying of God as He had commanded them not to eat of that fruit.

Often, sin looks attractive or right. When you are about to burst out in anger at someone, you would feel it is the right thing to do! Or when you are about to do something selfish, it may appear as if you have the right to do it. Remember how tricky Satan is. He would place in your mind the idea that sin is attractive, and that you have a right to do it.

What are some of the wrong thoughts or actions you may be tempted to do?

Answer: _____

Thought: We have to be careful of wrong thoughts!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the warning that sin can easily affect me. Teach me to be close to You, and one wonderful way is to fill my mind with Bible verses and Bible lessons. Please forgive my sins and help me be a strong Christian. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD

Now Adam and Eve no longer lived in the Garden of Eden. There they had been perfect and happy. Though driven out of it, God still took care of them for they were God's children. God blessed them with two boys: Cain and Abel. When people in the Old Testament brought sacrifices, they had to follow a set of rules given by God as the offerings had to be acceptable to God. God taught Adam, and Adam taught his two sons. Although the same thing was taught, the results were very different.

Cain disobeyed his father and God and brought offerings that were not acceptable to God. On top of the different offerings, there was also a difference in their hearts for Abel went to God in obedience and humility. In faith, Abel brought a lamb but Cain brought the fruit of the ground as his offering. God accepted Abel and his offering but rejected Cain and his offering. God rejected Cain and his offering because Cain did not follow God's instructions. Cain did not offer a blood offering and did not offer by faith.

Instead of repenting of his sins, Cain was angry, terribly angry at God. But although Cain was angry against God, he knew he could not reach or harm God. So what he did was to reach out and harm the one whom God loved, and the one whom he was jealous of – Abel. So he killed his brother! What a terrible sin! He broke God's commandment. When God asked him where Abel was, he told a bold hard lie to God – "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"

For his sin, Cain must be punished. God punished him—God cursed the ground, that it would hardly give food for him. Sinning has terrible consequences. We learn today that we must do things according to God's way (like the sacrifices of Cain & Abel) and if we sin, God will punish.

Dear child, are you obedient? Do you follow what is in the bible—to be a kind and helpful child, to honour your parents and love your siblings and friends? Or are you like Cain, wanting to do things your way in your pride and sin?

Thought: May I never be like Cain!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me never to be like Cain – for he was a proud, selfish and easily angered person. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DARE TO BE DIFFERENT!

From a couple – Adam & Eve – who were created perfect without any sin, their descendants became very evil very soon. Sin breeds, or gives rise, to more sin. When man does not want to have God in their hearts to guide and bless them, they would turn to evil sooner or later.

Right in the middle of all these terrible wicked men was Noah. These beautiful words describe him – ‘Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord’ (verse 8). He was a ‘just man and perfect, ...and walked with God’ (verse 9). He was very different from everybody. He dared to be different. Although there was a lot of evil around him, he did what he knew was the right thing.

Are you like Noah? Do you dare to do the right things you know God or parents want you to do? Or do you follow others in your group of class as you are afraid of being different and being teased, perhaps?

The sin was so great that God had to destroy the world with a global flood and start anew. In the account of Noah, God decided to save Noah and his family with an ark. But first, Noah must build the ark.

While we may think it is no big deal to build the ark, it took a lot of faith for Noah to build it. Many people likely ridiculed and laughed at him. Why? Because before the Flood, no one in the world had experienced or seen rain. There was no need for rain as God gave people on earth an amazing atmosphere that was like that of a perfectly kept air-conditioned greenhouse.

It took Noah a lot of time and a lot of courage to have the ark built. If you were Noah, would you have obeyed God and remained faithful in building the ark, or would you give up after people laugh and ridicule you?

Thought: May I dare to be different, for God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are people around me that don't do the right things. I must not be like them but to be like Noah who dared to be different. Like Noah, I will be just and perfect and will walk with God. Please help me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE FLOOD – GOD’S PROTECTION OF HIS LOVED ONES

Remember you read in the previous day’s reading that the earth was like a perfect air-conditioned greenhouse before the flood? Those were days when men lived very long. Most of them lived hundreds of years! That is because the perfect air-conditioned atmosphere protected humans from any harmful rays of the sun and was able to prolong life.

That is why we read in today’s text that Noah was already 600 years old when God told him to go into the ark. How many entered the ark? Eight: four men (Noah and his three sons) and their wives.

The animals also got into the ark. How did they? God brought them. Noah took them inside. He did not have to round them up. Two of each kind, from big to small, came and entered the ark. That was a miracle of God as He could control the animals. The wicked could see this wonder of the animals obeying God, but yet they did not repent. Imagine this – even animals obeyed God but these men did not.

God shut the door of the ark. He shut the door and stayed right there to guard Noah and his family and keep them safe. Noah and his family were not going on a nice boat trip but they were going through a terrible flood that would shake the earth and God went along. He would keep them safe inside.

Then, God caused rain to fall for the first time. It rained for 40 days and 40 nights. Child, think about it carefully. It rained a lot and for a long time. God made the fountains of the deep below the earth’s surface to break up and from the top, a canopy of water firmament that protected the earth to open up. So water from the sky fell and water from below the ground surged forth. The whole earth was completely covered by water! This was God’s judgment on the wicked world. There could have been tremendous earthquakes for the waters below to break forth and all land creatures both man and beasts and fowls of the air that were not inside the ark died.

But, inside the ark, God’s people, very small in numbers, were saved. It was a miracle. God was keeping His people safe.

Thought: As God protected Noah and family, God can protect me!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for always keeping me safe just like You kept Noah safe inside the ark. I am always safe because You are always with me. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S MERCY IN STOPPING THE FLOOD

One very important word in today's text is "remembered". God remembered Noah, his family, and the living things that were in the Ark. The flood was a great punishment from God as He had to cleanse the earth of all the sin and sinners. Was it an easy choice for God? I guess God did not like to do it but He had to for the sin in the world was too great to bear. That is why He sent the flood. But He remembered.

Think of the time you parents disciplined you when you did something wrong. The punishment could come in various ways, and punishment is always to teach children something. And no matter how long the punishment may appear to be, it will end.

This is the same case for what we read in these three verses. God remembered the people and animals and knew that they had to be let out of the ark and set foot on dry ground.

So God again did some miracles. The verses tell us that He caused the "fountains of the deep" and "windows of heaven" to close up and the torrential rain and flood stopped. What amazing powers our Lord has. What endless mercy our Lord has.

Eventually, the water level lowered and the ark landed on a mountain. And Noah and family as well as the animals could leave the ark and return to live their normal lives on earth.

As God saved Noah and family because they believed in Him, God will also save you and me if we believe in Him and have Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of our lives!

Thought: My God is a God of mercy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for stopping the waters so that eventually, Noah and his family could leave the ark and live their lives on earth. As I read of how merciful You are, I want to thank You for also being merciful to me. As You preserved Noah from destruction, You would also protect me from the destruction in hell. Thank You so much, in Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S CHILDREN SIN TOO

The flood wiped out everything on the earth. The wicked cities which the wicked men boasted of and loved were all gone. But wickedness never goes out of the earth. Even if we can wipe out the places of evil, evil can still strike at the heart of man.

Noah planted a vineyard and he made wine. Unfortunately, he drank the wine and became drunk, and lay in his tent naked. That was very wrong of Noah. Although Noah was a righteous man and was obedient to God in building and entering the ark, he is not perfect. No man is perfect, not even the most mature Christian, pastor, or church leader.

Here we see that Noah sinned. Unfortunately, Noah's son, Ham, sinned too. He saw that his God-fearing father had sinned and was drunk. He saw that his father was naked. What he should have done is to help his father, and the best way to help his father was to cover his nakedness. However, not only did he not do the right thing; he did the wrong thing. What wrong thing did he do? He mocked his father and in turn went to tell his brothers that their father had sinned.

After waking up, Noah knew what Ham did and placed a curse on Ham— his children and grandchildren – his line – would be cursed. There is punishment for sinning. They would not be in the line of God's people. That does not mean that all who were from that line would never be saved. It does mean the nation of Israel and eventually our Lord Jesus Christ would not be from that line.

In this passage, we read of how terrible and sad the consequences of sin are. And we learn that even Noah sinned. Do you sometimes think that pastors do not sin? Or some elder or deacon or other church leader does not sin? Dear child, the bible states clearly that all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God, and all need the forgiveness and love of God.

What then can you do to not sin? Keep close to God. And do not do anything that would lead you to sin. If Noah did not drink the wine, he would not have been drunk. If he had not been drunk, he would not be naked, and his son Ham would not have any occasion to mock him.

One sin leads to another. Dear child – be careful!

Thought: One sin leads to another.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be so careful in not doing or thinking anything unkind or sinful as that may easily lead me to do other wrong things. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

NOT JUST MOVING HOUSE...

Do you like to move house? Do you like to leave your old neighborhood and friends, your house and garden, and pack everything and take it along to a new house? Some of you may say, "Wow, that can be exciting!" But what if you have to move away alone, without your father and mother, leave everything at home, move out of your own country? Worse of all, what about not even knowing where you are going!

In ancient times, there was a man who had to do exactly that. His name was Abram. God told Abram to leave his country and his relatives. Abram was very happy in Ur; he had it good there; he had a home, many animals, land for the animals, and friends and relatives. Why should he leave them all behind?

Abram did not know where he was going. God would lead him to a place that He would show him. And God also promised to make a great nation of him. A great nation – how could it be? Why should he go to an unknown place?

And guess Abram's age? Was he a strong young man who perhaps could find this migration exciting and fun? No! Abram was already 75 years old! If you have an old man of that age today, what is the likelihood of him moving to another country, alone? For Abram, it was a very difficult decision. He had many possessions, owned many animals and had to bring servants along. It was not an easy task.

But he obeyed. Bringing along with him his wife Sarai, he stepped into the unknown. He travelled toward the land that God would show him. They had to cross the river Jordan before they got to the land God promised. Imagine how his animals, thousands of them including young animals, crossed the river without modern means!

Abram had great faith. He did not just move house. He moved to a new country, to a totally new and strange environment. How did he do it? With faith in God.

Thought: May I have great faith, like Abram!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Abram trusted You. Help me to also trust and obey You as this is the only way to be happy in Jesus! In His wonderful name I pray, Amen.

A STRANGER, A WITNESS IN AN UNKNOWN LAND

What kind of place had God promised Abram? A nice and safe place? Far from it, the land of Canaan was filled with wicked people. The wicked people served idols and hated God. How could Abram and family survive in such an evil place? This was surely the end for Abram and his wife and nephew.

However, the whole land of Canaan would be given to Abram as a promise of God. Even though God gave Abram the whole land, Abram would live there in tents. These are temporary 'homes', which can be assembled or disassembled at any time. It means that Abram was to live as a stranger in a strange land. Abram must not settle down to build a permanent home or a nice dwelling place. He was only travelling through it to his better home in heaven.

In the same way, we are to learn from Abram. Not literally to live like him in tents, but to treat this life on earth as a temporary place before our final home which is in heaven. That is difficult, isn't it? And often, we do not even think of it that way – we love this life so much we want to live here as long as possible.

Abram was righteous. God wanted all the sinners and heathen in Canaan to see that Abram served the Lord and believed His promises. In order to show the Canaanites that the God of heaven is the only God, Abram went up and down the land building altars to God. Altars were for worship. Abram was to be a witness of God to these wicked people. He was to show them that there is a God who loves them and through his example, perhaps they can understand more about this great God. You may recall a song that goes like this...

This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine

This little light of mine I'm gonna let it shine

Let it shine, Let it shine, Let it shine

Thought: Are you a good witness for God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Abram stood out among the wicked people and witnessed to them. He was not ashamed of God. Help me to witness to other people about the love of God and His promises. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE PROBLEM OF QUARRELLING

Quarrelling is a major problem for many people. Is it yours too? In school, have you quarrelled with your classmates? What did you quarrel about? What about at home? Do you and your sibling argue about not sharing the use of the computer? How did the quarrels start? Why didn't you give in to your friends or your siblings? How do we overcome this problem of quarrelling? Learn from the story of Abram and his nephew...

Abram and Lot were blessed by the Lord with great wealth – cattle, silver and gold. Imagine how rich they were – the fields were filled with thousands of grazing cattle, and they had a lot of gold and silver.

But wealth brings troubles. There were simply too many animals that needed to feed in the same fields. The servants of Lot and Abram quarrelled as they both wanted more land. Something had to be done. The solution was simple: Abram and Lot were to take separate parcels of land so their servants and livestock would not need to compete. As an elder, Abram should have the choice of which lot. But he was a godly man and instead, gave the choice to his nephew, Lot.

What was the root of the quarrelling between the servants of Abram and Lot? Why do quarrels occur? Usually due to our selfishness, pride and greed. Lot did not have enough land for his servants and cattle and tents, and so wanted more.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian believers gave the remedy for the issue of quarrelling – (Ephesians 4:31)

Let all _____ (SSENRETTIB), and _____
 (HTARW), and _____ (REGNA), and _____
 (RUOMALC), and _____ (LIVE GNIAEAPS),
 be put away from you, with all _____ (ECILAM)
(Clue: reverse the order of the letters of the words in the brackets).

Dear child, remember to put away all these bad feelings and sin in your heart so that you will not strive with people.

Thought: How do you solve the problem of quarrelling?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, quarrelling with people is wrong. Help me to get rid of those bad feelings against people and not quarrel. In this way, I will please You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SEEK GOD'S WILL

We read today of choices: Lot chose the land which seemed most fertile, although it was not good for him spiritually since it was near to a very evil city – Sodom. Abram on the other hand did not choose that piece of land for he knew it would be a bad choice.

From the point of view of the world, Lot made a right choice. It was well-watered, by the river Jordan. It was the best land! However as Christians, you and I have to seek God's will when we make choices, especially important ones. All the land of Canaan was Abram's as God had given it to him. He was willing to give some part of it to Lot, his nephew. Lot should have asked Abram who was older than him to choose first, and he would take what was left.

Lot knew well that this land was near Sodom, a wicked city. Yet he went ahead to move there. The land was what attracted his eyes despite knowing the danger of backsliding. He went to live with wicked and ungodly people. He left God's ways and looked for the things of the world. He was a selfish man and did not bother to seek God's will.

How about you? When you make choices, are you selfish? If your mother told you and your brother she could afford to buy only one scoop of ice-cream, how would you choose? Would you insist on having your scoop or would you be willing to let your brother have it? Or perhaps the two of you can share that single scoop?

How about other choices like which television channel to watch, who would be first to use the toilet, who will take the bigger piece of that yummy BBQ chicken... The list is almost endless. Dear child, when you make choices, do not think of yourself only. Think of God, what choice God would want you to make. Think of others, how they would feel.

Thought: May I never be a selfish child!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to be like Lot – such a selfish person who chose according to his heart's self-centered desires. Instead, may I seek your will and be kind and considerate to others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE READY TO HELP

Today's lesson is on helping others. As Christians, we must always be kind and be ready to help.

Near the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were three other cities. Sodom and Gomorrah and these 3 cities each had a king, and they helped one another. They paid money to four stronger kings for twelve years to ensure their safety. They were considered 'servants' to these stronger kings. In the thirteenth year, they ran out of money and told it to the four stronger kings. Feeling very furious, the four kings came with their powerful armies to punish them for not being their servants anymore.

Needless to say, being stronger, the armies with the four kings won the battle over the armies with the five kings. The place of battle was full of slime pits and many of the men of the five kings fell inside. The four kings took everything they could lay their hands on, and that included some people living there – and Lot was also taken!

Lot was captured! Someone managed to escape and told Abram the sad news. Why Abram? Everyone living nearby could see that Abram was the friend of God, and that God was blessing him greatly. And Lot was also his nephew, so perhaps he could help.

You remember Lot took the better side of the land from Abram? Did Abram harbor any resentment for Lot? No. In fact, from the response of Abram, it was clear he still cared for Lot. Since Lot was captured, Abram had to do something fast. Without delay, he took his servants with him. How many servants did he take? Answer: _____. It was a very small 'army'. Call it an army? Note that they were not trained soldiers. Abram and his 'army' rescued the people and the goods and Lot.

As an obedient child of God, Abram was ready to help others. In fact, there is a Bible verse that tells us that Christians must help others, especially other Christians. Write down Galatians 6:10 –

Thought: Why must we help other Christians?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to be ready to help other Christians who are in need or in trouble because they are Your people and Your children. Thank You for the bond of Christians. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S PROMISES NEVER FAIL

People make promises but sometimes, they break them. We too fall into that category – we make promises we cannot keep. However we can trust God's promises because God never fails.

God spoke to Abram in a vision. With comforting words, He said, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." What is a shield for? God promised to keep him safe. God's great reward is His blessing to him. God's future blessing will come in the Person of Jesus Christ who will save man from sin (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). Through Abram and his seed, Christ will come. Abram asked, "What will thou give me?" He had a servant, but no son. So how can Jesus come?

God replied that Abram would have his own son. Then God took him out to the open field to look at the stars. Numerous stars, countless stars! Abram _____ in the Lord (Genesis 15:5). God also promised that all the land of Canaan would belong to Abram and his children and his children's children.

At that moment, Abram thought it was almost impossible for him to have a son. But as we would read in tomorrow's passage, God would bless him with children, and very many future generations. And from Abram, eventually Jesus would be born of Mary.

Dear child, remember that whatever God promises, He will bring to pass. And remember that God not only promises wonderful things, He also promises to punish those who do not put their faith and trust in Him!

Have you believed in Jesus? Have you really repented of your sins and know that on your own, there is no way you can enter heaven? Have you also understood that to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior is not just to say it with your lips, but to live a changed life, a life so different from your past?

Thought: God's promises never fail!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for salvation in Jesus. You will forever keep Your promises because You never fail. It is so wonderful to know I can trust in You, and I praise and thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

WHEN OUR FAITH IS WEAK...

God had promised that Abram and his wife would have a son. However, both of them were already very old. They became impatient. They took things into their own hands. Surely, you understand what impatience is, don't you, reader? When something does not progress as fast as you like, you become impatient and want to interfere. You simply cannot wait. Write down your experience when you were last impatient:

Abram and Sarai were older than many grandparents today. They were waiting for a son that God had promised. They waited and waited.... Sarai gave up hoping for a baby, and she told Abram that she could never have a baby anymore. After all, she was past normal child-bearing age. She had used human logic to try to understand a promise God made and was unbelieving and impatient. Her faith was weak, so she decided to take matters into her own hands. She would do things her own way, not God's way. This is wrong. She had a maid, Hagar, who was younger than her and Sarai made Hagar marry Abram so that perhaps God would give them a baby, and this baby would be the promised child. Both Sarai and Abram thought maybe they can help God! Sarai did not trust; she forgot that God is the God of wonder.

The faith of Abram and Sarai was weak. They could not understand what they could not see, and only wanted to believe the things they could see. They forgot what faith is. Dear child, what is faith? Hebrews 11:1 teaches... "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Thought: May I have strong faith

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are many things that may happen to me that I do not understand. Please help me to keep trusting You and have faith in You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ONE WRONG LEADS TO ANOTHER...

Sarai had given her handmaid, Hagar to her husband to be wife. Hagar's behavior started to change – she thought she was an important lady, just as good as Sarai. She was proud. When you are asked to be a school prefect or class monitor, do you feel that you become important and start to look down on your school friends? It should not be this way. You should do your duty well to help your teachers and friends.

Hagar's conduct became worse when she knew that she was going to have a baby—she would not obey Sarai anymore. Hagar was a servant but despised Sarai, as Sarai could not have a baby. How terrible! See that a change of circumstances can change a person! Are you like Hagar: quiet and unassuming when you are not strong in something, but proud when you are gifted in something else? Perhaps you are not good in music but strong in Mathematics. And when others around you talk about Mathematics, you want to show them you are gifted in that subject?

The other lesson for today is that one wrong leads to another. Sarai was wrong in giving her maid to her husband. God gave only one woman, Eve, to Adam. That is the example to follow. So in giving her maid to her husband, Sarai sinned. And that sin led to other sins.

Sin of Hagar (pride), in turn led to other sins. Sarai became angry and treated her badly, eventually making her run away into the wilderness. In those days, it was different from today where if you run away from someone in one part of Singapore, you could always go elsewhere safe. In those days, running away from familiar surroundings could be very dangerous, especially for a lone woman as bandits and wild animals could harm Hagar.

Dear child, one sin leads to another. How do we best stop it? Don't start it!

Thought: May I keep away from sin, any sin.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that one sin leads to another. I must be careful of my spiritual walk and please help me to be a better Christian. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SHOWING KINDNESS

When you go to church this Sunday, look at the faces of strangers or newcomers in church. Do they look lonely to you? When your parents sit down with some newcomers and chat with them after worship service, do you see that perhaps these newcomers are happy someone bothered to talk to them? Does your family regularly invite guests or friends over, perhaps for Bible study and fellowship? Is your family hospitable? The Bible tells us that Abraham was – he ‘entertained’ angels.

One afternoon, the sun was burning and the weather was hot, Abraham sat at the entrance of his tent. He saw 3 unfamiliar faces – strangers coming. He did not know but they were not mere men. There were 2 angels and the third one was God Himself, appearing in the form of a man. You will also notice Abram is now called Abraham. God gave Abram this new name as the meaning of this new name reflects his new role – the father of many nations.

Abraham was kind and hospitable. He knew that the environment he lived in was a hostile one. Where he lived was a harsh land where roads are dusty, travel is dangerous, towns are far apart. And he knew that these 3 travellers should be tired and probably hungry and thirsty. So what did he do? He, a wealthy man at an advanced age, ran to greet and invite them to his place. Not only that – he arranged for a nice full meal as verse 8 tells us. What a lot of food! To slaughter a calf in those days was a big thing as a calf was precious. We can see that Abraham was very generous towards his guests.

Did Abraham eat? Interestingly, the bible tells us he did not; he stood by to make sure his guests are well served. He served with joy, love and kindness.

What may we learn today? Kindness and generosity. This is what we must learn from Abraham. In your own ways, be kind to newcomers in class. Be generous with people. Share food and toys willingly and happily. If we have Christ in our lives, we should be able to show kindness and generosity to others around us!

Thought: May I be kind and generous!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn to be kind to all, and to share things with others. It is sometimes difficult for I can go back to my selfish nature, but please help me overcome it. And if there are new students – may I welcome them and get to know them better. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?

“Is anything too hard for the Lord?” We all should know the answer to that question—there is nothing too hard for the Lord. He made all things, He made us, and He will make everything turn out for our good.

In today’s text, we read that Sarah laughed when the Lord said that she was going to have a baby. She was very old so how could she possibly have a baby? From the point of view of science and logic, she thought she was right and so she did not believe the Lord’s words, and thought it was a joke. Let us find out what happened...

Abraham treated 3 visitors very well – 2 were angels and the 3rd one was the Lord. The Lord then told him a piece of very good news—that Sarah would be with child. However, Sarah, who heard this did not believe. She laughed quietly within herself because she thought that would be biologically impossible!

But nothing is hidden from God, so He asked this crucial question: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Sarah lacked faith as revealed in her laughing.

At that time, Sarah was very old. She was already 90 years old, older than many grandmothers and had passed the age of having babies. If you would to ask your grandmother if she would like to have a baby, she may laugh like Sarah. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. If He can create the universe and man, surely He can recreate Sarah’s womb to make it fertile again!

Do you sometimes think there are things too hard for the Lord? Perhaps you have problems in the family? Perhaps parents are quarrelling often? Or school work is piling up? Maybe you think mum loves your sister or brother more than you? Dear child, commit all these to the Lord. Do not take things into your own hands like Sarah did. Pray that God will help, and be faithful as a Christian boy or girl. God does NOT promise He would solve all problems for you because often, problems are good for us.

Write down the things that make you worried and commit your burdens to God in prayer.

Thought: Nothing is too hard for God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You are all-powerful and there is nothing that is too hard for You and I can trust You to help me in times of need. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

CHOOSE WISELY...

Sodom and Gomorrah were two ancient cities that were prosperous and very wicked. You may recall we first talked about Sodom in the Oct 15th reading. Lot chose to be near that city because the land was very fertile, despite the fact that it was a city that would influence him and his family terribly.

We read in today's text that eventually, the Lord rained fire and brimstone on these two cities. Whatever wealth and power these cities had, God destroyed. As Lot chose to live there and build his wealth and businesses there, all his earthly possessions there were also ruined.

What was the greatest loss to Lot? Was it his wealth on earth? Of course not! What should have been most precious to Lot is his family: his wife and two daughters. But after all the years living in Sodom, the entire family was badly affected and hardened to sin. Lot's wife's loved the wicked city of Sodom. In the flight from Sodom, although they were already warned not to turn back, she turned around to look at the city she loved. She loved the things of the world; she was worldly. She had disobeyed the angel's words not to look back and as a result, died in her tracks.

All of us can be hardened to sin. If you and I have friends who keep using swear words, or do naughty things, or are disobedient to parents, we would be influenced. Slowly and surely, we will learn to be like those we mix with. Slowly, we would be influenced by our friends.

Are there children in school who are boastful or selfish? The bible teaches that we are to be friendly to all, but be wise in your choice of friends, especially good friends. And who is your best friend? How do you choose your best friend?

If you choose friends who are naughty or disobedient, they will influence you negatively. We are not to shun such children, but we learn today that a wrong decision by Lot years ago affected his family very badly. Surely we do not want to repeat the mistake Lot committed!

Thought: May I choose wisely.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the lesson today that I must choose friends wisely. Please help me to be a godly child and do the things that You would have me do. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES

The conception and birth of any baby is a wonder. It starts with a single cell which multiplies into tens, hundreds, thousands and millions of cells and by the ninth month, the baby is ready to be born. Every single baby is made by God. When a baby is born, parents, family and friends are delighted and happy.

This is especially so for Abraham and Sarah. Isaac was a child of promise by God, given to Abraham and Sarah when they were so old. Do you know how old they were when Isaac came into the world? Abraham was _____ years old (Genesis 17:17) and Sarah was _____ years old. If a couple so old can have a baby today, it would surely make headlines in the news!

From Isaac would come many children and to his children, many more descendants. God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be countless like the stars in the sky and the sand upon the sea shore. You must have seen beaches and understand the number of grains of sand is countless. And stars – perhaps you may not appreciate the vast number of stars out there. In Singapore, one would not be able to see the full glory of the stars in the heavens as our country is not dark enough at night for us to experience what one may in say the countryside of Malaysia or a farm in Australia. If you were there on a clear night, you will know the skies are filled with countless beautiful stars.

God kept His promise, for in due time Isaac was born. What is the meaning of Isaac's name? Isaac means 'laughter'. For Sarah said, "God hath made me laugh" (Genesis 21:6).

God is faithful and keeps all promises. You know many bible lessons on how God has promised something to His people, and how He always keeps His word. Dear child, continue trusting in God. Continue to be faithful in reading the bible and keeping up with your daily Quiet Time. And live the good Christian life you have learnt and God will keep His promise to watch over you!

Thought: God keep His promises!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for keeping Your promises. You have been faithful to me since I was in my mother's womb! You see me and I am precious to You. As promised, You will never leave or forsake me and so I praise and thank You in Jesus' name, Amen.

ARE YOU JEALOUS?

Before Isaac was born, Ishmael was the only child. For 14 years, he had the full attention of father. Both father and son spent a lot of time together. Abraham must have related to him all the adventures he had and taught him many things about God. It was no doubt that Abraham loved Ishmael very much. Ishmael loved his home and he had never imagined that one day he was forced out of home. That day was soon coming....

Trouble brewed on the day Isaac weaned. On that day of celebrations, instead of a happy occasion, an unhappy one took place. Ishmael was jealous of Isaac – he would not be the only son. At this important event, he mocked Isaac. To mock is to ridicule or make fun of. Instead of loving his younger brother, Ishmael was jealous and hated Isaac.

Sarah could see how jealous Ishmael was. She must do something about it because Ishmael may plot to do something evil to his half-brother. Sarah asked Abraham to “cast out” Ishmael and his mother, Hagar. They must be sent away from home. She did not want a wicked boy growing up with and potentially harming her son.

Was it a nice thing for Sarah to do – asking her husband to cast Hagar & Ishmael away? No. The wonder about the bible is that it gives the account as it is – without sugar-coating or saying nice things that are not true. While it is natural for Sarah to want to protect her son, it was not right to cast Hagar and her son away. Jealousy—that was in Ishmael’s wicked heart, and that caused other problems in his life. He brought disaster upon himself and his poor mother.

Are you jealous? Do you want mum and dad to love you more than your siblings? Do you secretly wish your family has more money, or can go for holidays every year? And if your family does go for holidays, are you jealous of other families that go to exotic places for holidays? And then when your own family goes to exotic places for holidays, do you wish your family can go to even more fun destinations. You see dear child, to a jealous person, nothing will satisfy him or her. As Christians, we seek satisfaction and joy in the things God gives us. Be contented; be grateful; do not be jealous.

Thought: Am I a jealous child?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me that I should not feel jealous when friends have things that I don’t have or can do things better than me. Help me get rid of jealousy. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LOVE THE LORD

God tempted Abraham. The ‘temptation’ here is not what you think. You must understand that God did not tempt him to sin. Rather, God asked him to do something very hard, very difficult, to test him to prove if he really loved God.

What was this hard thing God asked of Abraham? It was to offer up his son. Isaac was his only son (since Ishmael was no longer living with him) whom he loved more than anything else. He was also one that Abraham had waited for more than twenty years since God first promised him of the gift of a baby. How could Abraham kill this promised child with a knife in his own hand?

God told Abraham to take Isaac to a mountain which took 3 days to reach. He had three days to think about it, to ask questions. In his mind, he must have thought, “How can my descendants be as many as the stars in heaven if I kill my son?” “Maybe the Lord will raise Isaac from the dead if I must kill him”. Many thoughts raced in his mind. He could also change his mind and go back home. Did he return home? He did not.

When he saw the mountain, he left his servants and went on alone with Isaac. They set up the firewood and Isaac asked his father a touching question—what about the lamb to be sacrificed. What was Abraham’s reply? “The Lord will provide.” This short answer tells us a lot of Abraham’s faith and trust in God.

Amazingly, Isaac was willing to be tied as a sacrifice. When Abraham raised his knife to kill him, the angel of the Lord called to Abraham, and stopped him from killing Isaac. The angel said, “Now I know that thou fearest God.” Abraham had shown how he had feared and loved God.

God had tested Abraham’s love for Him with the most precious earthly possession – his son. And Abraham chose God. Abraham loved God above all, and he obeyed, although he could not understand it.

How much do you love God? Think for a minute.... do you love Him? Do you love Him all the time? Ask God to give you grace in your hearts to love Him more.

Thought: Abraham showed his love to God. How do you show yours?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for this wonderful example I see in Abraham. Help me to love You more, not just say it only, but to show it with action. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HOW TO SERVE GOD - PRAY

When we pray to God we talk to Him and tell Him our troubles... and thanks too. God hears us and answers prayer. He answered the prayer of Abraham's servant when he prayed for God's direction and leading.

Abraham sent his God-fearing servant and asked him to find a wife for his son. She must not come from the wicked Canaanites around them, but from the place Abraham had come from.

The servant set off on this quest to find a wife from Abraham's hometown. How to do it? He was not going to depend on his own ability. He feared God and prayed to God. What was his prayer about? He asked the Lord to show him who she would be. At the well of water, he asked for a sign. The sign was: if he asked a young lady for a drink, and she would offer to give his camels water too, let that girl be the one the Lord had chosen. Before he finished praying, the Lord answered the prayer. Lo and behold! Rebekah came and fulfilled the conditions of the sign. The servant asked if he might stay at her father's house. The servant blessed the Lord for leading him to the house. How marvellous it was – God answered his prayer! The servant told Rebekah's family of his intent and how the Lord had led him to them. Was Rebekah willing to leave her home? She was going to marry a man she had never seen! God had prepared her heart to be ready, and so her family blessed her and bade her farewell.

Look at verse 12 again – The servant prayed before this important mission. He knew that success can only come from God and wisely sought the Lord's blessing. In the end, the servant completed his mission. He told everyone in the house that God had led him.

Dear child, God is waiting to lead us too. Learn from Abraham's servant – pray. Seek the Lord's blessing and direction. Prayer should be a natural part of us. It is not that we pray continuously – like repeating certain "special words" or chanting as some in other faiths do. Prayer is talking with our precious heavenly Father. It is also to be mindful of His presence and to know He is always there if we need Him.

Don't forget to ask Him every day to lead and guide.

Thought: May I always rely on Him!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for leading me. I just pray that I'd remember to also look to You for guidance and protection. Thank You that I can talk to You and You hear me and lead me and answer me! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

HOW TO SERVE GOD - NO NAME MENTIONED

If you read the text for today, which is the same as yesterday's, you will notice that Abraham's servant was not named at all. He could have been Eliezer. We read from Genesis 15:2 that this man is the steward (or servant) of Abraham.

Why is the servant's name not mentioned at all in the entire chapter of Genesis 24? It is because when we serve God, our names are not important. In whatever areas we serve God, there is no need for us to be mentioned. There is no need for others to know we are the ones who work for God.

Dear child, should you serve God, learn from Abraham's servant. All glory should go to God and none to us.

When you do something for God, whether it is helping someone or doing a kind deed, sometimes we may feel a little disappointed when no one thanks us. Most people want to be recognized for their hard work. Today's passage tells us that the servant worked very hard, prayed very hard, and was just happy to find a wife for his master's son. He was not selfish; he was self-giving.

Have you been in situations when you do something for mummy or daddy, but they may not know. Instead, they may think it is done by your brother or sister. In times like these, do you feel shortchanged? In times like these, do you wish someone would give you more credit and perhaps praise you? It may be natural to think that way, but dear child, follow the wonderful example of Abraham's servant and do not claim credit.

Even if no one can see you serve God, it is OK as God can see. And when God sees your faithfulness, He will reward in due time. So press on and continue to serve God and be kind to others without expecting anything in return!

Thought: Serve God without any thought of recognition!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for teaching me that I should not be concerned at all about people knowing that I serve. As long as God knows, I will be happy! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S WAYS NOT MAN'S WAYS

Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah. And although they were hoping for children, it seemed God would not bless them with kids because Rebekah was barren – meaning she could not give birth. However, Isaac did not give up and continued to pray for the Lord's mercy. Then the good news – Rebekah became pregnant! It took 20 years – a long wait – for Isaac to become a father. And God gave them more than one baby; Rebekah would give birth to twins!

In ancient times, sons were preferred to daughters. In peacetime, sons were more suitable for working long hours in the fields. In times of war, sons can double up as soldiers to protect the family and country. And when sons marry, they bring their wives to their family. On the hand, when daughters marry, they become part of another family. Those are some of the main reasons sons were preferred. Among sons, the greatest honour is given to the first son.

In Rebekah's tummy were two boys, and as we know, Esau was the first son; Jacob was the second. According to custom, the second son is expected to serve the first. But God had other plans and made it clear to Rebekah that the arrangement for her sons would be reversed: the first shall serve the second.

What does this teach us? That God's ways are not man's ways.

Perhaps that is why 1 Corinthians 1:27 tells us, "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." God's way of salvation was to send Jesus as a lowly carpenter, in an obscure part of the world in Israel, to live a fairly short life of 33 years, to minister for an even shorter period of 3 years, to teach his closest group of disciples of only 12 very average men from humble backgrounds. Man may think – if God had such an important message, should He not choose a very large group of very smart and wealthy people to spread the Gospel message?

God's ways are not our ways. In humility, may we accept that His ways are better, and may we have the faith to continue to obey the wonderful truth in the Bible.

Thought: May I never doubt but always obey God's truth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, now I understand that Your ways are not man's ways and when I do not understand, teach me to obey Your Word and trust that Your ways are the best for me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

You are first in an ice-cream queue and someone steps up and insists that he should go before you. What do you do? Although we may feel like retaliating, we are taught in the bible to be meek. Step back. Imagine you and a friend come across a beautiful seashell while walking along East Coast beach. You thought that would be a nice souvenir and pick it up, only to hear from your friend he thinks it should be his. What would you do? It is alright, dear child, give it to the friend. It is not that the bible teaches us to be cowards; there are things we must stand up for. But in the examples above, it is ok to give in.

In today's text, we read of a famine which made Isaac consider going to Egypt but God stopped him on his way and promised him that He would bless him to give him all the countries in the land of Canaan. Wow – what a great promise it was! So Isaac planted his field in this place and reaped a bumper crop. The Philistines were very jealous. Abimelech, the Philistine king, hated him and planned to do something bad to Isaac...

The Philistines sealed Isaac's wells of water, and told him to leave. Isaac moved to a valley, and his servants dug another well. The Philistines seized it and said it was theirs. Again, Isaac let them have it, and moved away without quarreling with them.

Isaac's servants dug another well, and the Philistines claimed it too! Isaac suffered persecution without complaining or retaliating. This is amazing and would be impossible for a normal man. How did Isaac do it? It is because he remembered God's promise to him, and trusted that God will fulfill His promise. So Isaac went on to another place, and yet another well was dug.

When Abimelech saw how generous and meek Isaac was and how God blessed him, he went to see Isaac. His subjects were taking away Isaac's wells and yet Abimelech said he did no wrong to him. Did Isaac argue with him? No, instead he made peace by having a feast together with Abimelech. The next day he sent Abimelech and his people away. What a quiet, patient, meek and saintly man he was! What a child of God! Emulate Isaac. He was meek and willing to forgive those who had wronged him. He would not fight back.

Thought: Think about how you can be meek

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be meek when I relate with friends. When they hurt me with their words and actions, help me deal with them patiently and peaceably for this is the right thing to do. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD KEEPS HIS WORD

You have now learned of the few generations of people whose lives we have studied. First of all, there were Abraham and Sarah, and how unlikely this old couple could have a son. And yet, God kept His promise – Sarah did have a son, Isaac, even in her old age.

And when Isaac was a teenager, God tested Abraham's faith in asking him to kill Isaac, which Abraham passed exceptionally. This was not to let God know Abraham's faith, for God knows everything. Instead, this was to let Abraham himself find out more about himself and his faith.

Isaac and his wife Rebekah then had twins: Esau and Jacob. Isaac favoured Esau; Rebekah favoured Jacob. Again against the plan of man, God's plan prevailed. Isaac had wanted to secretly bless Esau with the birth-right but God intervened, and the birth-right was given to Jacob.

So in today's text, we read of how Isaac blessed Jacob, and reminded him to not marry a Canaanite woman because Canaanites believe in idols and not the true living God. Read verses 3 and 4 again – see the beauty of Isaac's blessings – that God will bless and make Jacob fruitful. Finally, Isaac links the blessings back to Abraham, and how God had originally given the promise to Abraham. It took a long time from when God first gave the blessing to Abraham to this time when Isaac blessed Jacob.

Different men; same God. Our God is faithful. He would take care of you and me as He took care of Abraham and his descendants. Dear child, it is so wonderful to be a Christian because our God is the one true living God and his plans and blessings for us will take place.

Sometimes troubles or difficulties around us may make us wonder if God is in charge. He is, and He will always be in charge. Let us be faithful and keep reading the bible and doing our Quiet Time and we would be able to slowly better know more and more of our God.

Thought: God will carry you through any difficulty.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, work in my heart that I may have more faith in You, knowing that as You took care of Abraham and kept Your promises to him, You would also take care of me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE

At this stage of his life, Jacob had a large family. He had also built up his wealth. It was time for him to take his family to leave Laban to head back home. The dreaded time had come for him to face his brother Esau whom Jacob had tricked out of his birth-right.

Esau came with his 400 men. He must have remembered his father's words – "Thou shalt serve thy brother." Was his brother coming back to fight him? He must be prepared. But Jacob thought otherwise. He was fearful that Esau would still be angry with him. He must divide his family in case there was trouble. Seeing his brother from a distance, Jacob bowed to the ground seven times. And his entire family also bowed. Now Esau could see that Jacob had not come to fight. In fact, Esau was touched by Jacob's humility. He hugged Jacob and kissed him. Jacob introduced his family, recounting God's goodness in giving him all those children. It was a happy reunion for the two brothers.

Jacob bought some land in Shechem in the land of Canaan to settle his family down. After living there for ten years, the Lord reminded Jacob of his promise that if the Lord led him back safely, he would go to Bethel and sacrifice. So he did. He made his family give him all the idols they may have had, and he buried them under an oak tree. At Bethel, Jacob sacrificed to God on an altar. God gave His promise again. Jacob's name would be Israel, and he would become a great nation, and kings would come from him – in particular – The King (our Lord Jesus Christ).

Rachel had another baby at Jacob's old age and Jacob loved this child dearly. He called him Benjamin, meaning "son of my right hand". Now Jacob had 12 sons. Jacob also reunited with his father Isaac before he died.

Jacob had his ups and downs in his life. He was not without sin, but at times was a man of great faith. We, too, are not sinless. No one is sinless, except Jesus Christ. And we like Jacob can sometimes go back to our old "self" to commit the sins we should not. May we learn not to do so but to also rely on God, and not to do things our way.

Thought: Live our life the way God wants us to!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, what have I done to deserve Your love and favor? Nothing, but You have been so gracious and kind. I thank You that out of Your mercy You have blessed me and I praise and thank You. May I live my life in a way that will please You, for I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

PARENTS ALWAYS SAY NO!

“Did your parents allow you to go to Jenny’s party?” asked Michelle’s friend, Leslie, as the girls were walking home from school.

“No, and I’m not even sure why not,” said Michelle. “When I asked Dad this morning, he just said he didn’t want me to go. As I was late for school, there wasn’t time for further discussion.”

“My parents said no at first, too,” replied Leslie, “but I kept telling them it was unfair of them not to trust me and they finally gave in.” She grinned. “Why don’t you tell that to your parents? They might change their minds, too!”

Michelle shook her head. “Don’t you think that when your parents tell you no it’s because they believe that’s what’s best for you?” she asked. She paused, then added, “I mean... I really trust my parents. I’m sure they want to make the right decisions for me and just have to say no sometimes.”

Leslie frowned. “Oh, that’s what they always say,” she muttered, “but I don’t believe it. I think it’s mean to boss kids around!”

When the girls turned to cross the street to Leslie’s house, they saw Leslie’s dog sitting in their driveway. “Lady got out!” exclaimed Leslie. “I wonder if somebody had left the gate open.” The dog looked their way, then jumped up and came running toward them. “Stop, Lady! No!” Leslie called out. Lady stopped right away. “Good dog!” approved Leslie when she reached her pet. “How did you get out?”

“You’re sure mean to Lady – keeping her penned up in the back yard most of the time!” said Michelle. “And like now... she just wanted to come across the street and meet you, but you wouldn’t let her. That’s mean!”

“Mean?” asked Leslie in surprise. “I’m not mean. Keeping her in the back yard keeps her safe. If I just let her run across the street, she might get hit by a car.” “So saying no was really for her good?” asked Michelle with a smile.

“Of course it...” Leslie stopped. “Okay... okay. I see your point,” she said. “I had to say no to Lady, and parents sometimes have to say no, too.”

Thought: How do you respond when your parents say no to something you want? Do you get angry or upset?

Prayer: Thank You Heavenly Father for reminding me that You have placed me under the care of my parents and given me the responsibility of obeying them! So even when I don’t understand the reasons for all they say and do, help me to trust and obey them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

OBEY YOUR ELDERS!

Hannah walked into the house with a big grin on her face. “Mom,” she called out, “we had the best time in school today!” “What did you do that was so much fun?” asked Mom with a smile.

“Oh, we had a substitute teacher today. It was so funny!” Hannah laughed. “Some of the kids switched seats, so throughout the day the teacher was calling them the wrong names. Pete and Joel lied to her that our teacher always let us out earlier for recess and we got out five minutes before the other classes!!”

Mom frowned. “How would your substitute teacher know who the kids are or where they were supposed to sit?” she asked. Hannah shrugged. “I know our teacher left a seating chart with everybody’s name on it,” she said.

“But if the kids used each other’s names, how would the sub know if they were in the right seats or not?” asked Mom. “And how would she know the boys were lying about being let out early for recess? No one corrected them, right?”

“Well, no. I... I guess she wouldn’t know,” admitted Hannah. “Why didn’t you tell her?” asked Mom. “Showing her respect and obeying her is not only common courtesy; it’s a command from God!”

Hannah’s eyes widened. “It is?” she asked in surprise. “I know the Bible mentions about obeying parents, but it doesn’t mention teachers, does it?” “When you were learning your memory verse during Bible Study Class last week, I heard you recite it several times,” Mom said. “It was Romans 13:1, right? Who does it say you should be subject to? Who should you respect and obey?”

Hannah thought for a moment. “Ah-h-h” “Yes,” said Mom. “We’re to obey anyone who is in authority over us, aren’t we?” “Oh! Well, she’s just a substitute,” replied Hannah with a shrug. “It doesn’t matter.” “Oh, yes, it does matter!” exclaimed Mom. “When she’s teaching your class, you are under her authority. Like I said, God commands that you obey her.”

“I-I-I’m sorry,” stuttered Hannah. “I... I know what I’ll do! I think she’s coming back tomorrow, so I’ll tell her who the kids are and what rules we have!”

Thought: How do you treat teachers or substitute teachers in school or Sunday school?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be kind, and respectful to everyone, especially respect those whom You have placed in authority over me and to obey them. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.

AS SMART AS A DONKEY?

“Are you as smart as a donkey?” asked Mr. Lim, the JW teacher. The kids laughed, and some of them replied that they were much smarter than any donkey. Mr. Lim smiled. “That’s great,” he continued. “Then I’m sure you can serve Jesus. The donkey in today’s lesson did.”

“I don’t get it!” exclaimed Trevor. “Jesus rode on the back of the donkey, didn’t He? You mean we’re supposed to give people rides on our backs?” Trevor liked to ask questions that might make the other kids laugh.

Mr. Lim laughed, too. “No,” he said, “but the donkey gives us a great picture of a servant. First of all, he was where God wanted him to be – he was available. We should ask ourselves, Am I available to God? Am I in a place where He can use me?”

Trevor shrugged. “I am,” he said. “I’m here at church all the time – whether I want to be or not.” Some of the kids laughed again, and Trevor felt pleased with himself. “But I’m not good at singing or speaking,” he added. “I don’t have any money to give, either.”

“I’ve sat in front of you in church, Trevor,” said Mr. Lim. “I happen to know you actually have a very good singing voice.” He smiled as he added, “Think about the donkey again. He had to be untied. Maybe you need to let Jesus untie your fears – maybe you’re afraid to try to serve Him.”

Trevor frowned. He couldn’t think of any smart reply, and Mr. Lim continued the lesson. “Also, the donkey was willing to let Jesus control him,” said Mr. Lim, and he explained that even though the donkey had never been ridden on before, he did what Jesus wanted him to do. “Have you truly let Jesus control you, or have you been stubborn?” asked Mr. Lim. Trevor began to feel more uncomfortable.

“How about it, class?” asked Mr. Lim at the end of the lesson. “Will you ask God to take control of your life and untie your fears? Will you be a servant just like the little donkey was?” “I’ll do my best,” Trevor said slowly, “but I’m still not so sure I can sing.” Then he grinned. “Of course, if it makes people laugh, that might be good, too.”

Thought: Are you willing to serve Jesus in any way you can? Or are you afraid to sing or play an instrument in public because you think kids will laugh if you make a mistake?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me be available when help is needed – whether it is for a Junior Worship project, to give a testimony or to share a Scripture verse. May I learn from the donkey! In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

TOO BUSY FOR GOD?

“I wonder why Ethan hasn’t come – or called,” said Jake, as he looked at the model plane he was putting together. “Ethan was supposed to help me finish my plane this morning.” “Maybe his mom or dad needed him to help at home,” said Mom.

“Maybe,” Jake replied, “but Ethan said he’d call if he couldn’t come. It’s almost noon, and he still hasn’t shown up or called.” “Well, why don’t you see if he can come this afternoon instead?” suggested Mom. “Maybe that will work out better.”

“Okay. I’ll see,” said Jake. He put the model down and went to call Ethan from the phone in the kitchen. When Jake picked up the phone, he heard his sister’s voice as she talked with one of her friends. He scowled as he replaced the receiver. “Nicole’s on the phone, and she’s probably been talking all morning!” he exclaimed. “If Ethan’s been trying to call, he would be getting a busy signal!” Jake reached for the phone again. “I’m going to tell her to get off the line.”

“Hold on,” said Mom. “I’ll talk to her in a minute. I know Nicole had to make several calls today, so like you said, maybe Ethan couldn’t get through to you because the line was busy.”

Mom was thoughtful. “That busy signal reminds me of a question that was raised during my Bible Study group this week: How often do you think the Lord gets a busy signal when He wants to get through to us?” Jake shrugged. “What does that mean?”

“Well, sometimes we don’t hear what God wants us to hear because we’re too busy,” explained Mom. “For example, women in my study group – including me – may think we have so much housework that we don’t have time to read the Bible or serve God in other ways.” Mom smiled at Jake. “What do kids like you do that sends a busy signal to God?”

“Well, ah... we have homework and music practice and football games,” replied Jake. “Oh! And model planes!” He grinned. “I’ll check and see when Ethan can come over, but I better learn my memory verse for Bible club before I finish working on my plane.”

Thought: Do you send God “busy signals”?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding me that You desire of me a two-way communication through Your Word and prayer. Please help me manage my daily activities so they don’t keep me from spending time with You. This I pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

LEARNER DRIVER

“Watch it!” gasped Uncle Sid. “Slow down, Abby!” In the back seat, Zach turned to Jill and grinned. When Aunt Sue asked Uncle Sid to get something from the supermarket, he offered to let Abby drive them there. While she was driving, Uncle Sid gave instructions to her almost non-stop since she had only gotten her driving license the previous week.

“There’s a “Give Way” sign up ahead. It’s a little hard to see,” cautioned Uncle Sid. He paused only a moment. “I slow down when I pass this fire station... oh, and two lights down we’ll turn right. Be sure to go near the curb when you turn that way... and have you learned that the best way to pull into parking places is...” Uncle Sid hardly stopped talking long enough to breathe.

When they reached the supermarket, Abby parked and handed the keys to her uncle. “Thanks for letting me drive, Uncle Sid, but I think you should drive home,” said Abby. “You’re more familiar with the car than I am.” “Well, Abby, are you sure?” Uncle Sid asked as he took the keys.

“Yes, I’m sure,” Abby answered. She smiled and winked at Jill and Zach. When Uncle Sid was out of hearing range, she murmured, “It’s usually fun to drive, but with Uncle Sid...” and they all laughed. Mom smiled when the kids told her about the incident. “Uncle Sid should have trusted Abby,” Jill protested. “She’s a good driver.”

“Don’t be too hard on Uncle Sid,” Mom replied. “Actually, we’re all a little like that at times.” “I’m not,” protested Zach. “I trust Abby.”

“Yes, but do you always trust God?” asked Mom. “When we accept Jesus as Savior, it’s like inviting Him to take over the driver’s seat of our lives. But often we act as though we’re sitting beside Him, telling Him exactly how to drive.”

Thought: Do you trust God and accept the way He leads you? He knows the very best way for you to travel in life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that the best driver in my life is not me, but You! Help me to trust You more and more as I grow older, for You know what difficulties lie ahead. In Christ’s precious name, Amen.

SHORT STUFF

When Seng's mother stepped into the kitchen, she knew something was wrong. His bag was on the floor, his books were scattered across the table, and he sat with his head in his hands. "What's the matter, son?" Mom asked.

Seng looked up. "Oh, Mom, I can't be on the basketball team," he said sadly. "I'm just too short. All the guys are taller than me, and they call me Short Stuff. Even most of the girls are taller than I am." Seng sighed. "Who wants to hang out with a short guy like me?" Mom looked at him thoughtfully. "Come to the balcony with me," she said, "we'll talk about it while you help me plant some seeds."

"Okay," said Seng. "Even a shorty can do that."

Seng knelt and helped his mother sow a variety of vegetable seeds. "Some of these seeds look a lot alike. I hope they remember what kind of vegetable they're supposed to be," he said with a grin.

Mom laughed. "They'll grow into a variety of delicious vegetables, but not because they know what they should be," she said. "They just let God determine that. Even plants from seeds of the same kind won't all be alike. Some will be bigger than others, but they don't worry or complain about that. That's up to God, too." She paused, then added, "You know, Seng, we're all a little bit like plants."

"How?" Seng asked, looking at the seeds in his hand. "We don't grow into plants." "No," said Mom, "but we start out small and grow and develop in the way determined by God." "So... plants don't care how big they get, and like them, I shouldn't worry about my size?" Seng asked. He grinned. "If seeds could talk, they'd probably complain as much as I do," he teased.

Mom smiled. "Remember that God knows best how seeds and plants should grow and develop, and He also knows how people should grow and develop. He knows exactly how you need to grow up to become the person He wants you to be so that you can use the gifts and abilities He gave you. Try to be content with that and leave your size up to Him. Okay?" Seng nodded. "Okay," he agreed. "I'll try."

Thought: Are you unhappy with the way you look? Prefer to be taller or slimmer or...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know I should not look at such external things. I thank You that You don't feel that way and I pray You would remind me You made me just right for whatever tasks You have for me. In Christ's holy name, Amen.

NUMBED?

Owen sighed and poked at his half-eaten piece of pie. “Nothing tastes good,” he told his mother. “I wish my tongue would quit feeling so funny.” Owen had been to the dentist earlier that day, and one side of his mouth had been numbed so it wouldn’t hurt when the dentist drilled his tooth. Mom chuckled. “Give it more time. There are lots of taste buds on your tongue, and when the dentist numbed your mouth, the shot numbed those taste buds, too. Why don’t you save the pie till later? You’ll enjoy it more then.” Owen nodded, got up, put the pie in the refrigerator and prepared to leave. “It’s a little early for you to leave for your bible study, isn’t it?” asked Mom.

Owen shrugged. “Can I please skip it today? I want to play with the guys,” he answered. Mom frowned. “Spiritual taste buds numbed, too?” she asked. Owen stopped, and looked at his mother. “I don’t know what you mean,” he said.

“Well, I remember that you used to be quite excited about bible study,” replied Mom. “You said it was wonderful to learn God’s Word and you’d come home and tell me about the lesson and what you have learnt about God and what He expects from us as His children. Remember?”

Owen nodded. “I still like bible study,” he said, “but there are so many other things to do that...” He paused and thought, “Mom may be right. Maybe my spiritual taste buds are numb.

“I think so,” said Mom. She smiled at Owen. “The numbness in your mouth will soon go away by itself, but we have to work at getting over spiritual numbness. A good way to start is to get back into God’s Word.”

Thought: Do you enjoy learning about God? Or have your spiritual taste buds been numbed by such things as TV programs, games, personal hobbies, or homework?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the warning that my spiritual senses may be numbed. I pray that I’d read my JRPG and Bible and learn to love the Bible! In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

EXTERNAL LOOKS ONLY?

“Mom!” yelled Naomi. “Justin won’t get out of the bathroom!” She pounded her fists on the door. “He spends more time grooming than I do!” After taking one last look at his hair in the mirror, Justin opened the door. Naomi stood there, waiting. He scowled, shoved her backwards, called her a bad name under his breath. He hurried outside, avoiding Mom, slammed the door, and went downstairs.

Justin saw a silver truck in the carpark. Neighbour Trent, a college student, was polishing the truck’s shiny, black finish. “Hey, Justin,” called Trent, coming around the truck. “How are you? I need to run to the store for some more polish. Want to come along?” “Sure!” said Justin. “I haven’t had a ride in your new truck yet. I’ll go make sure it’s okay with Mom.” He hurried back to check with his mother.

When Justin returned, he opened the door on the passenger side of the truck. Trash fell out onto the driveway. Justin picked it up and started to climb in, but the seat was littered with paper and empty soda bottles. “Just push that stuff out of the way,” said Trent, getting in on the driver’s side. Justin did as he was told, but he was disgusted to find he was sitting on a sticky, half-eaten hamburger. He was rather glad when they got back home.

“So... do you like Trent’s truck?” asked Mom. Justin scowled. “I thought it was so cool until I saw the inside. It’s a mess!” “Sounds like you,” said Naomi, who was still angry with her brother. “You get all spiffed up on the outside, but you’re mean and ugly inside.”

“Whoa!” cautioned Mom, frowning at Naomi. “Make sure your own heart is clean before you criticize someone else.” She turned to Justin. “Naomi does have a point,” she added. “We should be clean and try to look our best, but we need to remember that what counts most to God is what we’re like on the inside. We may be well-groomed and nicely dressed, but if we forget about the mess that’s in our hearts, we’re pretty much like Trent and that truck, don’t you think?”

Justin frowned, knowing he deserved a scolding for the way he had acted that morning. He glanced at his sister. “I-I’m sorry, Naomi” he murmured. “I really am.”

Thought: How much time do you spend on outward appearance? Do you also take that much time to make sure your heart and life are clean?

Prayer: Thank You Heavenly Father for reminding me that time spent with You to develop love, joy, peace, and a godly nature is much more important than looks. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

GLORIFY GOD THROUGH WORK

“What’s the matter, Sis? Ants in your pants?” Jon asked with a big grin. At their campsite, Ann had stepped in the middle of an ant hill and was frantically brushing the little creatures off. “It’s not funny, Jon,” Ann said as her mother helped her finish brushing the insects away.

Soon Ann and her mother went into the trailer, but Jon and Dad continued to watch the ants. “An ant nest is like a little city where thousands of ants live,” observed Dad. “Look! Some of them are carrying leaves,” said Jon, pointing at the busy ant hill. “They’re moving twigs and other stuff, too.” He grinned. “They’re hard at work,” he added. “Do they have a boss like you do at your office?”

“No. They don’t need a boss,” Dad replied. “They just make the most of every opportunity to gather food. They’re a good example for us.” Jon laughed. “So we should get busy and gather food before winter, too?”

“Not exactly,” Dad replied with a smile, “Although we do not experience winter in Singapore, but like the ants, we should be hard workers. We glorify God when we work hard for Him at whatever tasks He provides for us.” Dad paused, then asked, “What’s the opposite of a hard worker, Jon?” “Um... a lazy person?” suggested Jon.

“Correct. The Bible calls someone who avoids work a sluggard,” said Dad. “I’d hate to hear someone use that word to describe me.”

“Yeah. So I guess I should get busy and find the firewood we’ll need,” said Jon, heading into a thicker part of the woods where they were camping. “Maybe you should get busy and help me, don’t you think, Dad?” Laughing, Dad agreed. “Sure. I can help you with your job,” he said. “After all, I’m sure God is pleased when we work together and help one another.”

Jon nodded. “But what about having fun?” he asked. “Do you see any problem with having fun and working hard?” Dad asked. “Ah-h-h... no,” said Jon. He began picking up twigs and small branches. He glanced at Dad. “Race you back to camp – and with the biggest load of firewood, too!” he challenged. “It’ll be fun to beat you at that!”

Thought: Do you glorify God through your work?

Prayer: Help me my Heavenly Father to do things with a good attitude and to be busy and use the abilities You have given me to the maximum. Whatever I work, play, and talk, may I do so as “to the Lord”. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

KEEP YOURSELF PURE!

“Look, Dad.” Kok Beng held out the camera his mother had brought home from a neighbor’s garage sale. He pointed to some words on the front of the camera. “This says ‘Automatic Focus.’ What does that mean?” “It means that a little mechanism in front of this camera automatically opens or closes the shutter to let in just the right amount of light,” Dad explained. “No matter how close or how far you are from your subject, you won’t have to adjust anything to make each picture come out clearly.”

Kok Beng held the camera up to his eye and looked through it. “You know what?” he asked. “My science teacher says our eyes work a lot like a camera does. She says the colored part of the eye is like the shutter. It’s called the iris, and when the light is real bright, it makes the pupil – the round, black spot in the middle – get smaller. When it’s dark, the iris opens up wide to let more light through the pupil.” “That’s interesting, isn’t it?” Mom joined in the conversation. “I read somewhere that the eye also has a lens that allows things far away to be in focus, as well as things close up.”

“The eyes God has given us are very unique,” added Dad. “They not only take pictures, but those pictures are recorded for us. Pictures taken with a camera are recorded on film, and the ones taken by your eyes are recorded in your brain.”

“Wow! So the stuff my eyes see is recorded like a picture in my brain?” asked Kok Beng.

“That’s right, and that’s why your mother and I don’t allow you to read certain books or watch certain TV shows,” said Dad. “We want your brain to be imprinted with better things.”

“Yes,” agreed Mom. “We should be careful to use the cameras in our heads to record good pictures.” She smiled as she added, “And let’s be sure to thank God for our eyes and the wonderful way they work.”

Kok Beng nodded thoughtfully. “I promise to do my best to keep my brain film as clean as possible.” He looked down at the camera. “Hey, there’s film in here already! Take a picture of me, Mom. It will remind me of my promise to keep my brain clean!” Mom grinned as she snapped a shot of Kok Beng gleefully posing for the camera.

Thought: What do your eyes see? Do they see things that leave a good impression on your brain?

Prayer: Help me Heavenly Father to be careful with what I see especially when I watch TV or go online, help me not to sin. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

ORDINARY DAYS

“The jungle closed in around Pedro in Brazil,” Dad read aloud from the missionary book their family was currently using as part of their daily devotions. “Ever since Pedro became a Christian, other members of his tribe were determined to kill him. Even now, several men were not far behind on the jungle trail. There seemed no escape. Pedro prayed as he ran.”

“This is so scary!” Alexis whispered.

Dad continued reading. “Suddenly a masked man stepped out of the bushes just ahead. He motioned for Pedro to follow him and started moving deeper into the jungle. Should I follow? Pedro wondered. Is this man a friend? I’ve never seen him before. Pedro didn’t know what to do.” Dad stopped reading, looked up, put a marker in the book, and closed it. “End of chapter,” he said.

“Oh, no!” groaned Kurt. “Just one more page? I want to know what happened.” Mom shook her head. “There’s school tomorrow and you need to get to bed.” After praying together, Kurt stretched. “Some people live such exciting lives, but mine is so... so ordinary. It’s school, band practice, studying, eating, sleeping, and more school.”

“Would you rather have the excitement of having someone try to kill you because you’re a Christian?” Alexis asked. Kurt laughed. “Well, no,” he said, “but I still think my days are pretty dull.”

“God knows we need ordinary days to grow and to learn about Him,” said Dad. “Even great men of the Bible had ordinary days. Take Daniel, for example. He had to...” “His life was exciting!” Kurt interrupted. “He got thrown into a den of lions.” “Another bit of excitement I’m glad to do without,” observed Alexis.

Dad smiled. “Daniel didn’t face lions every day,” he said. “He also did many ordinary jobs in the king’s court. And the Apostle Paul was a tentmaker. He must have spent many days sewing, measuring, and cutting. We need to see all of our days as gifts from God. Do your best on every day He gives you.”

Kurt stood up with a yawn. “Yeah. Okay, I better get to bed then, so I can be rested for... ah-h-h...” He grinned. “For another ordinary day.”

Thought: Don’t keep thinking of holidays or special days – ordinary days are a gift from God, too!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for exciting days as well as ordinary days. Come what may, I pray I would remember every single day is a gift from You and I must treasure and do the best I can! In Jesus’ name, Amen.

HEALTH CHECK-UP

Charlie pushed open the door that had a sign of “Dr. David Lee” – his father – printed on it. As he entered the waiting room, the office nurse smiled at him. She said, “Your dad is almost done for the day. He’ll be with you in a few minutes.” Soon Charlie and his father were driving home. “Dad, I heard on the radio that the president was having his annual checkup today,” said Charlie. “When people come in for a one of those, they feel okay, don’t they? So how do you tell whether they’re sick or not?”

“Well, we check a lot of things and may run some tests,” said Dad with a smile. “Generally, if the vital signs are all good, the patient is healthy.” “Vital signs?” asked Charlie. “Like what?” “Oh, things like blood pressure, heartbeat, and lungs,” said Dad. “I also check the patients’ height and weight and look at their ears, eyes, nose, and throat. I ask if they have any complaints at all. If I suspect there’s any problem, I order other tests.” “And that’s why a checkup is so important?” asked Charlie. “Because there might be something wrong even if you feel good?”

Dad nodded. “The sooner illnesses are detected and treated, the better the chance of a cure,” he said. Dad added, “There’s another kind of checkup that’s even more important – and it’s one we can give ourselves.” “We can?” asked Charlie. “What is it?”

“A spiritual checkup,” replied Dad. “We should take a look at the vital signs of our Christian life. For example, we should see if prayer and Scripture reading have become regular habits. In general, we should have a positive attitude toward the things of the Lord and toward other Christians.”

“So... like if we’re mad at some of them, that’s a bad sign?” asked Charlie. “Or if we don’t want to witness or go to church?” “Good thinking,” said Dad. “Those signs indicate that we need to repair relationships as soon as possible – with God and with others. We need to ask God to reveal any areas of sin in our lives.” Dad smiled at Charlie. “Let’s both give ourselves a spiritual checkup today.” Thoughtfully, Charlie nodded.

Thought: When was the last time you gave yourself a spiritual checkup?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for today’s reminder that I need to have spiritual check-ups. I need to know if I am interested in learning more about You and what pleases You, I need to examine if I like to talk with You, I also want to check if I enjoy being with other Christians. If there is any area I can improve, please help me. This is my prayer in Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE MOST DANGEROUS BEAST!

“Wow! Look at that bear yawn!” exclaimed Guan Nam on their visit to the zoo. “See all those teeth? I bet he could really hurt someone with them!” Dad smiled. “I’m sure he could,” he agreed. “He’s got sharp claws, too.” A little later, Guan Nam pointed to a large tiger. “Imagine that guy sneaking up on you in the jungle!” he exclaimed as the tiger stared at them. His sister Olivia shivered. “I’d rather not,” she said.

On the way home, the family went for dinner. Guan Nam thought about the fierce animals they had seen. “Dad, which kind of animal do you think is the most dangerous?” he asked. “Well, I don’t really know, but I guess I’ll vote for the lion,” replied Dad.

“Or the grizzly bear,” Olivia suggested. “Look!” exclaimed Guan Nam. “The guy that just came out of that bar can hardly walk! And there’s a man sitting on the curb over there – and another one sprawled out right in the street. A policeman is talking to them.” Dad nodded. “That’s sad, isn’t it?” he said. “You know, we wouldn’t want to get too close to fierce animals like those we saw at the zoo, but you’re looking at evidence of something even more dangerous than lions or bears or any of those other animals.”

“Things around here don’t look very neat,” murmured Olivia, “but there aren’t any animals here, Dad.” “Not the kind we saw at the zoo,” Dad agreed, “but the Bible compares Satan to a roaring lion, and what we see here shows some of the damage he can do. More homes are broken and more people die due to man’s sin than from all the animals put together.”

“So you’re saying Satan is the most dangerous animal of all,” said Guan Nam. “In a way,” said Dad. “What we’re observing here looks bad, but Satan also knows how to make things look good. Because of that, people often like to try what he offers. That’s dangerous and often results in destroyed lives. We need to be alert and resist Satan no matter how good he makes bad things look.”

“Okay,” said Guan Nam. “I’ll remember that – and I’ll remind Olivia, too.” Olivia smiled. “We’ll remind each other,” she said.

Thought: Beware of Satan – the most dangerous beast!

Prayer: Father in heaven, I am so glad of this reminder that Satan is much more dangerous than all the wild animals in the zoo. I should be afraid of the bad examples of friends or the so-called little white lie that seems so harmless. These are things Satan uses to try to destroy me and others. May I be smart – and stay as far away from sin as possible. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

FORGIVE EACH OTHER

“It’s not fair!” Shelly continued as she and her mum walked into the supermarket. She complained about a teacher nonstop since Mom picked her up after school. “It’s just not fair! When Mr. Tan said we could have free time to study and I opened my history book, my pencil fell off my desk. I couldn’t reach it from where I was sitting, so I stood up to get it, and he yelled at me! He didn’t ask why I was standing up or anything – just told me to write I will stay in my seat fifty times! It’s ridic...” Shelly’s voice stopped in the middle of the word as she spotted Mr. Tan himself at the vegetables counter.

The teacher greeted Shelly and her mother and then looked awkwardly at his cart. “I’m not used to planning meals and doing the grocery shopping,” he said, “but my wife had surgery and is still in the hospital.” “I’m so sorry to hear that,” Mom replied. “How is she doing now?” “Much better, but...” Mr. Tan nodded. “Actually, the biggest challenge each day is getting two of my kids to day care and the third to kindergarten,” he said. “Teaching, parenting, and trying to spend as much time as possible with my wife keeps me busy!”

After talking for a few more minutes, Mr. Tan turned back to his cart and moved on. “Now do you know why Mr. Tan scolded you unfairly today?” Mom asked as she and Shelly picked out some vegetables. “He looked very tired and worn out.” “I know. I never thought about a teacher having problems before,” said Shelly. “I guess I shouldn’t have gotten so mad at him, should I?”

Mom smiled. “I’ve had the same kind of experience,” she said gently. “There have been times when I felt someone acted unfairly toward me. I got upset about it, only to discover later that the person I was angry with was reacting to a serious personal problem. We need to remember that God wants us to be patient and accept other people. We should be kind and help them through their difficulties instead of becoming angry with them.”

“I’ll ask God to help me be nice to Mr. Tan,” Shelly said thoughtfully. “I’m not mad at him anymore.” She grinned at her mother and added, “I’ll try to remember that teachers are people, too.”

Thought: Are you sometimes treated unfairly? Learn to forgive.

Prayer: My heavenly Father, I thank You for today’s verse that teaches me to have patience with others and to be forgiving. All people – parents, teachers, other kids, neighbors – all have problems. Perhaps those who treat me badly have a serious problem I don’t know about, so teach me to have a friendly attitude and to learn forgiveness. In His precious name I pray, Amen.

BE A WISE KID!

When little Adam let out a loud scream, Mom hurried to the backyard to see what happened. “I just took this piece of glass away from him,” explained Tami, holding out a glittering piece of broken glass. “Adam found it on the ground and was about to put it in his mouth when I stopped him. He didn’t like that.” Mom picked up the little boy. “Thanks for watching him so carefully, Tami,” she said. “You saved him from getting a bad cut.”

Tami shrugged. “Yeah, but Adam sure didn’t appreciate it,” she said. “He thought I was being mean.”

“I know. That’s because he’s just a baby,” Mom replied. “Babies don’t always understand that you’re helping them.” She smiled at Tami. “You’ve helped me a lot by watching Adam today,” added Mom, “but now it’s time for his nap. Would you like to go play with Carrie for a while? Or ask her to come over?”

“Carrie is mad at me,” replied Tami. “She was mad at her mom for making her turn off a TV show their family used to watch before they were Christians. When I said her mom was right and that I wasn’t allowed to watch it either because it’s not a good show, Carrie got mad at me, too.”

“That’s too bad,” said Mom. “Try to remember that she hasn’t been saved very long, and be patient with her. It’s like she’s just a baby Christian.” “So sometimes she’ll probably get upset like Adam did when I took the broken piece of glass away from him?” asked Tami.

“Yes,” said Mom. “When someone tries to help new Christians and protect them from dangerous things, they may resist and become angry because they feel they’re not being allowed to live the way they want to. They may dislike guidance from older Christians.” Mom shook her head. “Even those of us who have been Christians for quite a while often don’t like to accept help.”

When Tami thought about it, she knew she didn’t always want advice from her parents or other adults, either. “I hope I don’t act that way too often!” she thought. “I’ll try to be more patient with Carrie – and I’ll try to listen better when older Christians tell me something.”

Thought: Do you accept the advice and help given to you by your parents?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I grow to be a wiser and more mature child and accept happily the advice given to me by my elders: parents, Sunday school teacher, grandparents and other mature Christians. Indeed, they are more experienced in life and know much more than I do about the dangers and tricks of Satan. In Jesus’ precious name, Amen.

HOW IS YOUR SPEECH?

Brett looked up from his plate as he and his family were eating dinner. “You know what?” he asked, reaching for the salt shaker. “Today I remembered what Pastor said about witnessing and being wise in speech, and I decided to witness to Keith. He’s always doing really bad stuff. Like... he swears sometimes, and he’s mean to the little kids, and today I saw him cheat. So I told him he was a sinner headed straight for hell, and that he should repent.”

“Whoa! Sounds like you came on a little too strong,” said Dad. “I invited him to come to church, too,” added Brett, “but he said he already goes. I wonder what kind of church he goes to if he isn’t a Christian yet.”

“I hope you didn’t tell Keith that,” said Dad. “Did you?” “Well... sort of,” Brett replied. “Brett, if you insult the person you’re talking to, he might get angry and become completely turned off to the Lord,” warned Dad.

“I was just trying to witness,” said Brett. “How could that ever be anything but good?” He frowned and started to sprinkle salt onto his potatoes. After just a few shakes, the top fell off and salt poured out onto his food. Brett looked in dismay at his plate. Mom jumped up to help. “I guess I didn’t put the top on tight when I filled the shakers,” she said.

“You know, Son,” said Dad, “you got too much salt on your food, and that spoiled it. I think maybe in a way, you gave Keith too much salt today, too. It’s great that you witnessed to him, but you may have given him too much too fast. When we do that, it could spoil someone’s interest in spiritual things.” Brett got up to get a new plate. “Do you think so?” he asked.

“I’m afraid so,” replied Dad. “Like the Bible says, Christians are like salt, which is needed to improve flavor. So don’t stop witnessing, but next time, try to be kind and tactful. Be sensitive to the other person’s feelings.”

Slowly, Brett nodded. “I’ll apologize tomorrow,” he said, “but... it should be okay to tell him Jesus loves him and he needs to accept Him as Savior, shouldn’t it? Should I tell him I’ll pray for him, too?”

Smiling, Dad nodded. “Say it lovingly and kindly,” he said, “and that should be fine.”

Thought: Do you witness to your friends? It’s important that you do so, but lovingly and kindly.

Prayer: I agree Heavenly Father I need to witness to my friends and so please teach me to do so lovingly, and please teach me also to always be careful of my speech that I may not hurt anyone. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.

HANDLE WITH CARE!

CRASH! The sound of shattering glass echoed through the house. Both Randy and his mother ran into the kitchen. “Oh, Jennifer! My new vase!” Mom exclaimed when they saw the little girl looking in dismay at pieces of a glass vase scattered all over the floor. “I didn’t mean to drop it,” Jennifer sobbed. “It slid right out of my hands.”

Mom nodded. “I see that,” she said. “Right now, I want you to go wait in your room before you get cut on this glass. I’ll be there to talk to you in a minute, but first I need to clean up this mess.” So Jennifer sadly went to her room while Mom picked up the biggest pieces of broken glass and Randy got the broom and dustpan.

“Jennifer should have known better than to touch the vase,” said Randy with a frown, “but since she picked it up, she should have hung on tight and not let it slip out of her hands. It’s pretty valuable, isn’t it? I mean... it was.”

“Well, not so very,” said Mom, “though I liked it.” She looked thoughtful. “Speaking of letting it slip away reminds me of the most valuable thing anyone has, but many people let it slip away,” she added. “Any idea what that would be?”

“Ah... I’m sure you’re not going to say it’s money or a house or jewelry,” said Randy slowly, trying to think of the right answer as he spoke. “Us kids, maybe? Or just any family members?”

“That’s a good answer,” said Mom, “but I was thinking of our souls. People think so little about them and are so careless with them. Do you remember the story Jesus told of the rich man who was interested only in having a good time and plenty of food?” Randy nodded. “God called him a fool, didn’t He?”

“Yes. That rich man provided for his life on earth but took no thought of what would happen to his soul when he died,” replied Mom. “Many people still make the same mistake and let their souls slip into eternity without God. Making sure you’ll go to heaven is the most important thing you can do.”

Thought: Are you concerned about your soul? Handle with care!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for reminding me that having the whole world is worth nothing if my soul is lost. So please teach me to handle the most important thing – my soul – with greatest care and help me make sure I will spend eternity in heaven. In Jesus’ wonderful name, Amen.

SIN BUGS

As Angela turned over a rock in the playground, she drew back. “Yuck! Look at all the icky bugs hiding under this rock, Mom!” she exclaimed. “They look like they’re wearing armor. And they don’t seem to like the light. I think they’re looking for a dark place to hide.”

Mom and Angela watched the bugs scurry around. “Those are sow bugs, and I think you’re right,” Mom agreed. “The leader of my Bible study group used these bugs as an illustration a few weeks ago, and here they are!” Angela glanced at her mother in surprise. “An illustration of what?”

“The lesson was on how we sometimes like to hold on to certain sins. Mrs. Lee pointed out that we scramble to find hiding places for the sin in our hearts just like these bugs scurry around, looking for dark hiding places,” explained Mom. “We try to keep our sin in the dark – but God sees it!”

“You know what? My Sunday school teacher told us there are two kinds of sin,” said Angela. “She said we commit sins of com... ah-h-h... commission and sins of omission.” Angela was rather pleased with herself as she used the big words. “And do you know what that means?” asked Mom with a smile.

Angela nodded. “Miss Teo explained the difference to us. The sins of commission are the bad things we think or do,” answered Angela. “Like... it’s a sin to cheat or lie or say something to hurt somebody.”

“That’s exactly right,” agreed Mom. “And what are the sins of omission?” “That’s when we don’t do things we should do,” answered Angela. “Like not telling someone about Jesus when we feel like God wants us to, or not helping somebody when we know we should.”

“Good for you!” Mom smiled. “You remembered that lesson very well.” Angela nodded as she watched the last of the insects disappear. “I’ll think of these guys as sin bugs from now on,” she said. “They’ll be a reminder that I don’t want either kind of sin hiding in my heart.”

Thought: Are sins of commission and sins of omission new terms to you? Doing wrong is obviously sin, but failing to do what you should do is sin, too—that would be a sin of omission.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know You can see everything and I know sometimes, I try to hide a wrong thing I’ve done. Or hoping no one will notice that I haven’t done something I should do. Help me, heavenly Father, to confess all sins, and trust You to help me do the things I should do and say no to things I shouldn’t do. In Your Son’s mighty name I pray, Amen.

DID YOU KNOCK?

All the way home from school, Caleb worried about how he'd get into the house. "Maybe Mom will be home from work early today," he thought. But when he reached home, Mom's car wasn't in the driveway. "Oh, well. Sarah will be here in a minute," Caleb decided. "She'll have a key." As expected, his sister soon arrived. Caleb greeted her eagerly. "Do you have your house key?" he asked. "I forgot mine."

Sarah shook her head. "I forgot mine, too! Isn't Mom home?" "No," said Caleb with a sigh. "Maybe a side window is unlocked. Let's check." They did, but none of those windows would open. "Let's try this kitchen window," Caleb said. Locking his hands together, he held them out. "The window's too high to reach from the ground, but this will make a step for you." But when Sarah tried to step up on his hands, they gave way and both kids fell. As they got to their feet, Mom's car pulled into the driveway.

"Oh, good! Here's Mom," said Sarah, but Mom didn't get out of the car. As Caleb and Sarah brushed themselves off, a man walked to the side door and knocked! He waved to them as he waited, and they recognized Jerry, the mechanic, from a nearby service station where Mom often took her car to whenever it had a problem.

To the kids' surprise, Mom opened the door. "Thanks, Jerry," she said as he handed her the car keys. "You seem to have a way with that car. I'll give you a lift back to the service station." She turned to Sarah and Caleb, who had hurried up. "Hi, kids. You're home a little late today. What have you been up to?" she asked. Caleb and Sarah looked at one another and began to laugh. "Neither of us had a key, so we were trying to break in because we thought nobody was home!" explained Sarah. "It didn't occur to us to knock and find out for sure."

Mom smiled. "That reminds me of the verse at the end of the devotional story we read this morning," she said. "Remember it?" "Yeah. It says, Knock and it shall be opened unto you," quoted Sarah promptly. "Too bad we didn't think to knock on the house door."

Mom laughed. "That would have saved you some trouble," she agreed.

Thought: Have you thought to knock? That's a word Jesus used when He was talking about asking God for what you need.

Prayer: This is such a precious lesson, Father in heaven, that I will always turn to You in prayer. Sometimes I miss out on blessings just because I don't even think to pray! In His precious name I pray, Amen.

WEALTH IS A MIRAGE

“Can we stop here at the mall?” Lily asked as they drove past it on the way home in their old car. “I want a new blouse, and they had some really cool ones here last week.” “We don’t have money for that right now, honey,” replied her mother. “Besides, you really don’t need a new blouse.”

Lily sighed. “I wish we were rich and didn’t have to worry about money!” Her brother, Lucas, grinned. “You don’t have to worry about it,” he said. “Dad does.” “Actually, I don’t, either,” said Dad. “Having a lot of money or things doesn’t bring happiness, Lily. Didn’t you learn that when you got the CD you wanted a few months ago? You were happy for about a week; then you thought you had to have a new DVD. Remember?” Dad glanced at her in the rear-view mirror. “Look!” exclaimed Lucas. “Did it rain? There’s water on the road up there.”

“That’s a mirage,” said Dad. “It looks like water, but it isn’t.” Lucas wasn’t convinced until he realized that something looking like water was always just ahead of them. “That’s a good example of what happens when we think money will solve our problems,” said Mom. “The mirage up ahead seems to promise water, but there’s never any water at all. And money seems to promise happiness, but it doesn’t produce it.”

“Yeah, Lily,” said Lucas. “If you had a new blouse, you’d want new pants. Then you’d want new shoes and then socks.” Lucas laughed. “And then you’d probably want a...” He ducked as Lily aimed a playful swat at him. “Real happiness comes from loving and trusting in Jesus,” observed Mom. “But people who love Jesus sometimes want more stuff, too,” said Andrea.

“Sure,” agreed Dad, “but when we really trust Him, we don’t need lots of stuff to be happy.” He smiled. “We should be rich in something, though. Do you know what it is?” Neither of the kids knew the answer. “Okay,” said Dad, “when we get home look up 1 Timothy 6:18. Bring me the answer and get a treat.”

“All right!” exclaimed Lucas. “Is the treat some candy?” Andrea laughed. “That would make you happy, right? Well don’t forget – like Mom and Dad said, that kind of happiness won’t last long!”

Thought: Do you wish your family has more money? That could bring a lot of hidden problems!

Prayer: Thank You Heavenly Father for today’s lesson: having lots of money or things will never make me happy for long. Only Jesus can bring lasting happiness, so may I trust Him, and be rich in good works. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SECRET SIN?

The numbers on the watch glowed eerily in the darkness. Dylan sighed. “Why did I steal it?” he wondered. Dylan had seen the watch at a department store. He wanted it so much that he slipped it into his pocket. “I can’t wear this”, he thought, “Mom and Dad will notice, and how would I explain it? I sure hope nobody saw me take it.” Dylan tossed and turned all night, and the next morning, he was worn out from exhaustion and guilt. “Maybe things will seem better today, he thought.”

During lunch time, Dylan noticed several teachers talking quietly together, and one seemed to glance in his direction. In fact, it seemed like everybody was looking at him suspiciously. “Who saw me take it?” he wondered.

That night, Dylan heard footsteps in the hallway. “Who’s there?” he whispered hoarsely. “What do you want?” Dylan’s father appeared in the doorway. “I just got up for a drink of water, son,” said Dad. “Is anything wrong?” “It’s in my top drawer,” Dylan sobbed. “Go ahead and take it.”

Puzzled, Dylan’s father turned on the light and opened the drawer. He gave a low whistle as he held up the watch. “Judging from what you said just now, I assume you didn’t get this honestly, did you?” Dad asked. Dylan poured out the whole story, ending with his impression that everybody seemed to know what he had done.

Dad nodded. “Someone did see you take that watch,” he said. “He’s been bothering you about it.”

“But who, Dad?” asked Dylan. “God saw you,” replied Dad. “When the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, they often feel like someone is after them. They have no rest until they stop running from God and do the right thing.”

“I.. I need to take it back, don’t I?” Dylan asked through tears. Dad nodded. “And what else do you think you should do?” he asked.

Dylan thought a moment. “Confess it – to the store people and to God,” he said. So Dylan got on his knees and prayed for God’s forgiveness and promised to take the watch back the very next day and accept the consequences of his sin.

After Dad left, Dylan finally slipped into a deep, peaceful sleep.

Thought: Is there a secret sin in your heart?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know I need forgiveness for the many sins in my life. And if there is any secret sin hiding somewhere, please show it to me and I’d confess and be right with You. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

POLISHING PROCESS

Jeremy sighed as he perched on the arm of his dad's chair. "I'm tired of trying to be nice to Tat Lee, Dad. He's always bugging me," grumbled Jeremy just as Blake, his younger brother, dashed into the room. "Today in Sunday school, Tat Lee kept poking my arm. Why can't he grow up? He..."

"Dad! Can we go and look at my rocks now?" asked Blake, interrupting his brother. "It's been a whole week since I put them in my rock tumbler!" "It takes way longer than that to polish stones," Jeremy reminded Blake. "If you take them out now, they won't look much different from when you put them in." "That's right," agreed Dad. "We'll change the grinding agent pretty soon, but the rocks have to tumble for several weeks before they're smooth and shiny." "Okay," said Blake. He sighed as he left the room. "I'll leave them alone." After a moment, Dad murmured, "I guess Tat Lee isn't polished yet." Jeremy cocked his head. "What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I believe you said he accepted the Lord at Bible camp just last year, right?" Dad asked, and Jeremy nodded. "So he's a new Christian, and it takes a lot of polishing to make a person be like Jesus," explained Dad. "We're all at different stages of spiritual growth. Those of us who have learned some lessons about how to behave need to have patience – especially with new Christians."

"You mean I need to be more patient with Tat Lee?" Jeremy asked. He sighed as he thought about it. "When I'm annoyed with him, I guess it shows that I'm not polished enough myself," he admitted quietly. Dad nodded. "The Bible talks about iron sharpening iron – and I think that's a little like a grinding agent polishing rocks," he said. "Maybe God wants Tat Lee's shortcomings – and yours – to work like grinding agents to polish each other."

"Okay, but is it alright to ask him to stop if he pokes me?" wondered Jeremy. "Sure," said Dad. "Ask him politely, be patient as you get to know him better and as he learns more about the Lord."

"I will," Jeremy promised. "Maybe I can help him with some things in our Bible lessons, and I'll try to remember that I'm learning patience from him. Like you said, we can help each other."

Thought: The polishing process isn't finished – for you or anyone else.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray I'd always remember all Christians are still undergoing the polishing process and I must learn to help others, as You send them to help me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CAT AND HAMSTER

As Ashley carried the cat out of her bedroom, she met her mother in the hall. Mom smiled. "I see you're up," she said. "Do you feel better?"

"Not much," said Ashley, "but Snowball jumped on top of Ziggy's cage." Ashley pointed behind her. "And look at my silly hamster. He's climbing the cage like he wants to get out. Ziggy doesn't even know there's a cat out here waiting to catch him."

Mom nodded. "He obviously doesn't always know what's best for him," she said. "I'll put Snowball out, and you get back to bed. Would you like some milk?" Ashley nodded as Mom took the cat.

When her mother came back, Ashley was lying in bed staring glumly at the ceiling. "I don't see why I had to get sick today," she grumbled. "Our girl's basketball finals are after school, and I prayed all morning that I'd get well enough to play. Instead, my throat is still so sore, and I feel lousy. It's not fair."

"I know it seems that way," said Mom sympathetically, "but..." She sat on the edge of the bed. "Tell me – why didn't you let your hamster out of his cage a few minutes ago?" "Let him out with Snowball still here?" asked Ashley. "Ziggy might have been eaten up!"

"Being in the cage kept him safe," said Mom, "and sometimes the difficulties God lets us face keep us safe and free from worse trouble." Ashley thought about Mom's words. She shrugged. "I can't see what kind of trouble being sick would be keeping me from today," she said.

Mom smiled. "Your hamster probably didn't see what trouble you were protecting him from, either – and maybe you wouldn't have gotten into trouble today," she replied. "God might be teaching you some other lesson—perhaps to be patient or to simply trust Him when you don't understand why something happens. I don't know why you're sick today... but I do know God loves you and does what's best for you – just like you did what was best for Ziggy."

Ashley sighed, but she nodded. "I'll try to remember that," she said.

Thought: Do you blame God when you don't like what happens to you? God knows what is best for you!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes I don't like the situation I am in and wish they would change. And today, I learn that often, you put me through difficulties sometimes as that is best for me. so please teach me to trust in You. In Christ's precious name I pray, Amen.

TOUGH TIMES...

Seng stared out of the airplane window. He wished he could be excited about his first plane ride, but his thoughts were swirling like the thick clouds below. “Why did God let Mom and Dad be in that accident?” he wondered. “I like going to Grandma and Grandpa’s house to stay a while, but not when it’s because Mom and Dad are in the hospital.”

He turned from the window when the flight attendant arrived and served the beverages they had requested. “Cheer up, Seng,” encouraged his older brother, Kiong, noticing Seng’s frown. “Drink your juice. It will help you feel better.” “I’m not thirsty,” said Seng. “I keep thinking about Mom and Dad.” Kiong gave him a lop-sided grin. “I know, Seng. I really feel the same way – but we need to trust God. He loves us and cares for us, and He knows what He’s doing in our lives.”

Seng nodded, but he wasn’t sure he agreed. He sipped his apple juice, then with a sigh, turned to the window again. Immediately the sigh became a long whistle. “Look, Kiong!” he exclaimed. “The clouds have cleared away, and I can see all the way to the ground now.” Pressing his nose to the window, Seng stared down at the colorful fields and the cars and trucks that looked like tiny toys. “I didn’t know it would look like that,” he said. “Everything looks so little! Wow! I like this!” Seng’s solemn face had brightened.

Kiong leaned over. “It’s great,” he agreed, “and you know what? All that stuff was down there all the time. You just couldn’t see it because of the clouds.” Seng grinned and nodded. “We can think of Mom and Dad’s accident in the same way,” continued Kiong. “To us, the whole situation is cloudy, and we can’t see anything good in it, but you know who can, right?”

“You’re saying that God can?” asked Seng.

“That’s right,” replied Kiong. “Remember what Dad told us when they let us in to see him at the hospital? He reminded us that we accepted Jesus by faith, and need to live by faith – accept whatever God allows to come into our lives. Mom and Dad are doing that; we need to do it, too.”

Thought: Do you have a cloudy outlook on life when tough times come? God cares...

Prayer: Thank You Heavenly Father that when I have the biggest of problems, I can have the greatest King of kings in You to help and care for me. Teach me to have faith in You, and to know that even when tough times come, You still care. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

RIGHTLY DIVIDE THE BIBLE!

Joshua sprawled on his bed and flipped through a pile of photographs. When his dad looked in, Joshua glanced up. “Hey, Dad! I think I’ll be a deep sea diver someday,” Joshua announced. “Look at these pictures Uncle Loong brought over this afternoon. He took them when he went deep sea diving in Phuket.”

Dad peered over Joshua’s shoulder. “What unusual plants and animals!” Dad exclaimed. “And what vivid colors!” His eyes twinkled.

Together they examined more of the pictures. “God must have a wonderful imagination in order to create such a variety of life forms,” observed Dad. “Uncle Loong says the farther down in the ocean you go, the prettier it gets,” said Joshua as he picked up another picture. He paused and turned to his dad. “Why do you suppose God made such interesting creatures and then hid them down deep in the ocean where most people don’t ever see them?”

Dad thought for a moment. “I’m not sure,” he said, “but these pictures remind me of the great God we have – and also of the riches that we can find in the Bible.” “The Bible?” repeated Josh. “What do these pictures have to do with the Bible?” Dad smiled. “Well, think of Uncle Loong. He’s seen the ocean many times, and yet he decided he wanted to explore it more thoroughly – to go down deep to see what he could discover. Do you think he was rewarded for his efforts?” “He sure was,” said Joshua as he shuffled through the pictures again.

Dad nodded. “It’s like that with God’s Word,” he said. “If we explore and study it, He’ll reward us, too. I used to think personal devotions weren’t important. I figured I’d already heard all those Bible stories – and biblical principles – in church and Sunday school.” “You probably had,” said Joshua. “I have, too.”

“We’ve heard many,” agreed Dad, “but God will reveal additional knowledge, insights, and wisdom to those who are willing to dig deeper into His Word. Get it?” Thoughtfully, Joshua nodded.

Thought: Are you aware that the Bible has much more to teach you?

Prayer: O my Heavenly Father, I confess I have been lazy and have not been diligent to read the Bible. Teach me to divide the Word of truth, to study the Bible, and I would be rewarded with so much lessons and wisdom. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

WHAT REALLY COUNTS

Phil and his friends were stunned. One of their classmates had been killed in a car accident. “We feel sad this morning,” said Miss Tan, their teacher. “Sometimes it makes us feel better to remember good and happy things about a person who has died. Would anyone like to share something special about Jonathan?” Several students mentioned things they liked about their friend.

Amelia spoke first. “Jon played his horn really good,” she said. “He was smart,” offered Jason. “He could figure things out real quick.” “He was always nice to other kids,” said Kai. “Jon was a good person,” said Dylan. “He went to church every week.” Phil fidgeted in his seat. “The things the kids said were true, but nobody had mentioned the most important thing of all. Jon and I talked about it just last week. Do I dare tell them?” he wondered. Phil hesitated a few minutes longer, then slowly raised his hand. “Yes, Phil?” His teacher said and smiled at him.

“Well, my dad always says people are like cars,” began Phil nervously, “but Jon wasn’t at all like my uncle Robert’s car.” Phil noticed some of the kids frowning at him and realized how odd that sounded. He hurried to explain. “See... when uncle Robert wanted to buy a car, he brought it home to show Dad. It looked really nice and uncle Robert liked the CD player and stuff. But Dad kept saying, “What about the engine? It’s what’s under the hood that really counts.” But uncle Robert didn’t listen, and now his car won’t run half the time.” Phil paused, surprised at the long speech he was making. He noticed kids were still frowning.

“That’s interesting,” said Miss Tan, “but would you like to say something more about Jon, too?” “What I wanted to say was – we’ve heard a lot of good things about Jon, but like I said, I’m glad I can tell you he’s not like uncle Robert’s car,” said Phil. “He didn’t just look good. A couple of months ago, Jonathan told me he trusted Jesus as his Savior. That made him good in God’s sight, and that’s what really counts.”

Phil saw that a few kids looked puzzled, but some were smiling now. And he felt like, up in heaven, Jon was smiling, too.

Thought: Does your life just look good to man, or does it look good to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I confess that often, I want people to see the outside of me. I pray that I would be more concerned about the inside of me – that I am really saved and have committed my life to Jesus, that He’d be my Lord and Saviour. In His precious name I ask, Amen.

BE CONTENTED!

“I wish my dad liked camping like your dad does,” Sonya complained to her friend, Beth. Beth looked at the beautiful furnishings in Sonya’s home. “Well, I wish we had as many nice things as you do,” she said, “but we don’t have very much money.” The girls went on to compare and complain about their circumstances.

“I think you girls need something useful to do,” said Sonya’s mother, who was tired of their complaints. “I need to make some visits for the church visitation committee. How about coming along?” Hesitantly, the girls agreed.

At the first stop, a woman invited them in. “You’ll have to excuse this house,” said Mrs. Lee. “My kids drive me crazy. I’ll be glad when they’re all in school and I can get peace and quiet.” Motioning for her guests to sit down, she said, “I wish we had never moved to this unfriendly neighbourhood!” And for the rest of the visit, she continued to complain about everything and everybody.

When they left, Beth whistled. “Wow! I wonder if she’s ever happy about anything,” she said.

A smiling lady answered the door when they made the next call. “We’re so happy here,” Mrs. Yeo bubbled to her guests. “We’re thankful we found a loving church family so quickly.” She then went on to praise the church, the schools, and the people in their neighborhood.

“Mrs. Lee and Mrs. Yeo are so different!” exclaimed Sonya on the way home. “They moved here about the same time; their husbands work for the same company; they live in the same neighborhood; and they attend the same church. But one grumbled the whole time we were there, and the other one is happy about everything. Why is that?”

“Well,” said mum, “God says we’re to think about good things. It seems Mrs. Yeo learnt to look for and think about what’s good in any situation, and Mrs. Lee has not.” “I guess not!” exclaimed Beth.

“There are two ‘tents’ in which we can live,” added Mom quietly. “One is contentment, and the other is discontentment. It’s not activities or time or money that determines how happy you are. It’s which ‘tent’ you choose to live in.”

Thought: Are you living in contentment?

Prayer: I pray, Heavenly Father, to be able to live in contentment and happiness, to trust more in You and not to complain. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

FIGHT EVIL WITH GOOD...

Andy trudged home, a grim look on his face. He knew his mother would take one look at his clothes and know he had been in another fight. And Dad would... well, Andy didn't know what Dad would do. "But I don't care!" thought Andy. "Ever since Jason lied and got me in trouble, I can't stand that guy!"

As Andy passed an empty lot, he glanced toward an old tree stump where a swarm of bees had made a hive. There were none buzzing around, and he noticed a few lying on the ground. "Dead bees! I've been wanting one for my insect collection," he muttered. "Here's my chance to get it without getting stung." He picked up a bee and carefully put it in his pocket.

When Andy arrived home, it was just as he had expected. "Andy!" his mother exclaimed. "You've been in another fight! I suppose it was Jason again."

Andy's father was already home, too, and Andy felt bad when he saw the disappointed look on his dad's face. "Well, Jason is always mean to me," said Andy, trying to defend his actions. "He says all kinds of hateful things!" "We've discussed before what Jesus says about the way we should treat those who aren't nice to us," said Dad. "Using our fists on them is not one of the things He wants us to do."

"No, but I... I try not to get mad, but I just can't help it," mumbled Andy. He shoved his hands into his pockets. With a yelp, he jerked them out again, and a bee flew to the window. "It stung me!" Andy exclaimed. "I thought that thing was dead!" As Dad removed the stinger from Andy's finger, he shook his head. "You know, Son," he said, "the anger and unforgiveness you have toward Jason is something like that bee. Those feelings lie quietly in your heart and seem to be dead, but when Jason provokes you, they flare up again. You need to give your hurt and anger to God."

"I've tried," said Andy. "It doesn't seem to work." "You can't just say the words; you have to mean them," said Dad. "And do what God says—do good to Jason. I think you'll be surprised at what happens." "Be nice to him?" Andy asked. "But he..." Andy paused. "Be nice to him," he repeated after thinking it over. "I'll try it. I'll give him a... a cookie tomorrow."

Thought: Do you have anger, envy, or selfishness when someone hurts you? Give him good for evil, and forgive...

Prayer: My Father in heaven, I know it is difficult to control myself and I have to ask You to help me for I need to change to be a better Christian child, so that I will not retaliate or fight back. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

KEEP PURE FOR JESUS!

One evening, not long before her marriage was to take place, Lisa looked up from her desk and smiled at her younger sister, Tina. "I thought I'd read my Sunday school lesson and forget all about weddings for a few minutes," said Lisa, "but guess what the lesson is about?"

"What?" asked Tina, who was sprawled on her bed. She was almost as excited about the wedding plans as her sister was. "It's about Jesus and the Church. The Bible refers to believers as God's Church and also as the Bride of Christ – and Jesus is referred to as the bridegroom. Someday He'll come back for His bride," Lisa explained. "The verses for my lesson say husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church."

"That's a lot," said Tina, "and I can tell you and Dan love each other a whole lot, too." "Yes, we do," agreed Lisa. She looked thoughtful. "You know how hard I've worked to make sure everything is just right for my wedding to Dan," she added. "Now I'm wondering if I've been as careful in preparing to meet Jesus."

"I know a lot of what you've been doing to get ready for your wedding," said Tina, "but what are we supposed to do to be ready to meet Jesus?" "Trusting in Him to forgive our sins is the beginning, of course," Lisa answered, "and then, according to 1 John 3:3, we should be purifying ourselves."

"What does that mean?" Tina asked. "Well, think about it," said Lisa. "I want Dan to always be pleased with me, so I've been learning to love the things he loves – and to enjoy the places he likes to go." Grinning, Lisa added, "I'm even glad to go fishing with him!"

Tina laughed, remembering how Lisa disliked squiggly worms. "So... if we really love Jesus, we should want to do things that would please Him. And we should go to places He would approve of, right?" Lisa nodded as she put her book away and climbed into bed. "That's right," she agreed. "We should want to stay away from sin and live pure, clean lives for Him. Let's both remember to work on that as well as on my wedding plans."

Thought: If Jesus came today, would you be ready?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the reminder that I am to keep my life pure – and that my thoughts and actions must please Jesus. In His precious name I pray – Amen.

IDOL WORSHIP

“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall have no other gods before me,” Kristen murmured repeatedly as the family drove home from church. Kristen’s brother, Adam, frowned. “What are you muttering about?” he asked.

“Our class is going to learn the Ten Commandments,” replied Kristen, “so I’m learning the first one for next Sunday.” She frowned. “We’re supposed to think about what it means, too,” she added. “My teacher says people often worship false gods, even in Singapore, but I never knew anybody who did that.”

“Don’t be so sure,” said Dad. “A job, clothes, popularity, money – almost anything can become a god if it becomes more important to us than the true God. Sometimes it’s even another person.” “Seems weird to me,” said Kristen.

“I heard somebody say one of the girls in your class at school is imitating some rock star or movie star or something,” said Adam. “Do you know who she is? Maybe she’s making an idol of whoever she’s copying.”

“Maybe!” exclaimed Kristen. “I know who you mean. Her name is Hannah, and she dresses and acts so funny lately. She’s always talking about somebody named Shana. Hannah tries to walk and talk and sing like her. She fixed her hair the way she says this Shana person does, and Hannah tries to dress like her.” Kristen laughed. “She told us she and Shana even use the same kind of toothpaste! Isn’t that silly? Maybe Shana is a god to Hannah.”

“That would be too bad,” said Dad, “but let’s be careful to examine our own lives, not just point at someone else. What things – or people – might we put in the place that belongs to God?” “Ah-h-h... how about famous basketball or football players?” suggested Kristen. “I think boys make gods of them.” “Well, how about clothes?” retorted Adam. “Or hair styles? That’s what girls are always fussing about.”

“Any of those things could be a problem,” agreed Dad, “but again – be sure to look at your own life, not someone else’s. Be sure to give God first place in your life and worship only Him.”

Thought: Do you worship only the true God?

Prayer: My Father in heaven, I confess there are times when I may fall into this sin of idol-worshipping someone or something that I think is so nice. Thank You for the reminder that I must worship only You. In Jesus’ holy name I pray, Amen.

WHERE IS GOD'S VOICE?

“If only God spoke to me directly, then I will know that He really exists and believe in Him.” I used to think this way. Have you wished to hear the audible voice of God and see Him in the flesh? Today, there are many who claim that they have personal encounters with God. They say that God has appeared to them and they hear God speaking to them! Is this true? How does God really speak to you and me today?

It's true that God speaks to us. Since the beginning, God has never failed to communicate with us. In the past, God spoke to man through visions, dreams and even face to face. Men like Abraham, Moses and Samuel heard the voice of God directly. Joseph and Jacob received dreams from God, and prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel received God's Word through visions. God created us to enjoy a close relationship with Him, and to point others to know Him. How can we have a close relationship with our Creator, if we don't hear His voice? Just as God spoke to the believers in the Old Testament, God continues to speak to us today. It is no longer through visions, dreams or face to face. As the writer of Hebrews tells us, “in these last days” God speaks to us through His Son. How does God speak to us through His Son?

God speaks to us through Jesus, the Word of God. In John, we are told that Jesus is also the Word. Fill in the blanks below to see how Jesus is described as the Word!

“In the beginning was the _____, and the Word was with God, and the Word was _____. The same was in the _____ with God.” John 1:1

Dear reader, Jesus Christ is the Word. He was there in the beginning with God and He is God. When God speaks to us today, it is not through visions or dreams, but through His Word. The Holy Scripture is full of the message of Christ! Turn to the Bible, and look no further. In its pages, we find all the answers to who God is, who we are, and how we can find salvation. The best thing is that we have this precious book in our hands!

Ask yourself this question and answer honestly, “Is the Bible precious to me?”

Thought: God's voice is the Bible.

Prayer: Father in heaven, grant me a greater zeal and desire to hear Your voice as I study and reflect on Your Word. Help me to understand Your Word, so that I may grow in faith and in obedience to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THEREFORE, GIVE MORE EARNEST ATTENTION

Many things in life call for attention—school, personal interests and time with loved ones. Our attention is on the things that belong to this life. Do we give more attention to the things that will last forever? We are instructed in Hebrews 2:1 to “give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard”. These are the things that God speaks to us in His Word.

We are to shake ourselves out of spiritual lethargy, sit up with our eyes wide open, and put our minds to take notice and concentrate on what God is telling us through His Word. We are quick to fill our timetables with our earthly pursuits. But are we quick to run to God? Dear reader, are you paying attention to your spiritual life or have you neglected it? Starting from today, give more notice, thought, and interest in your daily reflection of God’s Word!

Giving attention to God’s Word is not like paying attention in class. We can pretend to pay attention in class. Our eyes may be looking at the teacher, but our heart is somewhere else. But we cannot pretend to pay attention to God. God tells us to be earnest. He knows if your heart is genuinely interested in His Word, or if it’s not. What is your attitude when it comes to spiritual matters? Are you reading this as quickly as possible so that you can get it over and done with, or are you genuinely serious about what God has to tell you today?

If we take God’s message of salvation lightly, there is no escape from the judgment that is to come. The words of angels were true and brought judgment on the sins of men. Therefore, how much more sure and certain is the judgment of God if we were to reject His message of salvation? Jesus Himself spoke it, the apostles heard and preached it, and God confirmed their message through many miracles and wonders. Dear reader, pay close attention to God and His Word. Do not treat it lightly! It contains God’s message of great salvation!

Thought: Give more earnest attention to God’s Word.

Prayer: Father in heaven, redirect my heart’s focus to desire Your Word and Your presence in my life. Keep me from spiritual lethargy, and grant me an earnest hunger and thirst after Your Word. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

BUT WE SEE JESUS

What was the original state of man? Man was made a little lower than the angels. Man was created to enjoy perfect fellowship with God and was given the privilege of being in charge of God's creation. No other being was bestowed with honour as mankind was! Yet, despite this special position, man fell into sin and was separated from a pure and holy God.

What is the state of man today? Man is not doing well because he is stuck in sin. Isn't this true of us? We like to do whatever makes us happy, and whatever feels right. We have no regard for God! We rebel against authority and in doing so, we go against the highest authority – God Himself. Man has no way to go back to God by himself because he is a sinner. Sin is no small matter because it results in an eternity in hell.

But we see Jesus – what a great consolation! Is this a thought that both amazes and puzzles you at the same time? When I think about why God would care enough for me to die for me, it leaves me in wonder. This is an unconditional and sacrificial love for a world of sinners who hate God. Jesus showed us this love by taking on the lowly form of a man. Why did He do this?

The payment of sin is death. The only way we can go back to God, is for someone to make the payment of death on our behalf. He is the captain of our salvation. Do you know of anyone who would willingly die in your place, so that you can go free? Jesus did! He didn't just die but He rose again from the dead and ascended back to heaven! That's the wonderful news of this great salvation. Man has hope in a Saviour, and His name is Jesus Christ.

What is your response to this message of salvation? There are only 2 responses – either you believe in Jesus and accept Him as your personal Saviour and Lord, or you continue in your sinful, rebellious ways. Choose wisely. Let today be the day of salvation!

Thought: Do I see Jesus or am I blind to Him?

Prayer: Father in heaven, have mercy on me a sinner. I need your salvation grace in my life. Thank you for the Lord Jesus who tasted death on my behalf. May the rest of my life no longer be lived in rebellion, but in obedience to You and Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ARE YOU AFRAID TO DIE?

The thought of dying frightens some. It frightens people because they imagine what it feels like to die, and what happens after death. Some people have sleepless nights because of this. Nobody likes to think of death. Look at verse 16. The writer of Hebrews describes man's fear of death as a lifetime of bondage! It can take a hold of us and affects the way we live.

Some live their lives according to superstitious practices to avoid 'bad luck'. Others spend lots of money on health supplements and anti-aging treatments because they believe these will help them to live longer. There are even scientists working hard to find the secret to living forever! Maybe at your young age, the reality of death has not struck you yet. But the truth is, we will all die one day. Rich or poor, young or old, all will have to die.

What is the solution to man's greatest enemy – death? Man has no solution but God has. He sent Jesus to earth so that He could die as a man. His was no ordinary death because there is power in His death. Jesus died and had victory over death when He rose on the third day. Death could not keep Jesus in the grave! Even the devil could not keep Jesus in the grave! Jesus destroyed them all for He is both God and man. Victory over death is a done deal!

This wonderful solution is all the work of a most loving and merciful God. Man only needs to have faith to believe that God has done this for him! The start to everlasting life is to believe that Jesus died for you and has saved you from your sins. When you believe in Him, God promises you an eternity in heaven with Him. This fear of death is replaced by a desire to see Jesus one day! The Bible tells us that once we pass away from this body, we will immediately be present with Him. With the glorious celestial city awaiting us, and an eternity dwelling with Jesus, there is no more fear of death!

Thought: Victory over death is secured because Jesus has obtained victory for me!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for giving me victory over death through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for this everlasting life that I now have. Draw me nearer to You as I put my trust in Your promises, that I may always give thanks for Your wonderful work of salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

WHERE IS HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST?

Isn't it true that help is the hardest to find when we most need it? Sometimes we find that no one is able to help because they don't truly understand what we are facing. Even if they were able to, their help would be limited. As much as we try, we cannot solve our own problems. The truth is that we are indeed helpless, and the people around us are helpless too. We are finite creatures and many things are beyond our control. But here is a great truth – we have a Saviour who is not helpless. Jesus Christ is your perfect help. You may ask, "Why is Jesus my perfect help?"

Jesus is our perfect help because He identifies with us. We often have the impression that God is far away in heaven and doesn't really know what we are going through. That is not true! He did not take on the nature of powerful angels, but the form of a weak and frail man. Do you think that nobody ever understands or knows how you feel? That's where you are mistaken – Jesus knows your weaknesses, He is able to help you because He too has gone through great suffering, trials and temptations. Jesus is not far away in heaven and distant from your cares and struggles. He helps you as one who has been in the same shoes as you. Jesus identifies with your struggles against sin and the trials that you are going through. That means that He knows exactly how to help you in ways that you may not even know yourself!

As a man Jesus not only identifies with us, He helps us by His constant prayers and pleas for us before God the Father. Even though we often fall into sin and even doubt His presence in our lives, He never fails to be our merciful and faithful High Priest. Jesus constantly prays for you and me that our faith will not fail in times of trials and temptations.

Are you going through a time of great trial or struggle against the temptation to sin? Help is readily available if you just look to Jesus and seek His help. He is ever ready to hear your prayers and provide the help that you most need. Look to Jesus today!

Thought: Only Jesus can provide the perfect help that I most need.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I confess that I am helpless to solve my own problems. Please help me in the difficult situations that I face, that I may learn to wait upon You for deliverance and to depend on You for help. Help me especially not to waver in my faith through these trying times. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NO GREATER MAN

The Jews counted Moses worthy of great honour because he was a great leader. He led Israel out of Egypt so they respected Moses and held him in the highest regard. Just like the Jews, we have people that we look up to, respect and admire in the Christian faith. Do you have such a person that you hold in high regard? Today we are reminded to consider Christ above man. Why are we to consider Christ?

Christ is the Apostle and High Priest of our faith. Christ is the only Apostle sent by God from heaven to earth. Unlike the angels who were God's heavenly messengers, Christ came as the Son of God, the Chosen Saviour. He not only brought the message of salvation, He preached and taught the people all of God's Word. There is no greater Apostle of our faith. No man, no matter how great and godly a preacher, can even come close to who Jesus is! He is not only the Apostle sent from God's right hand, He is also the High Priest who represents us.

As sinners, we have no way to approach God because He is holy and pure. We need someone to stand before God on our behalf. Christ is able to stand before God and represent us as our High Priest because He came as a man like you and me. But unlike us, Christ was the perfect man because He obeyed God perfectly, and did not sin. That's why only He qualifies as our perfect High Priest before God! All other men fall short of this perfect standard, including Moses, church leaders, pastors, and even the kindest people that you can think of.

Above all, Christ is worthy of more glory and honour than any man because He is the Creator. It is Christ who calls us to His work and enables us to serve him. No matter how much we look up to Christian leaders and teachers, they are just like us, all sinners saved by the wonderful grace of God! No man can boast of anything. Therefore, give to Him all the glory and guard yourself against placing any man in a higher position than Christ! There is so much confidence that we can have in our faith when we consider who Christ is!

Thought: There is nothing wrong with having godly examples to follow, but do not let them take the place of Christ in your heart.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Apostle and High Priest of my faith. He alone is worthy of all glory and honour. There is none like Him. May I daily learn to praise Him with my whole being. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SERVE FAITHFULLY AND HOLD FAST!

Have you wanted to give up on something that you once started with great passion? It could be a resolution to work hard at your studies or to help your family more at home. Even things that we have interest in could lose its attractiveness when we find that it takes up too much effort.

This same struggle gets even fiercer as we serve God. Many adults have stopped serving God because the many difficulties and cares of this world have drawn their attention away from the things of God. Others stopped serving God because they find time spent in the world far more attractive. One day, you too will be an adult and will have to make your own decisions. You will face the same temptations to stop serving God. Will you also give up?

Moses faced many trials throughout his years of ministry but he remained faithful. He had to deal with Israel's complaints, and when Israel disobeyed God, he had to plead with God not to destroy them. Even his family started to give him trouble by casting doubt on his leadership! We can learn from Moses' testimony of faithful service. No matter what happens, serve Christ our Master!

However, there will be moments when we are faced with tiredness and will be tempted to give up. What should we do when this happens? To hold fast – to cling on tightly with both hands and to never let go no matter what happens. What should we hold fast to? We must hold fast to the faith and hope that God gave. Do you believe in the salvation of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the hope of eternal life? Then hold fast! We have confidence in this promise that our service and labour for the Lord will be worth it all when we see Him in heaven. What a glorious and exciting thought that is! Dear reader, serve faithfully and hold fast to the end!

Can you think of one form of service at home that you can serve God faithfully in? I want to serve God faithfully by

Thought: It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus, our trials will seem so small when we see Christ.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the joy of salvation and hope of eternal life. Thank You for saving me from sin, and giving me the privilege to serve You. May I to serve You faithfully in all things, holding fast until I see Christ face to face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART

To harden your heart is to make sure nothing of God's Word can get in. No matter how well God's Word is taught, how a person may witness God's power, he still chooses not to believe. Although Israel was taught the Scriptures and witnessed many miracles, they still hardened their hearts against Him. They did not believe in God. Is this also a description of your spiritual state? How do you know if you have hardened your heart against God?

You know that you have hardened your heart, if you have heard His voice but still do not believe (verse 7). You could be attending church regularly and attend Sunday school. But with each passing week, the message of the gospel becomes so familiar that you take it for granted and do not actually take the step of faith to believe in Jesus. God's Word does not have a hold in your life and your heart is excited only by the physical things of this life and not what is spiritual and more precious. Will you continue to let the gospel pass you by and stubbornly harden your heart against God?

You know that you have hardened your heart, if you have seen his works but still do not believe (verse 9). The Jews witnessed first-hand the power and wondrous miracles of God, yet they still disobeyed. We see God's power in His creation. Only a fool would say there is no God because "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." There is no excuse to say we have never seen the works of God! When you see lives transformed, that is also the power of God working in the hearts of men! Who can change hearts and make a sinner repent of his sins? Only God can!

Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart. The result of the unbelieving Jews was that they did not enter into the Promised Land. Dear reader, if you have not believed in Jesus as your Saviour, what is causing you to delay? Desire what is spiritual and precious. The eternal future of your soul is at stake!

Thought: Is my heart hardened against God?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for your mercy and being so long suffering towards me. Please take away my stony heart and give me a heart of flesh that will desire to listen and believe in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

OVERCOMING UNBELIEF

We tend to think that only unbelievers have hardened hearts because they reject God and the Bible. But did you know that Christians also struggle with unbelief? Look at verse 12. The writer addresses his readers as:

b _____.

Are you a Christian who is struggling with unbelief? The writer warns us—Take Heed! What does it mean for Christians to have unbelief? It does not mean that they reject the gospel they once believed in, but rather that their belief in God has grown weaker. Verse 12 describes it as:

d _____ from the living God.

What causes Christians to depart from the living God?

The first reason is because we do not know God and His ways well enough (v10). Israel experienced God's powerful work of delivering them from slavery in Egypt. Yet when they went through moments of adversity in the wilderness, Israel doubted God and His ways. Isn't this so much like us too? The seeds of unbelief and doubt are sown in our hearts! To stop these seeds of unbelief from growing, pause and ask yourself – Do I really know God and His ways? If we don't, it's because we have not made the effort to learn more about Him. It's no wonder we doubt! In order to overcome unbelief, we need to start learning more about God and His ways through His Word.

The second reason why we doubt God is because of the deceitfulness of sin (v13). Sin is so subtle. It first starts to deceive us through our thoughts and feelings. Have you caught yourself thinking about something that you know is sinful, but you tell yourself that you can't help it? Maybe you give the excuse that no one gets hurt, it feels right, and everyone else is doing it too. Soon you grow comfortable with the idea of sinning against God. Be careful!

Thought: The key to overcoming unbelief is to know God more and to love to fellowship with His people.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I believe in You as my Creator, and Jesus as my Saviour. Help me to overcome my unbelief and strengthen my faith in You. As I seek You in my quiet time, please draw me closer to Yourself. In Jesus' name, Amen.

REST FOR THE LABOURER

Rest is something that we all look forward to after a hard day's work. There always seems to be so much to do but so little time. Whatever time we can have to relax is so precious! The hardworking labourer appreciates this the most! All of us understand how important physical rest is at the end of a busy day. But is this the only type of rest that we should look forward to? Today we learn about another type of rest. It is not a physical rest but one that is to come. What is this future rest about?

This is a rest that is only for the people of God (v9). Only Christians are able to enter into this rest because they are the ones actively serving Him. There are many who profess to be Christians, but have never put their hands to do God's work. If this is how you view your salvation, it is time to check and ask yourself if you are really a child of God. Those who have tasted the mercies of God in salvation, will sincerely desire to live for Him and serve Him out of deep gratitude. If you belong to God, you can be very sure and confident that there is a sweet and blessed rest that remains for you! The question is, do you belong to God?

How long will this rest last? While physical rest is short-lived, this future rest is permanent and eternal. One day all the work that the Christian does on this earth will cease (v10). It will simply come to a halt, never to be repeated again. It is a full-stop! Just as God rested after His work of creation, so too the Christian will rest from his work of service on this earth. What does this mean for us? As long as we have breath and life, we ought to seize every moment to labour for the Lord (v11). Wherever God has placed you, live for Him and shine brightly as His witness!

But is this rest so important? What if we don't enter into it? Dear reader, do not take this lightly! The Christian who walks the path of faith and obedience on earth, will one day enjoy the heavenly rest that God has promised. However, the end of those who wilfully choose the path of unbelief is not heaven but hell. Therefore, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. As you faithfully and diligently serve the Lord every day of your life, you will grow stronger in faith and in confidence of the blessed heavenly rest to come!

Thought: Am I a hardworking Christian, or an idle one?

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for saving me from sin, and giving me the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus. May every day of my life be one of diligent and faithful service, until I reach that blessed heavenly rest. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD'S WORD

All of us are imperfect and continue to need God. Many look for help to overcome an addiction, deal with their troubles, or to just to improve themselves, perhaps through self-help books. But all books written by man fall short, because every human needs help!

Only the Bible can reveal our heart's problems and tell us the truth, because the author is not another helpless man, but God Himself. The Word of God is alive and powerful!

The Word of God is quick. It is able to respond to every situation we face. As we grow, we find that the Bible is like a deep mine with so many more treasures to uncover. We may have read the same verses when younger, but when we read it again, God brings fresh meaning to it and we learn something new. No other book is like that!

The Word of God is alive. Not only is it alive, it has the power to change live. The power of the gospel of Christ is able to make sinners truly repent and believe in the Lord. For example, did you know that many former drug addicts have had their lives changed by God? They may have tried all sorts of ways to quit, but nothing is able to fully change them, other than the Word of God. Their conscience is awakened, and they are grateful for the great love and forgiveness of Christ. The Word of God has the power to change a man's heart and transform his life!

The Bible is also sharper than any two-edged sword. The Bible is sharp, not in the same sense of sharpness as a knife in the kitchen in cutting physical objects, but in revealing our deepest thoughts and motives. Every selfish thought and sinful act is laid bare before God. He sees everything that goes on in your thought-life. You cannot hide anything from Him! God exposes our sins and deals with our hypocrisy through His Word. God's Word is so sharp that it can be very painful! But it is a purifying process that makes us better Christians.

How important is the Bible in your life? Don't treat it as though it was an ordinary book, and neglect to read and reflect on it. It is the very Word of the living God. If we were to wake up to the knowledge of this fact, how vastly different our lives would be! The Word of God demands a response. What is yours?

Thought: How I need God's Word in my life!

Prayer: Father in heaven, forgive me when I have taken Your Word lightly. Renew my desire to read Your Word. And please grant me a humble and quiet heart to understand all that You are teaching me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRAYER, WHAT A PRIVILEGE!

Besides the Bible, we have another privilege to help us grow in our spiritual walk—prayer. God wants us to approach Him boldly in prayer all the time. He desires His children to speak to Him freely, openly and frequently without fear. As a child of God, what is hindering you from speaking to God freely and praying to Him boldly?

We can never be good enough to earn a right relationship with God. Rather it is who Jesus is and what He has done, that makes it possible for you to pray. Jesus represents us before God. With Jesus representing you, God no longer holds your sin against you. God now sees the righteousness of Jesus when He sees you. Jesus' perfect obedience as a man and His death on the cross makes Him our perfect representative before God. As verse 14 tells us, He is "passed into the heavens". Isn't that a great assurance? We can pray with boldness because our confidence in prayer is based solely on Jesus as our Risen Saviour.

Boldness in prayer also comes with knowing that Jesus empathizes with us. To empathize is to be able to feel with and totally understand. Jesus is our empathizing Saviour because He was tempted in all points as we are yet without sin (verse 15). He knows our feeble frame and every weakness we have. He is not an aloof or cold-hearted Saviour. Jesus feels with us because He too experienced it as a man. The significant difference is that unlike us, Jesus was without sin. Therefore He is the only one qualified to help us overcome our trials and temptations. We should not be afraid to pour out all our cares and worries in prayer. There is nothing too small that we cannot pray about, and nothing too big that He cannot help us with. We can pray boldly and without fear, for we have an empathizing Saviour.

Prayer is running to God's throne of grace. He invites all His children to meet Him there. And we may pray anywhere, anytime! God's throne of grace is always available! Won't you take advantage of this privilege, and run to God in prayer?

Thought: Thank God for Jesus!

Prayer: Father in heaven, Thank You for Your throne of grace that is always available to me. Thank You for Jesus and that because of Him, I can run to You in prayer. Remove all hindrances to prayer and help me not to waver in faith, but to always come boldly to Your throne of grace. In His precious name, Amen.

NOW THAT I AM SAVED, WHAT'S NEXT?

In the verses before this, the writer of Hebrews describes to us a group of people who once called themselves Christians, but have now fallen away. They heard the gospel preached to them, yet they turned away from God and rejected Christ. We call ourselves Christians too. But what makes us different from those who have fallen away? The writer of Hebrews tells us that better things are expected, things that accompany salvation. What are these better things that accompany salvation?

These are the Christian's work and labour of love for the Lord. All that the Christian puts his hands to, is now his form of service for the Lord. Wherever God puts him, he must be aware that everything he does now has a spiritual significance.

How does the Christian serve or minister to others? In order to minister to others, we have to start by knowing what their needs are. To do this, the Christian must first build friendships with those around him so that he is better able to serve their physical and spiritual needs.

Get to know those around you, ask them for their prayer requests, pray for them, and offer your help if you are able to. As you serve others, you will in turn be blessed. This labour of love that accompanies your salvation is sure evidence of your faith and hope in God. Have you been selfish and put yourself before friends and family? Are you willing to help someone who may be weak in schoolwork or to volunteer to help parents at home? Are you willing to give up your favorite chicken drumstick should someone else prefer it?

Now that you are saved, what's next? It is to serve the Lord until you see Him face to face. Serving God is not just for pastors and leaders in mission trips and the like. Serving God is to live faithfully everyday, in whatever place God places you in.

However, bear in mind that this is only for Christians who are truly serving God. If you have no desire to serve, you need to ask yourself if your faith in Christ is real. Ask the Lord to turn your heart away from sin, so that you may live a renewed life of purpose and service for Him.

Thought: I am saved to serve.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for Your gift of salvation. Now that I am saved, I desire and long to serve You with my life. Please help me to do my best for You and to be a blessing to those you have put in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

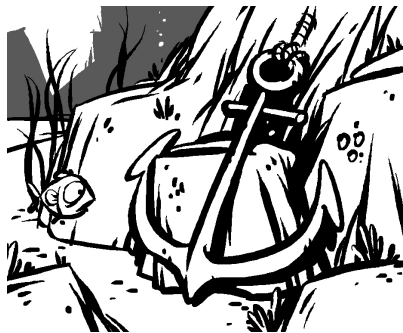
THE ANCHOR OF YOUR SOUL

All ships have anchors. If a ship is anchored securely to a rock, it is safe and able to withstand the rough weather that may come. In the same way, man without hope in the true God is like a ship without an anchor. The storms of life easily sweep him away, and cause him to be lost and confused. A person who has no hope will never have peace because he has nothing to hold on to. What is this hope that is described as the anchor of our souls?

It is the hope that after all the labour and struggles of this life, we will enter into the heaven. The way to eternal life in heaven has been opened for us by Jesus! With this hope, no matter what happens, we need not fear because we know that the storms of life will pass. We can look forward to an eternity in heaven. Those who do not have this heavenly hope have no peace. They have nothing to hold on to when trials come. Whether it is sicknesses, failures, or problems in the family, they are easily troubled and defeated.

The anchor of our souls is steadfast and sure, because it clings onto God who is our solid rock. Our hope is not based on the things of this earth, which may change at any time. It is based on the unchanging promises of God. He tells us that we can trust Him because He swears by two greater things – His name and His Word. Man can break his promises and take his vows lightly. But God is not like that. It is impossible for Him to lie! By swearing upon Himself and His Word, there is no greater assurance of His promises and hope of eternal life.

What are your hopes in life? Is it to study hard so that you can so that you can earn lots of money? Or is it that you will always be strong and healthy? These are earthly expectations that are not sure and steadfast! It is like an anchor that is trying to cling onto loose sand that will never hold fast. We need to anchor our hope in God alone!



Thought: The anchor of my soul is the blessed hope of heaven.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray that I may experience Your peace and consolation in times of difficulties. Help me not to put my hope in the things of this life but to anchor my hope on Your unchanging promises. In Jesus' name, Amen.

JESUS NEVER STOPS PRAYING FOR YOU!

There were many priests who served Israel – approaching God on Israel’s behalf by carrying out the sacrificial system of worship. The priests prayed for the people and helped them to offer sacrifices to God. Without them, Israel would not be able to communicate with God and worship Him. In other words, the spiritual lives of Israel depended greatly on the priests. Their role and duty was very important to keep the people close to God! But as mere men, these priests would die one day and their service on behalf of the people would also end. How about us today? As people of God, do we have to go through any man to approach Him?

Like Israel, we need to approach God through someone. However, it is not through any human being; we can only go to God through Jesus Christ. What a great comfort that Jesus is greater than all other priests! Many things in life change. We change and the people around us change. The circumstances that we are in will never stay the same for too long. But Jesus Christ continues to be the same through ages past and His priesthood is unchangeable.

What does that mean for you and me?

It means that His office of priesthood continues even now in heaven! As our Great High Priest, what is He doing for you and me? Jesus “ever liveth to make intercession” for us! Whereas, the priests of old could only intercede for Israel for a short time, Jesus continues to pray for us. In times where our faith is weak, Jesus prays for us that our faith will not fail. When we suffer trials and persecution for His sake, He prays that we may continue to stand fast and not fall away. Where there may be disunity among Christians, Jesus prays that His truth and love will unite us so that the world may see Him manifest. Whatever situation you are in, Jesus knows and tenderly prays for you by name. He knows you best, and so He is the best person who knows how to pray for your needs, that your faith may be strengthened. Jesus never stops praying for you.

Jesus will never tire or waver in praying for us. As you have trusted in Him for salvation, continue to trust in Him for tomorrow!

Thought: Wow – Jesus never stops praying for me!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ who is my Great High Priest. Thank You for showing me that He never stops praying for me. May I learn to trust in Him more for all my needs in life. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

THE WORK OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE

Although I grew up in church, I thought that in order to be saved, I had to be do good works, such as attending church activities and going for Sunday school classes. Have you thought this way too? Good works are the result of a person's salvation and not the means to earn it. It is not our works but God's work in us that brings us to salvation.

How does God start His work in our lives? Just as He chose Israel to be His people in the Old Testament, He starts His work in us by choosing us to be His children. John 15:16 tells us, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you..." Thank God that He did not leave us in our sins but chose us to be His children.

God continues to work in our lives because He has made a covenant or agreement with us. It is through Jesus Christ alone that we can enter into this covenant with God. But unlike those that are made between men, God's covenant with us can never be broken. He promises that He will cause us to persevere in faith till the very end. There may be times when we stumble, but He remains faithful to bring us back to Himself.

How does God cause us to continue walking in faith? He does this by putting His laws into our hearts and minds. Many may read the Bible but it never convicts their hearts or persuades their minds. It is an academic exercise or duty to them and there is no real thirst and hunger after God's truth. The conviction of the heart and mind is of God! It is all His work to illumine our minds and open our hearts. There is nothing for us to boast of! Even when your teachers teach you God's Word, it is still His work to help you understand and obey it. Whether you are young or old, God will cause you to know Him!

If you are doing your best to be good and obedient, ask yourself if you have first been convicted by God's work of salvation. Do you have a thirst and hunger to know Him more? If you are doing all these things in order to earn your salvation, you are greatly mistaken. Only by believing in Jesus sincerely from your heart, and repenting from all your sins, is there true salvation. It is only then that God will approve of your good works!

Thought: God alone is the Author and Finisher of my faith!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for choosing me to be Your child and for Your promise that You will continue to work all things out for my good. Help me to persevere in faith and grant me a greater desire to know You more. In Jesus' name, Amen.

POWER IN THE BLOOD!

Some people believe that they can atone or pay for their sins by inflicting pain on themselves. They use sharp objects to cut their flesh, hoping God will accept their sacrifice of pain. Man has the idea that shedding of blood can make payment for sins they committed. However, he fails to realise that there is no power in his blood. Only the blood of Jesus has the power to save, for the purity and holiness of God demands the sinless blood of a perfect sacrifice.

The nation of Israel made atonement for their sins by sacrificing animals such as bulls and goats. These animals were sinless, and therefore their blood was accepted by God. The person who brought the animal had to ensure that the animal had no physical defects. To make atonement for his sins, the person would press his hands hard on the animal's head, kill it, and the priest would sprinkle its blood around the altar. This signified that the animal had died on the person's behalf and he was now cleansed from his sins. However, the blood of bulls and goats only provided an outward and temporary cleansing. Each time a person sinned, these sacrifices had to be offered again. The blood of bulls and goats was sufficient only for a moment and not a perfect sacrifice!

Our perfect sacrifice is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If the blood of animals could cleanse us from our sins, how much more the blood of Christ! His blood has power to bring sinners to God because He was without sin and perfect in obedience towards God. He died a terrible and painful death, so that by His blood, He could make payment for the sins that you and I committed. How great is His love for us!

There is no power in man's blood, neither is the blood of animals able to take away all our sins. Only the blood of Christ has the power to cleanse us from inside out and to transform our lives. When you believe in Him as your Saviour, your sins are forgiven, and your life is changed to serve the living God. Do you believe that the blood of Jesus has power to cleanse you from your sins?

Thought: What can wash away my sins? Only the blood of Jesus!

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the blood of Jesus that cleanses me from all my sins. Forgive me when I have taken my salvation for granted because it cost Jesus a high price. May I ever serve You out of a thankful heart. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LET'S TALK ABOUT DEATH

Nobody likes to be reminded that one day their lives will end. We can avoid thinking and talking about death, but it does not change the fact that we will still die one day. Death has no respect for anyone. You may be young or old, rich or poor, nevertheless death can come knocking on your door at any time.

Death is one appointment that we will never be late for. God has already decided the date, time and place where we will die. Just as we do not have control over when we are born, we have no control over when we will die. Our times are in the hands of God. Many think that they can prolong their days on earth by eating and exercising well. While this may help to keep their bodies fit, it has no influence over the appointment of their death. Our days are numbered. When it is our appointed time to die, nothing can stop it from happening. You may ask, what happens after that?

After death comes judgment. God will judge every person and hold him accountable for his life on earth. If you think that standing before your parents, teacher or school principal to answer for some misdeeds is scary, that is nothing compared to what it will be like standing before a holy and powerful God! God sees through us and we cannot hide away from His eyes. Our lives will be as an open book before Him, and He will call us to answer for how we have lived. What are the consequences of His judgment? There is only one way that we ought to go because of our sins. We deserve to pay the penalty of our sins in hell. If God sent all mankind there, He would still be righteous, just and good. But the amazing thing is that He provided a way of escape!

This only way of escape from eternal death, is salvation in Christ. He bore the sins of many on the cross and died in our place. What a heavy burden that must have been for Him! It was for the joy of our salvation that made Jesus endure the cross and despise the shame of a cruel death. He rose from the grave and now lives at God's right hand in heaven! Jesus will appear again one day. For all who believed in Him and longed for His return, it will be a joyous occasion. But for those who disregarded God and His offer of salvation in Christ, they will need to pay for their own sins in hell. When we face up to the reality of death and its consequences, we will know how much we need Christ as our Saviour.

Thought: If I were to die tonight, how would God judge me?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I acknowledge that my times are in Your hands and that all my days are numbered. Therefore, help me not to waste my life away in sin but to live with eternity's perspective in view. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

We may have believed in Jesus and accepted Him as our personal Saviour, but there are still times when we doubt our salvation. This lack of assurance may cause us to pray to accept Jesus as Saviour again and again. It is a common struggle that is not without hope! We can have full assurance of salvation when we shift our focus to Christ and away from ourselves. Doubts about our salvation often arise when we feel that we are not good enough and continue to struggle with the same habitual sins. During these low moments, it is by remembering who Christ is and what He has done to save us that will set our minds and hearts at peace again.

Christians, remember the reason for your salvation! It is by the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, and His body broken for us, that you can enter into a relationship with God. Jesus is the only way to God. Salvation is not determined by whether we 'feel' we are saved or not! Once saved, always saved. There is nothing that can undo God's work of salvation that He has started in our lives. Christ has opened the way to God. We can boldly enter into God's presence because we are now of the same house of God.

The encouragement is for us to draw near in full assurance of faith. It is as though God knows that we are not near enough to Him and wants us to go nearer still. He beckons us as a loving Heavenly Father towards His children to come! We are still afar off because we hinder ourselves from drawing nearer to Him. What is hindering you from drawing nearer to God? Is it the guilt of sin, or a lack of faith in the invisible God? Christians, let us draw nearer to God. Your very desire to be saved is evidence that your heart has been purged from an evil conscience and the Word of God has cleansed you. Hold fast to your faith in God! Although we may not be able to see the air, we know it's there because we continue to breathe and live. In the same way, we cannot see God because He is invisible, but we know that He is there because we see His power in creation and at work in the lives of faithful Christians. We cannot depend on our five senses for faith and truth!

Be assured of your faith in God!

Thought: Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ when I put my faith in Him.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the full assurance that nothing can separate me from Your love in Christ Jesus. Draw me nearer to Yourself every day that I may experience Your power at work in my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Many churches have youth groups that are fun and exciting. In order to encourage their youth to bond and to get to know each other, they organise outings and plan games that everyone will enjoy. The time spent in studying God's Word is sometimes kept short so that youths do not find it boring. You would hardly hear any preaching on sin, hell, repentance and holy living. While there is nothing wrong with organising outings for everyone to bond, is this the true purpose that God intended for Christian fellowship?

Have you asked yourself for what reasons are you going to church, attending fellowship group meetings and camps? There is nothing wrong with fun. But God's purpose for Christian fellowship is much deeper. Christian fellowship must be based on our faith in Him. In verse 23, we are called to hold fast to the profession of our faith. Christians are to cling on and to never let go of their faith in God. Whatever happens in life, God is faithful and His promises are true and certain. We must hold fast to this truth! Only Christians will understand about faith in God, and the need to cling onto Him.

To help us to hold fast to God, it is needful for us to hold fast to God together. Therefore, we are told in verse 24, to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works". We ought to get to know each other beyond our superficial common interests, and to help one another through our needs. We are also to provoke each other to love and good works - not that we annoy friends to get a reaction out of them. To provoke is to challenge each other to be a better Christian, so that our lives may show more of God's love in our relationships with those around us.

The only way we can do this is to continue to meet and have fellowship around God's Word. God's purpose for fellowship must always be centred around His Word. We must have a close walk with God, to enable us to share and encourage each other with His Word. As verse 25 tells us, don't give up on having Christian fellowship. We must help each other to hold fast because Jesus is coming again!

Thought: True Christian fellowship is God-centred and not man-centred.

Prayer: Father in heaven, thank You for the fellowship that I can share with other Christians. Help me to be a blessing to them and that our fellowship may be pleasing in Your sight. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ARE YOU TRULY SAVED?

We talked about church groups in yesterday's reading, and learnt that we are to encourage each other as Christians. What about children or adults who go to church and other Christian gatherings, but seem to continue to live their old ways of life as if they were non-Christians?

Today's bible verses teach us about a group of people who appear to be Christians on the outside, but inside they sin on purpose. This is despite learning about the truth of God. What does verse 26 say? There "remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." It is bad news! This means that there is no way any sacrifice can be of help to such people, because they do not want to repent or change. What can these people expect? If these people remain unwilling to change and repent, there can only be one outcome – to spend eternity in hell!

The other lesson is that not all who go to church are Christians. Think of it this way – students like you go to school. But not all who go to your school are students. Mum may fetch you from school. The bus-driver has to go to school to fetch the children. But are your mum and the bus-driver students? No!

Dear child, you may have been to church for some time, especially if your parents are Christians. However, you are NOT a Christian, unless you repent of your sins, and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour. Only then will you be saved and be a Christian!

And if you are saved, you will see a change in your life. There would be changes, even if these changes are slow. You would be more kind to those around you. You would not be as selfish. You would be interested to read the bible and to do your Quiet Time, by reading this Junior RPG or other material.

As a child, you would feel hungry and thirsty if you go without food or water for some time. That is natural – all living human beings would feel that way. In the same way, someone who is spiritually alive, someone who is a child of God, would feel spiritual hunger and thirst. He would love to read the bible, and pray to the Lord. Do you?

Thought: Am I saved?

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray for forgiveness of my sins and ask that You would be merciful. If I am not sure of my salvation, I pray that I would be today, and ask Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour. In His powerful name, Amen.

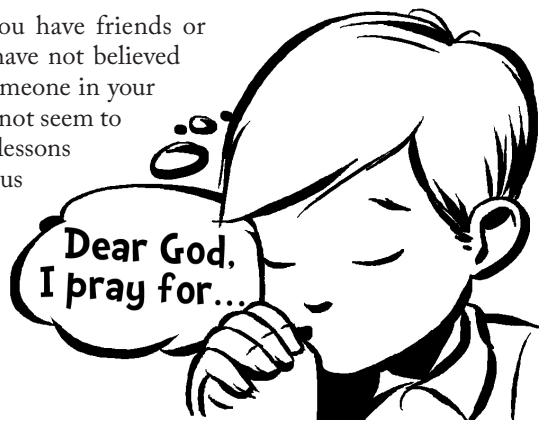
FEAR GOD!

If you were asked to draw a picture of God, what would it be? Some of you may draw God as kind and compassionate, and that is accurate – God is a kind, compassionate and loving heavenly Father. Others may draw God creating the world and the heavens. That also is correct as we know from the first few chapters of Genesis that God created the heavens and earth, and all living things. Perhaps others may draw God as love, for often people think of God as a God of love. That is true for God so loved the world that He gave us His only begotten Son – our Lord Jesus Christ.

Read the text for today again. How do you think we could draw God to reflect this verse? We usually do not think of “fearing God”. However, that is a very necessary aspect of our relationship with God. He is not just kind and compassionate; He is not just the almighty Creator; He is not just a God of love; He is a God we must all fear. And why do we need to fear Him? Because we must remember He has the power to punish man and He does punish unrepentant man with the worst penalty of all – hell.

That is the idea behind the verse – it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of God.

Dear child, do you have friends or family members who have not believed in Jesus? Or is there someone in your JW class who just does not seem to be interested in Bible lessons and refuses to accept Jesus as Lord? Pray for them.



Thought: May I pray for salvation for my loved ones and friends.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray for the salvation of my family members and friends. I pray that You will use me to be a good example so that they can see a changed life in me, and also want to be a Christian. In Jesus' powerful name, Amen.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Have you seen God? None of us have seen Him, and yet we believe in Him – that is faith. And that is how verse one of our text defines faith – “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The idea is – although we do not see God, we place our hope and trust in Him. That is faith.

Do we believe in things we do not see? Of course, all of us do. We do not see air, but we know there is air. We do not see “sounds” but hear them. You have not met your grandfather’s grandfather, but you know there was such a man! Why? Because the results of your grandfather’s grandfather is seen in him having descendants, one of whom is you! In perhaps the same way, we see the results of God’s goodness and kindness, and so we know that He exists.



More specifically, verse 3 of our text tells us to consider the creation of the world. Before God created the heavens and the earth, what we now see, feel, and sense around us did not exist. God created everything in 6 days through the amazing power of His spoken word. That is so remarkable and this ability to create out of nothing belongs only to God! As Christians, it is so important to have faith in God. One way to show we have faith in God is to have faith in His Word – the Bible. If we say we have faith in the Bible – we are expected to be faithful to read the Bible everyday so that we may know more of God and more of what He wants us to do.

Let us go back to the text and read verse 2 – For by it the elders obtained a good report. What does this mean? Well, it just reminds us that the elders, those great men of the faith that we read about in the Bible, were commended for having faith in God. And we are to follow their good example in having faith in God!

Thought: May I have faith!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You so much for creating the world! I pray for more faith in You and that I'd be able to read the Bible more regularly so that I'd know more about You! In Jesus' wonderful name, Amen.

FAITH IS ACTION!

Debbie's parents are active church members and love the Lord dearly. Since she was young, they would bring her along to church. Now 11 years old, Debbie claims to have faith in Jesus, and told her parents she is a Christian because she once said the prayer of salvation, asking Jesus to come into her life to be her Saviour and Lord. However, her parents are sad.

Why? Because when they observe Debbie, they know that something is wrong. What she says does not square with her actions. Although Debbie claims to be a Christian, her attitude, behavior, and thinking are not Christian. Debbie remains proud and selfish. She is rude to her parents, unkind to her brother, disrespectful to her grandparents. She does well in school and likes to boast about it to others. What is wrong with Debbie? In all likelihood, Debbie is not a Christian. She does not have real faith in God. She may think she is saved, but she is not.

Why? Because, as today's text teaches, real faith will be seen in what we do. Abraham was a man of faith, and we see that in what he did. Was Abraham a perfect man? No. When we become Christians, do we become perfect? No. All Christians continue to sin, but all Christians should sin less and less. They should be growing in the knowledge of God's Word, and also growing in being a better person as taught in the Bible

Dear child, how about you? Are you saved? If so, there must be differences in your life. You should be kinder, more patient, and more willing to share. At the same time, you would be less proud, and not wanting to take revenge. There are just so many areas of our lives we can improve on.

To be a Christian is not an easy thing because our old self in us still demands that we put ourselves before others. We still get angry easily and we want our way done. Dear child, if you have faith in God, your life must be changed for the better.

Thought: May I have faith that is seen in my action!

Prayer: Father in heaven, I pray for myself – that I'd really change for the better as I want to be the Christian You want me to be. And I pray that You can use me to be a good example so that others can see a changed life in me. In Jesus' powerful name, Amen.

ONLY JESUS; ALWAYS JESUS!

Yesterday we talked about faith seen in our actions. Today, we read a phrase in verse 1 - Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. What does that mean? That means we can learn from the great men of faith in the Bible, how they overcame very difficult circumstances with faith in action. These are the many people whose stories we may already be familiar with, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Then, you may see some other Christians around you who may be good examples of the faith. These could be your pastor, your parent, or some missionary you may have read about. All of them show us how we may follow their good example. However, remember none of these people are perfect. While we may learn from certain aspects of their life, they have their personal failings too. Who, then, may we see as a perfect example of faith? Verse 2 gives the answer: Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith!

What does it mean when the bible says “Jesus is the author of our faith”? That means Jesus, who is God, is the one who creates and starts our faith. To have saving faith in Jesus is a gift from God. It was God who knew we would fall into sin, and it was God who planned the perfect way of salvation for us – through the death and resurrection of Jesus. That selfless sacrifice bought and brought us salvation – that is why we say that Jesus is the author of our faith.

And what about Jesus being the “finisher of our faith”? It means that once a person truly believes in Jesus and becomes a Christian, God will sustain his faith. There will be many times when a Christian is tested, tempted, and tried. He may have a lot of tough times and difficulties in life. He would not be perfect; he would continue to sin. But if he is really a believer and has faith in God, this true faith cannot be lost, taken away or given away. This gives us great comfort – Christ has created our faith and He will watch over it, care for it, and sustain it.

Thought: Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith!

Prayer: Father in heaven, I thank You that in Jesus, my salvation is sure and complete. I know I have to continue to slip along the way and sin, but heavenly Father, please teach me to rely more on You so that I may be a strong Christian. In His precious name I pray, Amen.

LOOKING FORWARD TO PUNISHMENT?

Mark was a big boy for his age. At 12, he looked a few years older. At times, he would be unkind to other children. One day, his parents were told that he pushed a girl in his class, causing that girl to fall and suffer a cut on her lip. When his parents confronted Mark, Mark told them he was angry as that girl insulted him. Giving him the last chance, Mark's dad told him, "Mark, even if you are angry for the right reason, this is not what you should do. May could have been joking with you and that is no way to treat a classmate. Daddy loves you. But should you do that again one more time, daddy would have to punish you. I'll have to discipline you, and I'll throw away all your toys. All."

3 months later, Mark again pushed someone and his dad did what he promised. He punished Mark by disciplining him and throwing away all his toys. Do you think Mark likes to be punished? Do you think he ought to be punished? Do you think his dad liked to throw away the toys?

When was the last time mum or dad punished you? Can you remember what you did or did not do, that made them punish you? And in what form were you punished? We all get punished by our earthly parents. And they do that as they love us. They do that as they are our parents. Your parents would not be disciplining a boy or girl who is an absolute stranger, would they?

In the same way, God punishes us because we are His children, and He loves us. When we sin, there must be punishment. We must know we cannot continue sinning and that is why He needs to remind us.

Thought: May I accept punishment from God as love from a Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I want to thank You so much for today's lesson. You have the right to punish me when I disobey You. I pray that I'd remember this lesson well, and try to please You so that in whatever I think, or say, or do, You may be happy! I know that is very difficult so Abba Father, please help me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

BE AT PEACE WITH ALL...

Do your parents quarrel? How about your friends? Have you ever quarreled with anyone? People quarrel for various reasons. And God knows! That is why today's lesson is such a practical one: how to be at peace with others.

One of the ways we live out our faith as followers of Jesus is to be a peacemaker, or to work for peace. Peacemaking can come in many ways in different settings. You could be a peacemaker at home, in school, or at the playground. Jesus was the ultimate peacemaker, for He came to bring peace between sinful man and a righteous God who cannot stand sin. And what did Jesus do to bring about peace? He died for you and me as the perfect sacrifice so that the debt of sin may be paid, and the souls of man may be redeemed. Because of Jesus, we can have peace with God.

When we become peacemakers, we make peace as long as there is no sin or wrong involved. Let's assume you have a classmate called Kok Leong who is unhappy with your friend because your friend does not want to do the wrong thing Kok Leong wants him to. There is no need to make peace with Kok Leong. If he wants to make your friend sin, there is no need to make peace. That is one important aspect of peacemaking.

Peacemaking is often required in solving problems that arise. There is sometimes no perfect solution to problems but for all involved to be humble and try to give in to each other. However, that is not easy even for Christians. All of us still have the sinful self in us and this sinful self is always trying to make us selfish, prideful, quarrelsome, and impatient. The list goes on!

Dear child, are you a peacemaker? Are you at peace with others? Pray for God's strength to help you as you try to live the life God wants you to – be a peacemaker!

Thought: May I be at peace with others

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You so much for creating the world! I pray for more faith in You and that I'd be able to read the Bible more regularly so that I can know more about You! In Jesus' wonderful name, Amen.

BE CONTENTED AND HAPPY!

Sally is from a wealthy family. Every year, she goes on vacation to interesting destinations. She lives in a nice house and her father owns a big car. But she is an unhappy child. Looking at Su Fen, her classmate makes her sad. Why is that so? Because Su Fen comes from an even wealthier family. Her family owns many properties and she goes around in a chauffeur-driven car. It is not that Su Fen was boasting; she is a nice quiet girl. It is just that Sally is jealous when she sees Su Fen.

On the other hand, meet Mike. Mike is a contented boy. Although he comes from a modest family, where his mum is a home-maker and dad works as a technician in a small company, theirs is a happy family. He knows they are not privileged; and the furthest they can go for a rare holiday is Penang in Malaysia. But that does not matter to Mike. He is a Christian and knows the verses in Hebrews 13:5 and 6. What are these verses? They are the verses in our text today!

Precious child, we in Singapore live in a place where many are caught up looking at material things such as cars and houses. In a wealthy country like Singapore, there are many unhappy people. Why? Because people compare and get discontented. In today's text, we learn that our "conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have." The word "conversation" is not to be understood in the way we usually use it to refer to a discussion or talk. Instead, this word should be understood to be how we live out our lives. So the way to read this verse is "to let our life to be without covetousness". To covet is to desire for something that doesn't belong to us. We are not to covet, for we are told way back in the book of Exodus that to covet is a sin. Let us be contented with whatever God gives to us, instead of coveting and comparing. Do not take pleasure or pride in the things that you have. Instead, take pleasure with the things of God and in your relationships with family and friends.

Thought: May I be a contented child!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is such an important lesson to never covet but to be contented and to thank You for the much You have already given me! Help me instead to find pleasure in being with You, reading Your Word, and being with family and friends. In Jesus' wonderful name, Amen.

JESUS IS ALWAYS THE SAME

What are the 4 seasons? They are spring, summer, autumn, and lastly, winter. Most of the time, each season lasts about 3 months. Countries very far north or south of the Equator would have longer winters and shorter summers; countries nearer the Equator have shorter winters and longer summers. Countries like Singapore, which is almost exactly on the Equator, have summer all year long.

If we were to live in a country where there are 4 seasons, you will find that you have to wear very different clothing for the different seasons. A spring season outfit could include a rain coat, boots, an umbrella, a hat or gardening clothes. A summer outfit could include sunglasses, a hat, flip flops, a t-shirt, and shorts. This is what we are used to in Singapore. An autumn outfit could include overalls, a jacket or pullover. A winter outfit would probably include a heavy winter jacket, boots, scarf, mittens, and wool hat. Seasons change.

People change too. Have some fun and ask mummy for old photos of her and your dad when they were courting – that is before they were married. They were a lot younger then, and you may be able to spot big differences!

We change. You are growing up, and one day you'd be an adult. Then age will catch up and you'd be as old as mummy and daddy. Eventually, you could be as old as your grandparents! And when we age, we change. Our bodies become weaker and we fall sick more easily.

Everything changes. Except Jesus, for He is the same yesterday, today and forever! Now what does that mean to us? This means that Jesus will always be true and kind and available for us. This is because Jesus is God and God does not change. He does not age, for God is timeless. He does not gain more knowledge, for God is omniscient – meaning He knows all things.

Isn't it wonderful to have an all-powerful and all-knowing Lord in Jesus who at the same time is always true and kind and available to us? Go to Him today, and every day!

Thought: Jesus never changes!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You so much that Jesus never changes. It is so comforting for me as I can always seek His help and grace. Thank You also that He always understands my problems and needs, as He was a man when He walked on earth in Israel. In Jesus' magnificent name, Amen.

OBEY AND RESPECT YOUR ELDERS!

16-year old Linda adores a TV actress and cannot miss any of her shows. She reads a lot about this actress, noting carefully her dressing, her likes and dislikes, mimicking the way she talks and smiles. Slowly, Linda was influenced to wear clothing of certain types and brands, style her hair in a particular manner, and pick up hobbies that she thinks the movie star would like. What is happening here? Linda, although she does not know this TV actress personally, is trying to be like her. In reality, Linda obeys and respects the actress, as she tries to ape what this person does and value what the actress thinks in terms of dressing and way of life.

Do you know of anyone like that? Would you grow up to be like that? The Bible teaches that we are to obey those that have the rule over us – meaning our elders who teach and guide us in spiritual things. We are to follow them; not some TV actor. Many young people, instead of respecting and obeying elders, do not respect their elders. To some of these young people, elders are “not cool”.

Who are these “elders”? Those who lead us spiritually: your pastor, JW teacher, parent or another teacher of the Bible. We are to follow them for they can guide and teach us the ways of God. These elders are responsible for your spiritual life and they are to give an account to God on how they have guided you. So be a good student and follower – obey and respect them!

Imagine you are very good in playing the piano. And you have been requested to teach someone younger – let us call him Jack – how to play the piano. However, despite your kind words and patient teaching, Jack does not want to follow you. How would you feel?

May I not be like the 16-year old Linda or the young Jack!

Thought: Obey and respect your Elders!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that I am to be humble and learn from those who can guide me spiritually. I definitely need more help as I am still weak and know so little of your teachings and doctrines. In Jesus’ precious name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS TO BE PERFECT?

The word “perfect” is perhaps overused. Cake shops may advertise that their cakes are “perfect”. After a musician plays a piece of music, some may encourage him and say his performance was “perfect”. Or a watch company may try to sell their latest model and claim it is “perfect” in symmetry and beauty.

In today’s text, the word perfect is used. Dear child, read the 2 verses again and see that we are not perfect in ourselves but that the “God of peace” may make us perfect. This does not mean we will never make mistakes, for that is impossible since all of us, even the most senior Christian, is still sinful. What the word “perfect” means here is that we may be mature, that we may be equipped to do the will of God.

The focus is not us but God. God will enable us to do His will, and if we are mature and willing, we will do things that will please Him. This would be a great honour to please God, and on our own we would not be able to do so. That is why all of us need God’s help.

Sometimes as we look at ourselves, we see how selfish, impatient, biased, and foolish we still remain. And sometimes we are discouraged as we continue to sin. Even with the daily reading of the Bible and prayer, we still sin. Let us remember that God did not promise that the Christian life would be easy. In fact, He has taught us that the Christian life would be tough. That is why He gives all Christians the “spiritual armour” in the wonderful passage in Ephesians 6. When would soldiers wear armour? When they go to war. And why would they need to wear armour? Because in any fight against enemies, they need to protect themselves and they must put on the whole armour.

As this year comes to an end, remember that God wants you to live a victorious Christian life, that God wants you to live a life that will please Him. And none of us would be able to do that, unless we totally rely on Him. God is always there waiting for us. And God is powerful, for verse 20 reminds us that He raised Jesus from the dead. If God the Father can raise Jesus from the dead, surely He can help you to mature and live a life that will please Him!

Thought: May I be mature, even at a young age!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for myself – that I will be led by You to be a better child and to live my life so that I will please You. This is my humble request in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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