

April to June 2019
Teenz RPG Series on

Seeking After God

How Do I Seek After God?

Do pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don't be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God's Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said,

*"O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee,
my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."*

(Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God's alone!

Dn Milton Ang
On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK AFTER GOD?

Many people around the world are proud of the national culture they are born into. When my paternal grandmother was alive, she would speak fondly of the China that she left at a young age, and would strive to keep the cultural traditions alive. While she held a Singapore passport, no one who talked to her ever doubted that she was from China.

Once we are born again, we must always remember that we are now citizens of the heavenly kingdom, characterized by the eternal holiness of God. Nothing unholy can enter into heaven (Revelation 21:27), and we must appreciate that it is the priceless gift of God’s own Son that has bought us citizenship there. Although heaven is dressed in gold and precious stones (see Revelation 21), these can only shine when there is light, and thus it is the brilliance of God’s glory and holiness that makes heaven what it is. Therefore to seek the kingdom of God, means that we seek after God himself. We must realize our present position as born again believers who are headed to the eternal kingdom of God. Yet whilst we are still on earth, the Bible assures us that we are already part of His spiritual kingdom here. Our goal in life must then be to seek to be a useful part of this kingdom, and to demonstrate this by the righteousness of God in us.

While we are still yet on earth, we must already live with eternity’s values in view, being citizens of God’s kingdom. Do not put off knowing God (2 Corinthians 6:2); seek to know Him now, through what He has revealed about Himself in His Holy Word. Experience His leading in your life right now, trusting the promises in His Word. Understand how to lead godly lives through prayer and meditation on Scripture. Visibly place Him first in everything in your life, whether in studies, at home, in leisure, at church, or in relationships (Matthew 6:33). Let your entire being be holy and consecrated to Him, testifying you belong to Him. Dear teen, are you seeking after God?

Thought: Do others see us as citizens of this world or citizens of heaven?

Prayer: Lord, help me and make me, ever, only, all for Thee.

WHY MUST I SEEK AFTER GOD?

Solomon had just finished building the temple – the dwelling place of God on earth. He had made a wonderful prayer of dedication, and had dedicated the altar unto the Lord. It was at this juncture that the Lord appeared to him to encourage him and assure him that his prayers have been heard. God had seen Solomon's work, and was pleased to use the place as a house of sacrifice. God also warns Solomon that indeed if they were to sin, heaven would be shut up to them because of their iniquities (2 Chronicles 6:26-27). Yet if they were to repent, humble themselves and earnestly seek the Lord in prayer He will be quick to forgive and heal the land. In this we see the grave importance of seeking the Lord, for the opposite of it is sin, and it invokes the judgment of God.

Yet despite knowing this, many teens do not see the necessity of seeking after God. Because life is comfortable, and everything seems to be going well, they do not feel a need to depend on God nor seek after Him. They are foolish to ignore that all good things come from God (James 1:17), just as the rich man did to his own destruction in Luke 16:19-31. Never take God for granted. If you call Him God, if He is really God to you, then realise that even today, He controls everything, even the food that you partake, and the life that you breathe, and thus you must seek after Him for your very existence. We are called by the name of Christ because even before we first sought Him, Christ died for us that we might be reconciled to the Almighty God. How ungrateful we are if we choose sin instead of seeking Him who loves us so much that He gave His life to save us from sin's penalty – eternal death. Nay, dear teen, humble yourself before Almighty God, acknowledging that you must pray to Him to provide what you need for your life on earth, just as He provides salvation in Christ Jesus. Do not be arrogant to think that you only need to seek Him for some desires you cannot fulfil; if you do not humble yourself in acknowledging that all that you have comes from Him and not give Him the glory in thanksgiving, be sure that He will not hear your prayer. Do not wait for disaster to strike before you finally seek after God.

Thought: Is it easier to seek after God in times of trial or to seek Him in times of comfort?

Prayer: May I humble myself before Thee before I am humbled by Thee.

“...thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul”

HOW DO I SEEK GOD?

What does it mean to sincerely seek after God? What must I do in order to demonstrate my yearning for Him? Must I travel to the Holy Land and visit the Biblical sites? Or must I live the ascetic life of a monk and separate myself completely from the world? Must I clock a certain number of hours in prayer and read the Bible through a set number of times before it can be said that I am seeking after God?

Remember that what separates us from the thrice Holy God is our sinful nature. If we want to find God, we do not have to travel to certain places, nor do we need to don certain clothes or perform certain rites. Instead, Deuteronomy 4:29 tells us that we can always find Him, as long as we seek Him with all our heart and with all our soul. Our soul must already be totally justified by the blood of Jesus. We cannot believe our salvation depends (even in part) on anything else like our works or our status in society. Our heart must also confess that He is absolutely our King and our Lord, there being no other gods before Him. We must confess our sins before our thrice Holy God and come to Him in humility. Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:9-14. God hears the publican who confesses his sin, not the Pharisee who proudly comes before God looking down on everyone else. Recall that both were praying in the temple: thus during our Lord's Day worship, it is possible that some march into the sanctuary thinking they thoroughly deserve their place in the pews because of the good works they think that they have done, whilst judging and despising all around them who do not meet up to their standard of holiness.

Does that mean externals do not matter? Can one dress or behave the way one desires in the Lord's House? The simple answer is that the externals are often a reflection of our heart. If a person is not saved, then it is entirely possible that his dressing and behaviour does not acknowledge God's presence in his life. If a person is saved but has backslidden and allowed other gods in his life, then it is not surprising if his dressing is too casual or that he spends time chatting with friends instead of worshipping God.

Thought: What is my attitude during Lord's Day worship?

Prayer: God be merciful to me a sinner!

WHAT IF I DO NOT SEEK GOD?

As Ezra had earlier proclaimed to the king that God protects those who seek Him, he did not want to hypocritically request from the king additional human protection, but wholly sought God to provide. Having already professed faith in God, he was faithful to the end. Even in the face of danger, and though it might be wise in man's eyes, he did not fall into the temptation of trusting man. In so doing, God was glorified in both Ezra's words and actions.

There is indeed no middle ground or compromise with God. Either you seek God or you do not. If you seek Him, then His Hand is upon you for good; if you do not, you have forsaken Him. Be sure that His power and His wrath shall be against you. You might be tempted to think that your Christian testimony, while not great, is still acceptable, but God's Word really is a double-edged sword that will expose the true condition of your heart. You might have your reasons for not seeking Him, whether man's wisdom dictates a certain way, or you are obeying your desires. Nonetheless you are forsaking God.

Hebrews 12:6 tells us: *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”*. If you are really His child but have not sought Him, then do not be surprised when you eventually receive the rude shock of chastisement. He does so because as your Heavenly Father, He loves you and cares for you, and desires you to seek His will rather than your own. You must realise that bearing the name of Christ, you need to be a faithful testimony to Him in your life. Israel bore the mantle of God's own nation was similarly chastised whenever she did not seek God. Being that faithful testimony glorifies Him, as others can see His Hand upon you as a result of your seeking Him. Being otherwise dishonours Him.

Thought: How often do I seek God? How much do I seek Him?

Prayer: May I glorify Thee rather than dishonour Thee.

AM I TOO YOUNG TO SEEK AFTER GOD?

At the tender age of 8, Josiah ascended the throne of Judah. In the 8th year of his reign, at the age of 16, *‘while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father:’* (2 Chronicles 34:3). We can probably mark this year as the time when he was saved, where he began to receive and accept Jehovah as his personal Lord, and look towards the promise of the coming Messiah by faith. This is observed in our day and age as well, as many young people testify that it was during their teenage years that they fully understood sin and the gospel, and were truly saved. How we live our life as a youth, and the things that we seek after can have consequences that can affect the rest of our lives. For Josiah, he chose to seek the Lord and was faithful for the rest of his life, and thus highly commended by the Lord.

Note also that he sought the Lord. This was the simple beginning that sparked off a revival that spread throughout his whole nation. Every revival of the heart or of the church would start with this simple desire to seek the Lord, to go to Him and ask for his grace. When we talk about getting right with God, and fixing our walks with Him, it must always start with a sincere desire to seek him, and to draw near to Him. The Bible also points out that who he sought was the God of David his father. This is significant especially in the context of who his father and grandfather were. He chose wisely in that he did not follow the gods of his idolatrous parents, but instead the Lord God of David.

Dear teen, like Josiah, we too can seek after God from a very young age. You can already serve God in various capacities as a teenager. More importantly, although studies are important at your age, do place God first in your studies: for example, honour Him by not making it a habit of studying on the Lord’s Day, which should be dedicated to honouring God alone.

Thought: What excuses do I give myself for not seeking God?

Prayer: O God, may nothing come between me seeking Thee!

CAN'T I WAIT TILL I'M OLDER TO SEEK GOD?

The above question is sometimes asked by unbelieving teens who do not want to abandon their worldly pursuits; knowing that accepting Christ means denying oneself, they desire to only seek God later, perhaps after their studies are completed and they have a career, or perhaps when they have had a chance to enjoy their worldly lifestyle.

Isaiah 55:6 says *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near”*. While God gives His salvation offer to all, the offer period is not open indefinitely! There will come a time when God can no longer be found if we have not done so, there is no hope of salvation if we die without Christ. We can die suddenly and unexpectedly, so do not assume you can wait to seek God. Do not assume you will be given more time later in your life to seek God, when you have already been given so much time to do so. Remember every breath we take is by His mercies alone (Lamentations 3:22-23). Now, we must count the cost before we take the step to seek God and salvation (Luke 14:26-33). However, this should not be our excuse to delay seeking Him so that we can indulge in our worldly pursuits first; rather such cost counting is to make us realise that the eternal salvation of our soul is infinitely more valuable than these worldly pursuits (Mark 8:36).

If we are truly saved, it would be sad if God calls us home suddenly and we have done little more than just living for ourselves because Christ loved us so much that He gave His very life for us, yet we have done so little for him in return. Our time on earth is limited by His appointment alone, so redeem the time while you can, dear teen; do not delay seeking after Him!

Thought: What have I done for Jesus?

Prayer: O God, let me redeem the time from now on!

DO I NATURALLY SEEK AFTER GOD?

A few years ago, during a class reunion I bumped into my ex-school head prefect, and was startled to find that the former Christian beacon of light had turned into a present day ruffian. Later, I realised that children in this world may appear to be good not because of a desire to do so, but because of ulterior motives. Some do so to impress people while others may do so for reward or status.

Psalm 14:2-3 says it so well: *“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”*. Even after being saved, in the course of serving God, our motives can be suspect. Some might serve in a certain ministry because it feeds their pride, while some serve to get close to another person. Indeed, as long as we are in this mortal body, it is extremely difficult to have pure motives. Now, it does not mean we should stop serving God altogether, but it does mean we must constantly check our motives. For example, if asked to serve in a particular area, do seek God’s will in prayer rather than your own.

The point is, we will not naturally seek after God. Indeed, before we were saved, none of us would have sought after God on our own because of our sinful nature. It is only because of the Holy Spirit that convicts us that we will realise our sinfulness and need for salvation. Yet, this sinful nature within us will continue to plague us, as explained by the Apostle Paul in Romans 7:14-25. Unless we yield to the Holy Spirit to teach us, our own sinful nature will never naturally seek after God.

Therefore for us, we must constantly pray and ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives. By our own efforts, we would so easily backslide and seek after the things of the world. But with God leading us, we can live lives of consecration that glorify and please Him.

Thought: Do I yield to the Holy Spirit or to my own will?

Prayer: O God, see if there be any wicked way in me, cleanse me, lead me in Thy way.

HOW DO I KNOW I AM TRULY SEEKING GOD?

I remember during one retreat years ago, I was approached by a teen who said he wanted to profess Christ. After talking to him, I found out that he just wanted Christ to save him, but he was not prepared for Christ to be His Lord, for he did not want to give up the world. Sadly, there are teens like him who say they seek God, but are not genuine.

Psalm 63:1 shows how much David sought God: *“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is”*. As we have seen earlier, we must seek God with all our heart and soul. Our soul must continually realise that this world is full of sin, and the Holy Spirit is our sole source of sanctification. He alone can continually wash and cleanse us from sin. David realised that without the Holy Spirit, we would have fallen deeper and deeper into sin, for none will naturally seek God. Once our soul realises this need, our heart must seek Him as our Lord (*“thou art my God”*), confessing we are nothing before His divine holiness, and desiring to obey His every command.

This realization of how much we need Him will drive us to seek Him early in the morning. While we may or may not do our quiet time in the morning, we must commit each day to Him in prayer in the beginning, to start the day with Him. We must daily confess He is our Lord and place Him first in everything we do, not just on the Lord’s Day. The extent of our yearning for God is likened to how a thirsty man desperately seeks for water in a desert. Is that how our relationship with God is?

So dear teen, when you wake up tomorrow, may you share your first thoughts with God. And as Psalm 63:6 also exhorts us, let your last thoughts of the day be those of God too. David’s psalm conveys the sense that his day is never complete without such intense heartfelt daily communion. This is one way to tell if we are truly seeking God.

Thought: Can I truly say, O God thou art my God?

Prayer: Early will I seek Thee! Always will I seek Thee!

HOW DO I SEEK WHAT I CAN'T SEE?

When a teen who is seeking salvation approaches me, sometimes the concern that the teen has is: how do I know if the Bible is true? Rather than bring up all the evidences for this, I usually encourage the teen to take time to read the gospel of Luke. One such teen called me up 3 months later to say that on completion of the reading, she had no doubt that it was truly God's Word, and she had just accepted Christ as her Lord and Saviour.

Hebrews 11:6 says *“But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him”*. If we want to come to God, we must believe that He exists. We need to have such a faith, because we cannot visibly see Him. Bear in mind that Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as the evidence of things unseen: thus even though we do not see Him, we must believe in Him in the same way as if He were physically discernible. Christ is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), and will thus give faith to the elect. The teen who read the gospel of Luke realised by faith that these are the very words of her Lord, as John 10:27 says *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”*, and she obeyed her Master's call to be saved.

After we are saved, that same faith must be present if we want to come to Him. We must walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7), which means we must continually look to God's Word for His instruction. Though the visible world may try to discredit the Bible and our own sinful nature tries to draw us away with visible pleasures around, may you by the same faith that saved us continue to believe that we owe our lives now to Him who has saved us from sin. Though we see Him not, yet we have faith that one day we will and He will reward all that live by faith. In the meantime we must live believing that He is always here, desiring for us to seek Him.

Thought: Am I drawn away from God by the enticing things that I see?

Prayer: O may I live by faith and not by sight!

ISN'T GOD TOO FAR AWAY FROM ME?

Sometimes in deepest trials or when terrible things happen, some might think that God is far away in heaven, thus seeking Him is futile if He does not care about what is happening to each of them.

Nothing could be further from the truth, as Apostle Paul points out in Acts 17:27 *“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us”*. God has given much physical evidence in this world to attest to His presence; one needs only to look at the stars at night and the beauty of creation to realise that there is a Creator. He desires that mankind may seek Him. Like the loving father of the prodigal son, He stands by the gate and constantly waits for us to turn to Him in faith and repentance. Sadly only some of those searching will find Him. The phrase *“feel after him”* has the sense of groping in the dark. Many people claim to be seeking for the meaning of life, and try to find their god, but they never find it, for they are looking at the wrong place, like the heathens in Athens who were worshipping the ‘unknown god’.

God’s assurance is that He has never been far from each of us, His creatures. It is only our misconceptions that delude us into thinking that He is far away; but in reality, He is always near, to the extent of knowing the very hairs on your head. Do not reduce God to a finite being that dwells only in a certain place (1 Kings 8:27). The omnipresence of God means that everywhere is in the presence of God (Psalm 139), and that includes each and every one of us. Believers know by faith that Christ dwells within us. The question then is whether we seek Him though He is so near. Do you?

Thought: How guilty I have been to limit God’s presence!

Prayer: O God, praise Thee for being our omnipresent God!

WHY MUST I PREPARE MYSELF TO SEEK GOD?

This seems to be a common trend. Often during camp time, many teens confessed they have backslidden and professed that they desire to turn back to God. However after the camp, a good number of them turned back to a life of sin, and so quickly forget the confessions that they had made. Why is this so? What can we do to ensure that our desire for God is sincere, and not just a fleeting emotion that wanes so swiftly?

Solomon's son Rehoboam became the king of Judah upon his father's death. A few short years after he began his reign, Rehoboam *"forsook the law of the LORD"*. (2 Chronicles 12:1) Faced with impending conquest by the Egyptian Pharaoh Shishak, the king humbled himself before God. However, this proved to be only an outward show, for his life showed little change after that. In fact instead of fully repenting and asking the Lord to guide his kingdom, in a vain bid to cover up his failures, he installed shields of brass to replace the gold that had been plundered. 2 Chronicles 12:14 records *"And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD"*. Rehoboam remained in sin, because his heart was not prepared. Although he seemed to confess his sins before God in humility, it was only an outward temporal confession that was not from the heart. He was not prepared to confess Jehovah as absolute King and Lord over him. Instead, his desires were only for his own pride and glory. He never truly cared to seek after God at all, and thus his life was one that brought nothing but shame and grief to the Lord.

This verse highlights to us that if we do not prepare our hearts to seek God, we will inevitably fall into evil. Remember our hearts are desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and we have no way of trying to change ourselves. There are many potential idols in our lives that seek to draw us away from God, and if we are half-hearted about seeking God or if we only fervently seek Him at the spur of the moment without much thought, we will soon fall back into idolatry. Without a whole-hearted confession that Christ alone is our Lord, we will not be able to renew our minds on our own accord. Soon the wisdom of this world will return to us, and we will become disillusioned. Seeking God is therefore a serious decision rather than a frivolous one.

Thought: Is my heart really prepared to seek after God?

Prayer: O Lord, Thou art God alone, I have no other gods!

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF SEEKING GOD?

Our God is a good God. When we seek Him, He promises in Psalm 34:10 “The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.” The young lions that depend on their parents for food, may sometimes be let down by them and go hungry, though lions are amongst the most powerful of beasts. But our Almighty Heavenly Father promises us who seek Him, that He is always able to provide, and that all things will work out for our good. Note the use of the covenantal term LORD: He will provide because we are His very own children, and what He has promised to do, He will do it, and we simply need to have faith in Him. Note also that He does not say we will never go hungry or never be poor, but He may allow this for our good: for example, some missionaries in Africa may sometimes suffer from famine, but they rejoice, because as a result of seeking Him, they are where God wants them to be, and great will be their reward in heaven for their labour. *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Alexander Peden told of a poor widow woman, when soldiers came to plunder her house, telling her they would take all she had: “We will leave thee nothing, either to put in thee, or on thee.” She replied: “I care not, I will not want as long as God is in the heavens.”

When we are in God’s will, relying on Him for all our needs, that is the best place to be, for who can better take care of us than God can? Therefore, dear teen, seek God, and claim His promise that “no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11b). When we are walking in the will of God, we can rest in the comfort of His loving care for us, for we know that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Thought: Do I believe that God is able to provide for all I need?

Prayer: That I may learn that being in Your will is the best!

DOES PRAYER REALLY WORK?

If you read your Bible daily and consistently, you would have realised that prayer is part and parcel of the lives of the people of God. Many mighty prayers were recorded in the Bible and God answered them with many mighty miracles and wonders.

Elijah, the mighty prophet of Old Testament times is an example for us. James 5:17 describes him as a man who is subject to like passions as we are. He prayed that it would not rain on the land of Israel for three and a half years – for God was wroth with the sins and evils of the land led by an idol worshipping and apostate king Ahab. God heard and answered this great prayer and all the crops, cattle and people suffered much hunger and thirst as a result. The unforgettable encounter (1 Kings 18:19-39), as he stood alone but with God on his side, against the 450 prophets of Baal, is an example of prayer that not only worked but also showed that Israel’s God is the living and true God. God settled the question when He sent fire from heaven, in answer to Elijah’s prayer.

Prayer is as necessary as the air we breathe. But best of all, is the promise in Luke 11:9-10 that comes in between two wonderful parables on prayer. God promises to answer our prayers if we continuously seek Him in prayer according to His will, for He is our perfect loving Father in heaven who knows how to give good spiritual gifts to His children!

Elijah sought God with all his heart. This he did by praying and calling to God fervently, as he lived in the secret places of the mountains and plains. He had been alone with God as an intercessor against the evils of his day. You can be confident too that God will answer your earnest prayers as you seek Him to strengthen yourself against the evils in your heart and the evils that surround you. God will honour your continuous and unceasing prayer, just as He honoured Elijah’s mighty prayer.

Thought: Prayer is power with God and with men.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray with confidence and faith in You, seeking only for Thy glory and Thy name to be glorified.

HOW CAN I LEARN TO PRAY?

You can learn to pray by studying the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 6:9-13. It was given by Jesus in response to the queries that the disciples had, in asking Him how they ought to pray. They must have witnessed and observed the wonderful prayer life that Jesus had, and wanted to experience it for themselves. Indeed who better to learn about prayer from, than from Jesus Christ himself! Though He was God, yet he often rose early and spent much time in communion with God the Father (Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23).

The prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples begins by addressing God as *"Our Father which art in Heaven"* and this is a good way to begin your prayer. Many of our church leaders pray beginning with *"Our most gracious and loving heavenly Father"* or *"Mighty and eternal God, our loving and merciful heavenly Father"*. The Bible also has countless ways of addressing God. In times of need, the Psalmist often cries to God as their *"refuge and strength"*. Thinking of His second coming, we can also begin by praying, *"Our gracious heavenly Father"* but add to it *"Our soon coming King."*

The important thing is that we must approach God reverently and yet boldly as He is our Father in heaven. Yes, we approach God as a child approaches his father, remembering that He is one who is mighty to answer our prayers for the great love He has for us. He is pleased when we His children address Him as *"Our Father"*.

When praying, we begin by focusing on God and His wonderful attributes. We come boldly before His throne of grace, knowing that we are accepted in the beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ whom we have believed and have trusted. We also approach Him reverently for God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all its fullness thereof. We come humbly as we think of His great love for us when we were yet sinners. Teens, it is wonderful to have an Almighty and loving Father in heaven who listens to our prayers.

Thought: No ones cares for me like my heavenly Father.

Prayer: Lord, teach me and grant me grace look up to Thee unceasingly, in prayer, to praise, adore and commune with Thee.

WHOM DO I PRAY TO?

We pray to the one living and true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that whosoever believed in Him should not die, but have everlasting life. But how do we address Him?

We take our example from the Lord Jesus Christ. During His days on earth, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, in a unique relationship to the heavenly Father, prayed and addressed God with the word *“Father”*. *“I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight”* (Matthew 11:25-26). The term *“Father”* then, was the one, which Christ familiarly used, in living and dying, and which, evidently, was exceeding precious to him. When Jesus died on the cross for us, He made it possible for believers to come into the same relationship with God. Together with the gift of the Holy Spirit, He had made it possible for believers to come boldly to God’s throne and address Him as *“Father”* in our prayers.

Thus New Testament saints like Paul had always bowed their knees *“unto the Father”* (Ephesians 3:14). James, too when he blessed God addressed his praise to the Father (James 3:9). Peter also did the same (1 Peter 1:3). This address came, at last, to be used by the saints, especially in prayer, with infinite reverence, tenderness and gratitude.

How can we ever begin to thank God that He makes us worthy to be His sons to call Him *“our heavenly Father”*? As we struggle with the stress and strain of life, may we ever remember that our Father in heaven is pleased when we come to Him in prayer. Dearest teen, nothing is too big or small, important or unimportant, to bring to God our heavenly Father in prayer. Go to Him as you begin the day, as you end the day and for every moment in between.

Thought: Pray without ceasing.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank You for Your boundless grace that took a poor sinner like me and saved me.

WHY MUST I GIVE ADORATION TO GOD?

As we begin our prayer addressing God as our heavenly Father, we also centre our prayers on God Himself first, before all things. A prayerful focus on God will enable us to have truly genuine prayers. We ought not to pray with self and personal needs as the focus, important as they may seem. We look to God, the One who can deal with our needs. As needy persons, we must be intensely centred on God as we pray. This focusing on God is to give adoration and praise to God.

Adoration is simply praising God for who He is and what He has done for us. This is what it means when we pray “*hallowed be thy name*”. It is a cry in praise of the holiness of the name of God. The Psalms are excellent for helping us learn about God’s magnificence, and sets for us a pattern of how we ought to express ourselves when we desire to adore Him. For an example, read Psalm 103:1-4.

*“Bless the Lord, O my soul:
and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:
Who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases:
Who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with
lovingkindness and tender mercies:”*

Beginning prayer with adoration is a powerful way to get focused on God. The only way for us to be truly sincere in our adoration, is if we ourselves have experienced and understood the goodness of God in our lives. Only then would we have an earnest desire to praise God for all that He has done for us.

Dear Teen, have you already been praising God in your prayers? If not, begin by remembering the goodness of God in your life. Count your blessings, and thank God for each and every of them. Such adoration pleases God, and He delights to hear it in our prayers.

Thought: In adoration my soul is concerned about the majesty and glory of God.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, blessed be Thy name forever and ever. May I worship Thee with all my heart, mind and strength. May I praise Thee from sunrise to sunset.

WHY MUST I SEEK HIS KINGDOM?

To pray and to seek God's Kingdom here on earth is to desire that Christ may soon rule and govern on earth, replacing human governments and rulers. When that happens, it will be heaven on earth as righteousness and justice will reign. All men will submit to Christ. Peace and order will reign. This will only happen at the Second Coming of Christ, where He comes to establish His Millennial Reign on Earth. Isn't that a truly wonderful thing? Is this something you are looking forward to?

In every prayer, this should be our earnest petition. Every prayer that we make should echo this glad tiding that Christ may soon set up His Kingdom on earth. The Bible promises that the Kingdom of God will come in due course and the earth will become Christ's footstool in the golden Millennium (Hebrews 10:13). Every believer should look forward to that wonderful day.

We seek His Kingdom not only in prayer on our knees but also with our heart, soul, mind and strength. The preaching of the Word, testifying and witnessing, supporting gospel rallies and gospel events are all means to this end. The secret power of the Spirit must also be prayerfully called upon to do its marvellous work of converting sinners and saving souls. We therefore pray that God shall exert His power, both by the Word and by the Spirit, that the whole world may willingly submit to Him.

Dear teen, are you putting in effort to advance God's glorious Kingdom? What nobler cause do you have on this earth? Whatever gains you have in the world – a prestigious place in a university or school, an invention to make you famous and rich – all these pale in comparison with the eternal joy of salvation and God's wise and holy rule over a suffering and sin cursed world. What a privilege and honour to be involved in such a magnificent and holy endeavour for the Lord!

Thought: God's Kingdom is continually growing and advancing.

Prayer: Gracious loving heavenly Father, have mercy on those still outside Your kingdom and grant that I may have opportunities to share the gospel and impact the people around me for Thy glory.

DO I SEEK HIS WILL OR MY WILL?

As a believer, you have submitted, in obedience, to forsake all your sinful ways and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour. Romans 12:2 describes this experience and submission as not only a transformation but also a renewing of the mind. With this renewed mindset, you are then able to understand God's perfect will. You can perceive things in the context of the Kingdom of God.

Slowly, you begin to understand and experience that God's will is indeed good and acceptable and perfect. God's perfect will if followed protects and preserves while enabling one to maximize one's potential. In following our own will, due to our sinful nature, limited worldly experience, knowledge and understanding, we often hinder our own spiritual growth.

Whatever we ask must be in accordance to God's will for God's plan for our lives is always good for us. He is the Sovereign God who rules with perfect justice, perfect wisdom and perfect equity over all. You need not fear that you will lose out or be cheated of your opportunities. God is wiser, greater and more loving than all and He will see that His child grows to the stature of the perfect man, in grace and knowledge of Him. Your objective in life and in prayer is always to glorify Him.

To ensure that you are seeking and doing God's will, learn to ask Him what His will is on any particular matter before acting. That is why the next clause that Jesus taught in the Lord's prayer is for us to ask for *“thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”*. Basically we are asking that God would execute His perfect will in our lives, in accordance to His divine heavenly decrees. When we make such a prayer, we are submitting to His leading and guidance, and seek to align our will with His.

Go to Him in prayer, before you go to men or to your friends. If you go to unbelievers, it is even worse. They do not see things from the perspective of the importance and glory of the Kingdom of God. Doing God's will might sometimes entail some sacrifice and pain. It is often not what we desire but you can be sure that if you submit, you shall come forth as gold!

Thought: Jesus obeyed God's perfect will when He died on the cross for our sins.

Prayer: Increase my faith, heavenly Father, that I might always seek to do Thy perfect will.

WHAT IS OUR DAILY BREAD?

Notice that this request comes only after we have sought God’s glory, kingdom and will. This is the order that God teaches us to follow. God’s name and glory should be our focus. In fact, it must be our priority. Jesus reiterated this when He concluded the chapter with these simple words, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you”*. These things are our daily personal needs which God assures us will be added to us when we place Him as first priority.

The *“daily bread”* will include all our physical and material needs. These two words are meant to include our daily need for food, clothing, accommodation, health and medical care. We are to trust our Father to supply all of them, day by day. God has not promised to provide the many *“wants”* such as expensive computer games and gadgets. Matthew 6:8 records for us that *“your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him”*. Dear teen, we must, in our prayer, be ruled by the simple faith of trusting the Father who knows what we need before we ask Him, and has promised to provide all these things. Jesus continued to provide many examples of our Father’s provisions in nature when He feeds the birds (verse 26), enables us to grow without any effort on our part (verse 27), and clothes the common lilies of the field with beauty (verse 28). We are not to be anxious like the unbelievers for our heavenly Father knows our needs. We are certainly more precious and valuable to Him than the sparrows and the wild flowers by the roadside.

This request is the logical progression in our prayer request. This is the life of faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). Pray on a daily basis for your daily needs. Manna was provided for the children of Israel as they gathered it day by day. When they gathered a double portion, thinking to leave it for the next day, it stank and rotted with worms (Exodus 16:20). So come to God daily, with your burdens and your sorrows, your heartaches, and your many anxieties and the Lord will sustain and see you through.

Thought: Our Father in heaven always knows best.

Prayer: Lord, let me rest content as I trust Thee to meet my daily needs.

WHY MUST I CONFESS MY SINS?

To confess our sins is to ask God for forgiveness. Since the day the Lord opened our spiritual eyes to see that we are sinners, we have realised that our sins are so many. We sin so easily. We lie. We are unkind. We are selfish. We are self-willed. We are unforgiving. The list goes on and on. After we have sinned, do we feel sorry for those whom we hurt and do we realize that we have not been a good testimony for the Lord? Do you desire to confess your sins? Or do you prefer to go on sinning?

Notice that we begin by asking God to forgive us of our sins. Our sins are our debts, debts we owe our heavenly Father. We have no means of paying those debts, except that He has mercy on us and cancels them. He so loved us that He sent His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to suffer and to die on the cross of Calvary. By this merit, God forgives us and cancels our debts when we put our trust in Jesus. If we plead with God to forgive us, we must also be willing to forgive others. For, by comparison, our debts to God are greater than any man's debts to us.

When we are unforgiving, we harbour many hostile feelings of anger and hatred. This is a great burden upon our hearts. The hurt begins to fester and harden our hearts. This also becomes a barrier and hindrance to our spiritual walk with the Lord. Our prayer life is affected as God will not hear us when we pray because our sins separate us from Him (Psalm 66:18).

It is a good rule for your spiritual life to confess your sins as soon as you realise it. Get rid of that poison in your heart and in your life. God has promised in 1 John 1:9 that He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. The longer our sins remain unconfessed, the worse off we become. We carry the weight of that sin wherever we go. This leads to bitterness and can even lead to physical sickness and emotional trauma. We end up harming ourselves much more in the end.

Thought: Obedience to our Lord brings peace into our hearts.

Prayer: Search me, O Lord, and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me to confess my sins.

WHAT IF I CAN'T STOP SINNING AFTER CONFESSING?

Guess what, teens. There would be a lot of perfect people if we could stop sinning after confessing. The truth is that no one stops sinning. We only stop sinning when we reach heaven, or when this mortal, corruptible flesh is replaced by the immortal, incorruptible glorified body (1 Corinthians 15:53). While we are in this world, there are the sins of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life that we must contend with daily (1 John 2:16). Indeed, the world is not a friend to God and we are in hostile territory. We are also often weak and easily tempted.

When the Bible tells us to repent, it does not mean we will be able to stop all sinful behaviour by just deciding to do so (Romans 7). Instead, repentance means to turn away from sin and turn towards God. We turn our minds back to Christ – confessing and asking Jesus to cleanse us. Therefore we ask that the Lord would lead us not into temptation, but to deliver us from evil. This request should, of course, be made with the desire and willingness to be kept from repeated sinning. We should resolve and ask God to give us the strength to resist and conquer temptation. We should not be merely mouthing words, without any heartfelt feeling. That would be insincere and hypocritical. Seeking of strength from the Lord to be able to overcome our sins is a gradual process. Through continued prayer, dependence on God, studying and meditating on the Scriptures – we grow in spiritual maturity. Then we will be better equipped to overcome sin and temptation.

It is good to humbly realise how weak we are and how easily we fall. At the same time, realise too that it is only by the Holy Spirit indwelling in our hearts that we may be kept or delivered from the attacks of the evil one. We thus ask God to lead us not into temptation because God is in control of all things, including the evil things that come our way. So do not be discouraged when you sin. But you should grow stronger and more determined, by the grace of God, to overcome sin with time. This shall be so as you trust and depend on Him more and more.

Thought: God's mercy is greater than all my sins.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, teach me to trust and depend on Thee more and more that I might conquer my sins.

WHY MUST I GIVE ALL GLORY TO HIM?

The Lord's Prayer ends with praise, proclaiming God as the glorious King over all things. It praises and acknowledges God as having supreme right and authority over the whole universe. The words *“and the power”* refers to God's infinite ability to perform His will in heaven and earth. Because He is the Almighty, He has to the ability to do whatsoever He pleases. He never slumbers nor sleeps and nothing is too hard for Him. He must also be praised for all glory and honour belongs to Him, as He is the God who answers prayers.

Praise and thanksgiving is the logical conclusion to all our prayers since God is the One who has given us all things including eternal life and all material blessings. When we do not give thanks to Him, we are guilty of being ungrateful and unthankful. We are actually complaining that God has not given or loved us enough. Thus we sinned against God. The truth is that, *“...God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8). If we are truly saved, we know that we will never fully realise how immeasurable is God's loves for us. We also realise that even if we thank Him every day and every hour, we can never thank Him enough. A child of God cannot but give thanks out of a grateful heart for we know that we are not worthy of His great love for us.

Give thanks every day and in all circumstances. This is pleasing to God. Give thanks for the blessing of salvation. Not only are all our sins forgiven and our souls saved, we are given a place in heaven that we might live eternally. Even now, God is constantly caring for us and loving us. Give thanks for home and family. Give thanks that there is peace and plenty where we live, for many around the world suffer from earthquakes, typhoons, famines and war. Give thanks too for every opportunity to do good and to serve the King of kings and Lord of lords. Indeed His blessings cannot be numbered! When we do so, we are rendering all due glory to His name, for He alone is the God who has done all these things for us.

Thought: Humility is the good ground where thankfulness grows.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I give You all thanks and praise for Thy goodness to Your children.

IS IT DEBTS OR TRESPASSES IN THE LORD'S PRAYER?

While both words "debts" and "trespasses" are sins, there is a fine shade of difference. "Debts" are not financial debts but sins of omission (not doing what we ought to). We are asking God to forgive us for what we have failed to do. We are asking for forgiveness for our debt. "Trespasses" are sins of commission when we break the moral law by doing what we ought not to like lying and stealing. We are asking for forgiveness for something we have done. Whilst we recite *'forgive us of our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us'*, it does not exclude the idea of debts that we have against God as well.

The use of the word trespasses in our Lord's Prayer actually dates back to the 1500s, even before the King James Version was translated. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer based their rendition of the Lord's Prayer on the English translation by William Tyndale, which used the word trespasses in Matthew 6:12. Since then, we have been using this as our standard for the Lord's Prayer. Some other churches may use the word 'debts' instead, and they are not wrong also. This is an issue more of practice than a different doctrine.

The most important thing is that we should realise the depths of our sins that many a time we sin not only by doing wrong but also in not doing that which is right before God. We must therefore mean what we say when we pray for forgiveness, and we must be willing also to forgive others. All their offences can never be greater than our sins against God.

Dear Teen, may the Lord help you to bear a clear conscience before God and before men that you be willing to forgive others who may have offended you as Christ has freely forgiven your offences.

Thought: There is wideness in God's mercy.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, though we sin against Thee often, You are always merciful to forgive.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PRAY IN JESUS' NAME?

This is how we should end our prayers. Not only in John 14:13 did Jesus teach, “*And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son*”, but in John 16:23 we also read, “*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you*”.

Therefore, our prayers to God must not go through any other name, neither Mary nor any saint. This is also not a magic formula like “open sesame” in the Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves story. If what we ask for is not for God’s glory and according to His will, saying “in Jesus’ name” is meaningless. Genuinely praying in Jesus’ name and for His glory is what is important too. It is not the words in the prayer that are first in importance but the purpose behind the prayer.

It is to remind us that all our prayers are made possible through His atoning work on the cross for us. If Jesus did not die, and we did not put our trust and faith in Him as our Saviour from sins, our prayers will never be heard and answered. We do not have any merit of our own that makes us worthy to approach God. It is only through the merits of Christ that a believer can come with his adoration, petitions and thanksgiving, knowing that not only will God answer, but He will also be pleased. We are accepted “*in the beloved*” (Ephesians 1:6) for Jesus is beloved of God.

Praying in the name of Jesus, we come boldly before God’s throne. God accepts us and treats us as He would His own Son because we come in His stead. We are represented by the Son when we come to the Father. What a blessing that Christ has told us to approach the Father in His name! What a blessing to know that God welcomes us as we commune with Him under the authority and name of Jesus, the name above every name.

Thought: David fought and won a victory over Goliath because he came in the name of the Lord.

Prayer: O Father, may I understand that praying in Jesus’ name is praying for things that will honour and glorify Jesus.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I PRAY?

Prayer is so important that it is to be done without ceasing. It should become second nature to a believer. Wherever he or she is, at whatever time, concerning big issues or in small things, the believer can come boldly before the throne of God and make his requests. A writer says it this way, “Prayer must cover all things, be in every place, find itself in all seasons, and embrace everything, always, and everywhere.”

We need to remember what a privilege it is to pray. Our Lord Jesus Christ, speaking through the Apostle Paul, assures you that you may pray without ceasing. There isn't a moment that prevents us from praying. Here you have permission to come before the King of kings and Lord of lords, at any time of need. Remember that appointments have to be made when we need to see any important official. They only work on certain days and certain hours. King Ahasuerus in the days of Esther the queen, would not let anyone approach him in his palace except when they were called. Here Jesus, the King of kings calls His people everywhere to come to Him at all times. Unless king Ahasuerus stretched out his sceptre to pardon anyone who came to him without prior appointment, they will be slain; but our King never withdraws His sceptre. It is always stretched out, and whosoever desires to come to Him may come now, and at any time. It is also a command. Obeying and persevering in prayer will only bring God's blessing in your life. *“Pray without ceasing”* if you want God's richest blessings in all your work and your life.

Pray without ceasing for the salvation of your loved ones. Never give up. As long as you have breath, you need to remember them and ask for God's mercy upon them that they might not perish but have everlasting life. Pray for your daily needs and you know that your needs are many. Satan is as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Temptations abound. Take the weapon of all-prayer and you need fear no foe.

Thought: Pray without ceasing for the Lord never ceases to hear you.

Prayer: O Father in heaven, help me to pray without ceasing.

WHY MUST I COMMIT EVERYTHING TO GOD?

To commit everything to God is to experience peace. This is God's prescription for peace. To do otherwise is to be anxious all the time. We can get anxious and worried over many things in this modern world. We worry most about our studies and this entails a lot of expectations concerning tests, examinations, projects, assignments, day-to-day readings, tuition and homework. Then there is health to consider. Even if we are healthy, a media report of a widespread superbug or disease outbreak in our neighbourhood can also cause much anxiety. Oh, there are also our important relationships with our parents, our siblings and our peers. Just one quarrel or misunderstanding can cause us to have many sleepless nights. Dear teen, why let worry rob you of peace and joy from your heart, steal your sleep, disturb your rest and make you irritable and unpleasant to be with? Worry and anxiety will only bring more misery to your life.

God desires to bless us with His peace. In order to experience God's blessings, we need to bring “everything” to Him in believing prayer. Notice the contrast in verse 6. *“Be careful for nothing: but in everything by prayer and supplication...”* The divine antidote to worry is prayer. It is believing prayer as it is *“with thanksgiving”*. God hears and God cares. In His good time, in His own way, He always answers.

The cares of this world and the Word of God cannot mutually coexist in a person's heart. One will dominate the other. If you do not desire to be a spiritual weakling, you must control the worries that this world generates in your heart. Dear teen, learn to roll your burdens off your shoulders and come to God in prayer. Tell the Lord all your cares. Ask Him to carry them for you and you shall experience His peace.

Thought: When we put our cares in God's hands, He puts His peace in our hearts.

Prayer: Lord, I cast all my cares at Your feet, trusting You to care for me.

WHAT IF I STILL WORRY AFTER PRAYING?

The Bible tells us that the person who still worries after praying is guilty of doubting God’s Word. He lacks faith. He is compared to the sea waves that flow and ebb with the tide. Worse still, when the wind blows, he is tossed and driven to and fro. When we waver, we are basing our faith on feelings or emotions, instead of God’s Word. Then we cannot expect to receive “*anything of the Lord*” (verse 7). Our faith must become stable, steadfast, and consistent to receive blessings from God.

While many of us are weak in the faith, we need not stop there. We must mature in the faith. We will then learn to simply take God at His Word and act on it accordingly. We will not doubt, or flounder in our unbelief or uncertainty. We would not waver in unbelief or rebellion. As you progress in spiritual maturity, there will be a growing steadfastness in your faith. Abraham was strong in the faith. He did not waver in unbelief. He moved to Canaan, as God commanded, where God promised him a son in his old age, made him a father of many nations, and provided a land for his seed. When God commanded him to sacrifice his son, Abraham immediately submitted, not doubting for a moment that God would somehow raise Isaac from the dead if it came to that. All these require complete trust in our heavenly Father.

Faith grows when we diligently seek the Lord. How much time do you spend with God daily? You need to spend much time reading the Bible, memorising and meditating on Scripture. Educate yourself with writings from good Christian authors, and remember to pray. You need to have a disciplined Quiet Time with the Lord. Do you? Perhaps you have planned to use your time for your studies or sports, but how much more important is the exercise of your soul!

Thought: When you ask God for help, remember that He is faithful.

Prayer: Father in heaven, help us to trust You, one day at a time, resting on Your promises to answer and provide.

HOW COME MY PRAYERS AREN'T ANSWERED?

The answer is plain. Prayers that ask for the wrong things will not be answered. There was a believer who quarrelled with her neighbour. She confessed that she prayed that God would punish the neighbour. Simply praying for vengeance rather than resolution to the quarrel even in a God-honouring manner is asking amiss. There are those who pray covetously for wealth with no thought of how to use it for God's glory. Likewise, praying simply for things to satisfy our worldly desires is praying amiss. Such prayers will not be answered.

God only answers prayers that glorify Him and are in accordance to His will. We must surrender our will to Jesus completely if we are to follow Him. He is our example, and even He had prayed before going to the cross on Calvary, *“Not my will, but thine be done”*. The people of the world are full of selfish lusts, easily consumed by their selfish impulses. We should not be like them. We have a loving and holy heavenly Father who loves us and wants the best for us. His best for us is what we seek, not what we think is best for us.

Furthermore, the Bible warns us that if we regard iniquity in our hearts, our prayers will not be heard (Ps 66:18). We must first fix our relationship with the Lord by repenting of our sins, before we can expect Him to heed to our requests.

What have you been praying for? It would be wonderful if you have been praying for the salvation of your loved ones. God is honoured and glorified when sinners come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. A look at the church's prayer list or the Youth Fellowship prayer list will reveal that we pray for good health that we might serve God. We pray for good examination results to glorify God and be good testimonies for Him. We pray for protection. We pray also for blessings upon all our activities for we know that without God we can do nothing. We honour and glorify God when we depend completely on Him.

Thought: Prayers in the language of lusts than of graces will return empty.

Prayer: Our gracious heavenly Father, teach us to pray aright, to ask for the things that will honour Thee.

WHY MUST I PRAY FOR OTHERS?

The best gift anyone can give to another is to pray for him or her. We live in a sinful world where bad things happen to people and people are continually tempted to sin. Praying for another person not only helps that person find God in the midst of trouble, but also helps us recognize the blessings that God gives us daily. It leads to spiritual growth as we learn to love and care for one another.

Praying for one another is known as intercessory prayer. The Bible is full of godly men that God raised to intercede for His people. Abraham interceded for Lot when he knew that God would rain fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses interceded for the people when God's wrath was upon them, for making and worshipping the golden calf.

We are clearly commanded to love one another as disciples of Jesus. In John 13:34, Jesus Himself commands us, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*”. The noble expression of love is to pray for our brethren, especially those who are poor, the sick, the lonely, for those who have fallen away, the aged, the young, parents, children, and for many, many others.

How wonderful it is that God has given us the blessed ministry and privilege of praying not only for ourselves, but also for others. Spend some time every day praying for the needs of others. Some of your friends have burdens that are heavy to bear. Others might be in a spiritual battle. Others are still outside the kingdom of God and thus destined for hell. Will you seek God to help them ease their burdens? Remember, in your time of need, others had prayed for you too.

Thought: Prayer is the most powerful thing we can do.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to spend time with Thee in prayer for the needs of others beside myself.

WHAT MUST BE MY ATTITUDE IN PRAYER?

Our attitude must be that of a humble worshipper who comes to God in faith, trusting and believing that He answers prayers. At the same time, we should also be careful that we do not make a show of praying in public, to be “*seen of men*”. This would be showing off our spirituality, which is what the Pharisees did. We go to a private place. The “*closet*” mentioned here simply means a private place. In Bible times, the Jews had a flat rooftop with little chambers built on the side so that they could pray in secret. Jesus often went to the mountains early in the morning to pray. If you should face a difficulty here, remember that the desire to pray and the love of prayer will enable you to find such a private place.

This verse pertains to private prayer or devotions. There is a place also for public corporate prayer when we meet in fellowship groups or in a group or church prayer meeting. We may sit, stand or kneel. Whenever possible, one’s head should be bowed and the eyes closed so as not to be distracted. Of course, it may not always be practical to do so, for example, while driving or crossing the road. In these situations we should simply whisper a prayer in our heart.

As we pray in secret, unseen of men, but seen of God, He will reward us openly. The goodness of God will not only provide more than we ask, but even prayer itself is rewarded! He hears you as you whisper to Him your deepest fears and struggles. Yes, dear teen, bring all your deepest hurts before Him. He will abundantly soothe, comfort and restore you to health and joy.

Have you found a suitable place to do your morning devotions? You also need to find a suitable time. Be consistent and you will soon find a rhythm to your routine. Your first thought upon waking up should be to thank the Lord for a good night’s sleep and seek His blessing for the new day that is before you. You may read the Bible with the help of the Teens RPG, which is specially written for you.

Thought: Jesus prays for us, even now in heaven.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us for the many times we have been too indolent to pray when prayer is so vital to our spiritual life.

WHAT IS THE OBJECTIVE OF QUIET TIME?

Moses, God’s chosen leader of the Israelites, had been taken home to be with the Lord and Joshua was to be his successor. Joshua was handed the seemingly massive and daunting task of leading the Israelites into the promised land of Canaan over the river Jordan. He may have been feeling overwhelmed and fearful of this great responsibility and the upcoming battles. He could also be feeling inadequate and pressurised to have to follow in Moses’ footsteps. Joshua 1 gives us the wonderful account of God assuring Joshua that it is not by his strength but by God’s that they will enter the Promised Land. God dispels Joshua’s fears and misgivings about the future and comforts Him with promises of His presence with him. He also teaches Joshua what he must do to succeed in his mission. This precious truth found in verse 8 is something we can learn too.

God instructed Joshua that His Word should not “*depart out of [his] mouth*”, that he should be constantly reading and speaking God’s Word. He should also be meditating on God’s Word “*day and night*”. God then instructed him to not only immerse himself deeply in His Word but also to be a “*doer*” of His Word as well. He commanded Joshua to “*observe to do according to all that is written therein*”. It was only through this whole-hearted devotion to God’s Word that Joshua would then be “*prosperous*” and have “*good success*” in his leading of God’s chosen people.

One might think that with such a huge task, Joshua would not have time to spend reading God’s Word. One might think that he could spend his time better by training his troops or drawing up war strategies and battle plans. But God Himself here reminds Joshua and us of the “*one thing needful*” (Luke 10:42), which Mary chose while Christ was on earth. It is communion with God which we have during our Quiet Time. So no matter how busy we are, we need to ensure that we set aside time for God. In fact, the busier we are, the more we need God to enable us! Quiet time draws us closer to God, strengthens our knowledge of His Word, helps us to obey His Word and thus, results in us succeeding in what we strive to do in life according to His will.

Thought: The bigger the obstacle ahead, the harder the preparation, the more we need to stop and meditate on God’s Word.

Prayer: O Lord, help me to choose the “one thing needful”.

HOW DOES QUIET TIME DIFFER FROM PRAYER?

Psalm 119 is the longest psalm in the Bible, consisting of 176 verses divided into 22 sections of 8 verses each. Each section starts with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the “KOPH” section is the one we will be considering in the next few devotions. Psalm 119 is full of joyful exclamations of love for God’s Word and a daily reliance on Him. It is therefore a most fitting psalm for us to consider as we take a deeper look into why and how we do our Quiet Time.

The section for our consideration begins with the psalmist crying out to God in prayer (v. 145-147), pleading for God to hear him. His earnest and heartfelt pleas to God sound almost desperate as he promises to keep God’s “*statutes*” and “*testimonies*” if God would hear and save Him. The word ‘*prevented*’ here speaks of the chronological order, whereby he came before the dawning of the morning, and cried unto the Lord. But he did not just stop at prayer, for he spent time in meditation and study of God’s Word, for it is in God’s Word alone that he was able to find hope amidst his situation.

In a nutshell, that is what Quiet Time is – spending time alone with God. The two key elements of it are prayer and the reading of God’s Word. It is time spent alone in communion with God. It should be free from all distractions, allowing us to nurture our relationship with Him through prayer and the study of His Word. It is vital to read God’s Word during our daily Quiet Time as it is in His Word that we find the answers to our prayers. Thank God our relationship with Him is not based on a one way communication for we do indeed hear His voice through His Word.

Thus it can be said that prayer is an element of Quiet Time, but is certainly not limited to only our Quiet Time. We can pray without ceasing, at all times throughout the day. Of course we can also read and meditate on God’s Word through the day as well, but we must always have a devoted period of time (preferable in the mornings) where we make a concerted effort to sincerely seek the Lord.

Thought: Can I do my Quiet Time more than once or twice a day?

Prayer: Let me be diligent in reading Thy Word, O Lord, so that I may be assured that Thou will indeed “hear me” and “save me”.

WHY MUST I DO MY QUIET TIME DAILY?

The psalmist read God’s word every morning and night. In Psalm 119:147, he testified that he “prevented the dawning of the morning”, meaning that he arose even before dawn to read and meditate on God’s Word. In the next verse, he mentions that his “eyes prevent the night watches”, showing that he also read God’s Word late into the night. Such was his love for God’s Word and communion with God, his Saviour and Creator.

He saw his daily quiet time as more vital than his physical needs, likely foregoing that bit of extra sleep in order that he might spend more time digesting God’s Word. He truly believed that “*man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD*” (Deuteronomy 8:3). If we know that we must eat three times a day in order to sustain our physical bodies, is it not then natural that we would want to spend time in prayer and reading God’s Word in order to nurture our spiritual lives?

Can you now see the reason why Quiet Time must be a daily routine? If eating regular meals and drinking enough fluids each day is essential to our physical health, daily Quiet Time is likewise essential to our spiritual health. If we are slack to read God’s Word daily, very soon our hearts start to lose faith and our eyes grow dim and cannot see God’s will for us. We are more easily troubled by trials and will more easily fall prey to Satan’s temptations. If only we purpose in our hearts to daily read and meditate on God’s Word, we will soon see that we cannot do without it and it becomes such a natural routine to us like eating our meals and sleeping at night. In fact, it may become even more important than food and sleep like in the case of the psalmist. Let us all strive for that!

Thought: Instead of saying “yet a little sleep” (Proverbs 6:10), let us say “yet a little more time with God”!

Prayer: O Lord, help me to be convicted in my heart that daily Quiet Time with Thee is more important than my physical needs such that I will purpose to have Quiet Time everyday without fail.

ISN'T ATTENDING CHURCH ENOUGH TO GROW?

To be quickened has the meaning of being made alive, revived or restored. Ephesians 2 describes how we as sinners were once dead in trespasses and sins. However because of the great love and mercy of God, He quickened us together with Christ, for he raised us out of our spiritual deadness and we now have a new life in Christ. But our spiritual revitalization did not end there. As we begin this new spiritual journey as babes in Christ, we need constant spiritual sustenance in order to continue to grow and mature in the faith. That is why we are told to desire the sincere milk of the word in the same manner as how hungry infants would cry for mother's milk (1 Peter 2:2). This is the only way which we can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

It is easy then to understand what the psalmist means when he says that God's judgment or His law can “*quicken*” him spiritually in Psalm 119:149. As we develop a deeper understanding of Him and His will through reading the Bible, our spiritual insight will be awoken, and our life in Christ will become more rich and vibrant. It also vitalizes our hearts as they light up in understanding and conviction of God's purpose to bring salvation to the world. It excites and stimulates us to strive to lead holier lives that would please Him and drives us to increase our evangelism efforts.

If reading and meditating on God's Word could quicken us so tremendously, why would we be content with just opening our Bibles in church on Sundays? Such a “Sunday Christian” could only grow at a snail's pace, or worse still, just stagnate or backslide. Therefore, it is certainly not enough to just attend church and hope to grow significantly as Christians. We would only remain as “*babes in Christ*”, stunted in development and only tasting the “*milk*” and not the “*meat*” of God's Word and His doctrines (1 Corinthians 3:1-2). Let us read His Word daily that we will mature in the faith.

Thought: Can you cite any experiences where reading God's Word truly “*quicken*ed” you?

Prayer: Dear Lord, let me desire to grow in Christ through studying Thy Word daily and not just on Sundays.

HOW IS GOD’S WORD RELATED TO SEEKING GOD?

What does it mean to seek after God like the psalmist proclaimed in Psalm 119:10? To note, he sought after God with his “whole heart”. It was his all-consuming and fervent life mission. God, as the Creator of the Universe and as an infinite spiritual Being, should be completely out of reach to us, finite and carnal creatures. However, by His grace and love for us, He chose to reveal Himself to us through His Word and to provide a way for us to be able to commune with Him through His Son. It is through these avenues that we can seek after God.

To seek after God we must first be reconciled to Him through Christ’s redeeming work on the cross. Without this first step, we can never be close to Him as Christ is the only Way to God (John 14:6). After that, seeking after God would be to grow closer to Him by knowing Him more and obeying Him more through His Word. To know Him more would be to learn what His attributes are and what His will is. To learn how He is a righteous God who will punish sin but also a God of love and mercy who desires to save and forgive the sinner. To understand that He desires to be glorified and how His whole work of salvation does that. To obey Him more would be to seek to first learn what pleases Him and what He views as sin, and then to strive to lead a righteous life according to His standards, not ours.

How then does one seek after God? The Psalmist prays that he will not “wander from [God’s] commandments”. God’s commandments are found in His Word and it is through the reading of God’s Word that we can achieve all of that which has been mentioned before. God’s Word has been given to us by God Himself (2 Peter 1:21). What better way is there to learn about someone than to read the autobiography where He wrote of himself? God reveals Himself to us through His Word. If we truly desire to seek God with our “whole heart” like the Psalmist, let us then read His Word and meditate on it daily in our Quiet Time.

Thought: What steps or changes to your life can you make to seek after God with your whole heart?

Prayer: O Lord, I want to seek after You with my whole heart. Help me to do this by guiding and teaching me through Thy Holy Spirit as I read Thy Word daily.

HOW CAN I DO QUIET TIME? (I)

After understanding the importance of daily Quiet Time, we now ponder how we should do it and how to gain the most out of it. Again, the Psalmist in Psalm 119 who truly enjoys his Quiet Time and loves God's Word can give us useful pointers. We will consider these pointers in our next few devotions.

In Psalm 119:18, the Psalmist asks God to open "[his] eyes, *that [he] may behold wondrous things out of [God's] law*". He acknowledges that he is a mere human being who cannot understand spiritual things by his own mind. We are fallen creatures who have had our understanding of spiritual things broken and corrupted by sin. The Bible may just be words to us. We do not naturally see the spiritual aspect of the events in our lives. Such is our fallen nature. A sinful person can read, study or even memorise the whole Bible from start to finish but without the illumination of the Holy Spirit, he will never truly understand or submit to it.

If we realise our fallen nature and that only God Himself can help us understand His Word, we will know that we need to ask God to open our spiritual eyes when we read His Word. It is important to say a prayer before we start our Quiet Time to ask God to teach us by His Holy Spirit as we read His Word. This requires a humble and teachable spirit on our part and we need to learn how to cultivate this. If even the psalmist, who may be more mature in his faith and understanding compared to us, needs to keep asking God to teach him, then how much more us?

Thought: Do you make it a point to pray to God to help you understand a Bible passage or even a sermon before you read or listen to it?

Prayer: O Lord, "*open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law*".

HOW CAN I DO QUIET TIME? (II)

The Psalmist asks a question that is very pertinent to teenagers – *“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?”* The Psalmist may not be a young man when he wrote this Psalm but he understands that young people have to wrestle with sins, youthful lusts and the temptation of the world. He specifically directs this question to young people as he also knows that it is important to start striving for a righteous life at a young age. He echoes Paul in 2 Timothy 2:22 in calling on young people to *“flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart”*.

After asking the question, the Psalmist immediately provides the answer – *“by taking heed thereto according to Thy word”*. Taking heed means to pay special and careful attention to something. In this case, the psalmist calls on young people to read God’s Word carefully and deeply, measuring their lives by its standard. They are to examine their lives as they read God’s Word, taking care to repent and reform if they are lacking or fall short. This is how their lives will be cleansed by letting God’s Word which *“is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword”* discern *“the thoughts and intents of [their] heart”* (Hebrews 4:12).

Young person, do you ask the same question as the Psalmist? Do you desire to *“cleanse [your] way”*? If you have truly accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour and have become a new man in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), this should be your desire. Therefore, turn to God’s Word everyday. As you do your daily Quiet Time, pray that God will use His Word to cleanse your heart. Do not just read His Word superficially but meditate and think about how this portion of scripture requires you to respond by changing something in your life that may not be pleasing to Him. By doing this, you will be truly *“taking heed”* to how God’s Word is teaching you to cleanse your way.

Thought: What is wrong if you realise that you have no desire to cleanse your life?

Prayer: Lord, help me to take heed of Thy Word and examine my life in light of Thy Word. Give me the humility and discipline to change the aspects of my life that do not please Thee.

HOW CAN I DO QUIET TIME? (III)

In the previous devotion, we spoke of how to cleanse our lives by taking heed to God’s Word and applying it. Today’s verse teaches us to take this one step further. Not only should we read God’s Word to grow in righteousness, we should also memorise it. The Psalmist proclaims, “*Thy Word have I hid in my heart*”, showing that he also makes it a point to commit God’s Word to memory. He hides it like a treasure in his heart so that God’s commandments and promises are always with him.

How does that help us to keep from sin? Often when we are confronted with temptation, we may not have our Bible with us. We may vaguely remember a Bible verse that may help to counter the temptation before us but its weak memory can only put up a half-hearted defence against falling into sin. If we had memorised Scripture, we can easily remember it and use it in defence against the devil. We will be able to counter Satan’s attacks like our Lord Jesus did in Matthew 4:1-11. He answered every one of Satan’s temptations with God’s Word and was victorious over sin.

Let us challenge ourselves to memorise Bible verses regularly during our Quiet Time. Sometimes by reading the same portion of Scripture repeatedly over a few days, you may be able to commit it to memory. You can also choose certain memory verses that you find useful in your time of temptation or despair. You can choose to record the verses that you have memorised in a notebook. Good verses to memorise would also be those pertaining to salvation so that you can readily use them to answer unbelievers when they have questions about your faith (1 Peter 3:15). At first, it may seem difficult and even tedious to memorise verses but persevere and ask God for help. You will definitely find that the rewards are well worth the effort.

Thought: Memorise Psalm 119:11. Make it a habit. Start today!

Prayer: Lord, grant me the discipline and ability to commit Thy Word to memory. Help me to see that Thy Word is precious treasure that I should hide in my heart.

HOW CAN I DO QUIET TIME? (IV)

The Psalmist loves God's Word. It is a treasure in his heart that gives him immense joy that is not found in this world. In Psalm 119:14 and 16, we see how he has *"rejoiced in the way of [God's] testimonies"* and how he will *"delight [himself] in God's statutes"*. Does God's Word give you as much joy and excitement as it gives the Psalmist? And if not, can you then recall anything that might elicit such an enthusiastic response from you? I am sure some readers might have difficulty even thinking of that, let alone God's Word.

How does the Psalmist love God's Word so much? In verse 15, we find that the Psalmist does not merely read and memorise God's Word, he also meditates on it. To meditate on something means to give much thought about it. It is to turn it around in your mind and truly ponder in depth its meaning and what you might learn from it. Meditation is not the New Age idea of emptying your mind. This is in fact very dangerous as an empty mind is ready ground for evil thoughts and influences that the devil is only too happy to plant. Therefore, we must be sure that we have the right idea of what meditating on God's Word means

By meditating on it, the Psalmist is able to understand God's Word more deeply. He begins to grasp certain truths that may not be so apparent with just superficial reading. God's Word is full of rich truths and precious promises for us. It is no wonder that the Psalmist loves and respects God's Word so much.

The Psalmist's immense love and delight in God's Word is not something alien or unattainable to us. We must see His Word as a treasure trove of wisdom and comfort, and start digging deep into it by spending more time considering and pondering the passages we read during our Quiet Time. By meditating on God's Word more, we will begin to love it more and more.

Thought: *"And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes."* (Psalm 119:47-48)

Prayer: Help me O Lord to love Thy Word more and more each day!

IS THERE A BEST TIME TO DO QUIET TIME?

God does not live in time and space. He does not wake in the morning, work when the sun is up and go to sleep at night like us. Christ said, “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work*” (John 5:17). He is always working. His ear is always ready to listen and His hand to strengthen us at any time of the day.

David affirms this in his Psalm. David is desperately crying out to God as his enemies sought his life and his friends betrayed him (verses 12-14). Many commentators feel that this betrayer is Ahithophel, his counsellor who joined David’s son Absalom in rebellion against David. Imagine how David felt as he was on the run and in perpetual danger (verse 5). However, although he wished so much to “*fly away*” like a dove (verse 6), he drew strength from what he knew about God, that if he called upon Him, God will save him (verse 16). He also knew that no matter what time of the day he sought God, whether “*evening, and morning, and at noon*”, God will hear him. God does not sleep. He is ever near, just a prayer away.

Therefore, does it matter then what time you do your quiet time? Does it matter when you seek God? Some people may say that first thing in the morning before you start your day is the best time and there is no denying that there is much to be gained if you begin each day with God. However, if you are always rushing in the morning and rushing through your Quiet Time, it might be better to find another time of the day to do it. Some people prefer having their Quiet Time just before bed because they have wound down from their busy day and feel that their heart is most ready to read God’s Word then. Yet some people are so tired from the day that they fall asleep halfway through reading God’s Word. You need to decide which time of the day is best for you and make it part of your routine. What is most important is that you do it daily and that it is a truly “quiet” time that you can hide away from the world, and focus on reading God’s Word and praying to Him.

Thought: “*Evening, and morning, and at noon*”, God will hear us. Instead of just choosing one of these times, how about communing with Him all the time!

Prayer: Lord, thank Thee for being ever near to me no matter what time of the day it is. Please grant me the wisdom and discipline to know when the best time of the day to do Quiet Time is.

HOW IS SERVING GOD RELATED TO SEEKING HIM?

Thus far, we have considered what it means to seek God, and various aspects in our journey of seeking after God, such as prayer and Quiet Time. For the next couple of days, we will consider yet another aspect of seeking God: service.

In today's reading, in Deuteronomy 10:12, we read of 4 main instructions that Moses gave to the Israelites, as part of a sermon that he preached to them right before they entered the Promised Land. As God's chosen people, they were to make sure that they were living righteous and holy lives before God. They were to fear God, love Him, and walk in all His ways. But it doesn't stop here. A practical manifestation of their desire to seek after God would be in their service towards Him. Hence, they were commanded also to *“serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul”*. They were to devote themselves wholeheartedly and entirely to His service, not sparing any effort to advance the kingdom of God and to be used in any way possible in His work.

Service is hence one of the marks of a person who truly seeks after God. If we know what God has done for us in our lives, we would love Him. A true expression of that love for God would naturally be a desire to serve Him!

Dear teen, if you are serious and sincere in your desire to seek after God, you would naturally desire also to be used in His service, to spend and be spent for Him. Spending time on the Lord's work will be viewed not as a chore or an obligation, but as a great joy and privilege. To be with God's people, labouring for God's people, for the sake of our Lord – truly what great pleasure and joy that ought to bring!

Thought: Do I desire to serve God?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to serve.

BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY OTHER GODS, DO I?

What image does the word “idol” conjure in your head? Perhaps you would imagine a bronze-coloured figurine of a round-bellied man, sitting cross-legged and laughing heartily. Or perhaps you might remember the golden calf from Sunday school stories, of the idol that the Israelites worshipped at the foot of Mt Sinai.

Interestingly enough, if you do a Google image search of the word “idol”, what comes up is rather different. Images of various pop stars, movie stars, celebrities etc fill the screen; in particular, hundreds of images relate to the popular reality show “American Idol”. What does this tell you? Simply this – that idols are not limited to those little bronze or wooden figurines that you find in temples and that superstitious people bow down to. As today’s passage tells us, an idol is basically anything that you serve, worship or adore in place of God. That is why, in the Second Commandment, we are commanded not only to not bow down to false gods, but also to not serve any other god besides the LORD our God.

Dear teen, do you find yourself serving something or someone else more than you serve God? That thing or person has become the other god in your life that has robbed God of His rightful #1 place in your life. And remember, our God is a jealous God. We are His creation; therefore He has an intense hatred for anything that replaces Him in our hearts. Idolatry is hence something that displeases God greatly.

Is there a movie star or singer that you idolize? Are you spending so much time on studies or other activities that you neglect God? Do you have a hobby that consumes your every waking thought? Dear teen, may you thus set aside any of these other gods which you may be serving in your life right now, and commit your life fully to serving God alone.

Thought: Am I serving another god?

Prayer: Lord, rid my life of all idols and help me to serve Thee only.

DOES IT MATTER IF I DON'T SERVE GOD?

What is the nicest thing that someone has ever done for you? Perhaps your computer crashed and you lost all your notes the night before an important examination, and your friend offered to share his notes with you. How did you feel about it? Surely you would have felt a deep sense of gratitude, and will certainly repay the favour if opportunity arises.

To the Israelites, what God had done for them is far beyond human imagination. In verses 1-13 of Joshua 24, Joshua reminded the people of the great things that God had done for His people, from the time of Abraham's call all the way to the deliverance of the Israelites into the Promised Land. In essence, this was a recap of God's wondrous and providential work throughout the history of the people of Israel thus far. And in verse 14, Joshua tells the people how they should respond – they were *“therefore”* to fear and serve the LORD. Seeing how God had so miraculously and powerfully brought them through multiple trials, surely this was the absolute least that they could do, in gratitude and love towards the Almighty God. The command to serve is also repeated twice, perhaps as a double reminder that they were to serve *“in sincerity and in truth”*, and also that they should serve God alone and not any other gods and idols.

Dear teen, what has God done in your life that demands a similar response of fear and service towards Him? Has He not sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross for you? Has He not forgiven you of your sins? Has He not called you to be His child? Has He not promised you a place in heaven? Has He not granted you eternal life? Has He not granted you grace for every trial, strength for every temptation? How, then, can you not give your life to Him, to serve Him with whatever time and talents you have?

Thought: God has done so much for me – what have I done for Him?

Prayer: Lord, help me to serve Thee with all my heart, soul, strength and mind!

WHY IS MOTIVE CRITICAL IN SERVICE?

Having the right motive in my service to God is one of the greatest struggles which I personally face. Even though I might appear on the outside to be serving actively and fervently, what matters is the inner motives of my heart. Am I serving for the right motives? Or am I serving for ulterior, selfish, sinful motives?

In today's reading, Paul speaks of the Day of Judgment which all believers will have to go through. The judgment which we will all have to face concerns our works, for *“every man's work shall be made manifest”*. What will be examined by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself will be the works that we have done while on earth, purportedly in His name. Only the *“gold, silver, precious stones”* (verse 12) will survive the trial by fire, while the *“wood, hay, stubble”* will all be burnt up.

This is why your motives in service are so critical. Service that is rendered to God out of a pure heart will be accepted by Him, and He will reward accordingly (verse 14). However, service that is done for the wrong motives will amount to an absolute zero in God's eyes. Though your salvation and your place in heaven is still secure, it will be as if you have gone through your entire life without having accomplished a single thing for God. How ashamed and miserable it would be to come to God empty-handed!

Dear teen, never forget that God sees every motive of our heart. What matters most is not the outward acts of service which we do and are seen by men, but the motive behind these acts that only God sees.

Thought: Why do I serve?

Prayer: Lord, help me to serve Thee with the right motives.

HOW COULD MY MOTIVES BE WRONG?

I remember a rebuke that I once received for being too self-conscious. A brother told me that this stemmed from the sin of pride and being a men-pleaser. For example, by refusing to lead in singspiration because I was “scared” or “shy”, I was actually worrying more about how I looked in the eyes of others, and not focusing on how I could bring glory to God by serving Him. I was afraid that I would embarrass myself in front of others, and so gave up an opportunity to serve and glorify God.

In today’s reading, Paul reminds us to remember that all our service should be done *“as to the Lord, and not to men”*. How absurd to focus so much on what others think and perceive, when the One we are serving is *“God, which trieth our hearts”* (1 Thessalonians 2:4). God is the One who knows our hidden motives, and who will ultimately reveal them in the last day. Yet, so often, we find ourselves falling into this very sin. We serve to please others or ourselves, rather than to please God. We serve only at our own convenience, rather than giving all our time and energy to God. We worry so much about what others think of us, forgetting to even consider how we appear in God’s eyes. We strive to make sure that others are impressed by our service, when in fact God is not in the least pleased.

Dear teen, have you been serving with the right motives? The next time you are given a chance to serve, ask yourself: Am I truly doing this *“as to the Lord”*? Or are there ulterior motives? Am I trying to impress someone else? Would I still serve even if not a single person notices or appreciates me? Conversely, if you reject an opportunity to serve, ask yourself: What is preventing me from service? Am I worried about what others will think about me? Is it because it is not “glamorous” enough?

Thought: We serve only to please God, not men.

Prayer: Lord, help me never to be a men-pleaser, but only a God-pleaser!

WHAT SHOULD COMPEL US TO SERVE THEN?

It is not always easy to remain faithful in service. The little Sunday School kids might appear cute the first few times you see them, but when they start crying and screaming non-stop, you might start to have second thoughts. It might be exciting to start the year as a leader in your fellowship group, full of ideas and initiatives, but somewhere along the line you may be discouraged when you see no one responding well. It is in times like these that we consider what our motives for service are, and whether these are pure enough to endure and to keep us going.

To the Apostle Paul, he was always clear about his own reasons for service. The Corinthians were not an easy congregation to care for – there were some troublemakers in their midst who accused Paul of many things falsely. They accused him of being, among other things, untrustworthy, fickle-minded, proud and dishonest. They even accused him of being mentally unstable (2 Corinthians 5:13)! Any other person with less-than-pure motives would surely have taken the accusations personally, and would have turned his back on them. Yet, Paul remained loving and caring, taking the time to rebuke them for their sins and to bring them back to God. What was his secret? Simply this – that *"the love of Christ constraineth us"*. Because of the great love which Christ showed in dying on the cross for our sins, Paul was able to show the same unconditional love to others, even to those who had wronged him. No matter how difficult the circumstances were, his zeal and earnestness for the Lord's work remained. At the same time, this also meant that he was not worried about what others thought about him. He was not there to impress others or to show off his own abilities. He served out of love for Christ.

Dear teen, are you motivated to serve by this same love? Would you be willing to serve in any area, no matter how tough? Or are you only motivated by ulterior motives? May you examine yourself, and consider whether or not you can truly say that you, too, are constrained by the love of Christ.

Thought: Does the love of Christ constrain me?

Prayer: Lord, I confess, Your will is all I need, I'll follow where You lead, compelled by love.

BUT WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE TIME TO SERVE?

I recall a recent sharing from one of the Elders in our church. Though the church is so big in terms of membership, yet the Church Session is so disproportionately small – despite multiple calls and pleas for more to step up and serve God, few are willing to respond. Many give the reason that they are too busy to commit. To this, the Elder said, “Do you think those of us who are in the Session are so free, that we have nothing else better to do, and so we decide to serve?” Of course not!

Time is something that all of us have in equal portions – 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Yet, why is it that some are able to serve the Lord so abundantly and fervently, while others claim that they have no time at all to spare? Ultimately, lack of time is merely an excuse. The real reason lies in today's passage. People do not serve not because they do not have enough time, but because they do not make enough time. Rather than choosing to set aside time to serve God, they choose instead to spend their time pursuing the things of the world. But the Bible makes it very clear to us that *“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”*. “Mammon” here can refer to wealth and money, and by application, it refers also basically to any idol that takes the place of God. As a student, your *“mammon”* could refer to your grades, a prestigious scholarship, or a successful future career. While it is certainly not wrong to want to study hard and to do well in school, it can become sinful when you start to place your studies above God. Your *“mammon”* could also be your leisure activities – obviously if you are spending 5 hours a day playing computer games or playing sports, surely there would be no time left to serve God!

Dear teen, if you currently think that you have no time to serve God, ask yourself: Why is this so? Is it because you truly do not have a single moment to spare? Or is it because you are spending all your time on something else? Is there any activity that you can spend less time on, so that you will have more time for God?

Thought: Is God my Master? Or mammon?

Prayer: Lord, help me to set my priorities right.

CAN I SKIP WORSHIP SERVICE TO SERVE GOD?

Recently, I was given the privilege of serving on the camp committee at a youth camp. Before as well as during camp, there were so many countless things to take care of. Rather than looking forward to camp, I found myself starting to dread it because of the many tasks that I would have to handle during camp. This account in today's reading came to mind, though, and I was reminded that, while I was at camp to serve, I was at camp to learn from God's Word, too. Rather than being caught up in all the duties and tasks, I should also focus on the messages and make sure that I myself would benefit and be fed spiritually.

In today's passage, we read of 2 sisters, Martha and Mary, who had the great privilege of having Jesus as a guest at their house. While Mary “*sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word*” (verse 39), Martha was “*cumbered about much serving*” (verse 40). The word “*cumbered*” here has the idea of being distracted by cares and worries. In her bid to be a good hostess to Jesus and to serve Him well, she neglected to pay attention to that one needful thing (verse 41) – that is to feed herself spiritually from the Word of God. Though it should be a great joy to play host to Jesus and to serve Him, she became “*careful and troubled*” – anxious, worried and disturbed by the many physical tasks and preparations she had before her.

Dear teen, have you been a Martha? While service is definitely important and something that every Christian should be involved in (as we have learnt over the past couple of days), it should not be at the expense of our own spiritual health. Perhaps if you are serving in the Sunday School ministry, you may have to miss the sermon at the morning worship service once a month; but you definitely should not be skipping it every week! For if you are not spiritually fed, how then can you feed others? Similarly, while you might have to spend time during the week preparing lessons, this does not mean that you miss out on your own personal Quiet Time with God! Dear teen, may you never become so cumbered about with serving, that you miss out on that one needful thing.

Thought: Service should never be done at the expense of worship.

Prayer: Lord, help me never to neglect my walk with Thee.

“For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.”

WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL LIKE SERVING OTHERS?

Given the choice between spending a week helping out at a children's camp or on vacation at a holiday resort, I would, most of the time, choose the latter. In fact, given the choice between spending the week working on these RPG readings, or just enjoying my holidays and doing what I like to do, I might be tempted to choose the latter! Sadly, as human beings, our sinful nature would always cause us to have a me-first attitude. What do I enjoy doing? How would I like to spend my time? What can I do to have a fun time?

No greater example do we have than our Lord Jesus Christ. Though He was fully God, He was at the same time the “*Son of man*”, too – the Bible tells us that He could be “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities*”, and “*was in all points tempted like as we are*” (Hebrews 4:15). Did He succumb to the fleshly desires and temptations, though? No, not at all! He came into this world fully conscious of the horrors of the suffering and death that awaited Him. Yet, He never lost sight of His mission: “*not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*”. Though He was the Son of God, He did not expect to be served or ministered to while He was on earth. Instead, He “*took upon him the form of a servant*” (Philippians 2:7), labouring tirelessly night and day to preach the gospel and serve others. Even when He was rejected by many, He persevered in His ministry and never gave up. What great love, and what great humility! And His ultimate act of love was in how He gave “*his life a ransom for many*”. Was it easy? No! Was it painful and agonizing? Yes! But did He still do it? Of course!

If Jesus had not died for us on the cross, would we be able to enjoy salvation grace? Dear teen, can you still say, then, that you do not feel like serving others? Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, gave up heaven's glory in order that He might die on the cross for our sins, to save wretched sinners like you and me! If He could do so much for you, is it not the least you can do to serve others?

Thought: “I gave, I gave, My life for thee; what hast thou given for Me?”

Prayer: Lord, help me to love and serve others with the same love You have for me!

WHERE SHOULD I SERVE GOD?

As a teen, you may sometimes think that service is only for those who are older or more mature. Yet, as we have learnt over the past couple of days, service is for every single Christian!

As today’s passage teaches us, what differs between Christians is not whether or not we are given gifts to be used in God’s service, but rather what these gifts are. The gifts that each of us have differ *“according to the grace that is given to us”*. This means that, whatever gifts we have been given, this is all by the grace of God. Hence, if you think that you have many different gifts, don’t be proud! It is only through the grace of God that He has given you these gifts, that you may use them to serve Him for His glory. And if you think that you have no talents at all, don’t think that way! Every believer has been given at least one gift, again by the grace and sovereignty of God, that you may be able to serve Him in your own small way.

Where, then, should you serve God? First and foremost, you can serve by being the best child you can be to your parents, the best sibling to your brothers and sisters, and the best student you can be in school. Honour your father and mother, be loving and kind to your siblings, and study hard so that you can glorify God through your testimony in school.

In church, there are countless ministries and areas in which you can serve. Are you good with children? The Sunday School ministry may be for you. Are you passionate about books? You can help out in the bookroom and the church library. Do you have a burden for souls or people in need? The tracting and visitation ministries always welcome more to join. Can you communicate well with old folks? Volunteer to help out in the Golden Years Fellowship, and join the teens for the monthly visits to the Old Folks home! The list goes on – what you have to do, then, is to pray about it, ask God to show you where your gifts lie and where He wants you to serve. Work on improving these gifts, and find out where you can be of use to God!

Thought: What gifts have God given to me?

Prayer: Lord, show me where I can serve Thee!

WHAT DOES WORSHIP MEAN?

To worship means to hold in the highest regard, to honour, praise and glorify. While the world worships many things other than God, the Bible tells us that it is God alone who is worthy of worship. To do otherwise would be idolatry (Read Revelation 4:11 and Exodus 20:3-5). Thus we see the Psalmist cry out: *“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name”*. When we worship God, we acknowledge that He is indeed the great all-wise, all-powerful God who is worthy of worship, and the least we can do is to give Him all the glory that is due to His name.

True worship is not an activity which simply involves observing certain practices in a ritualistic manner. Rather, external activities must reflect the actual inner condition of the worshipper. Therefore, it involves the worshipper’s entire being, that is, his body, heart, mind and soul. Furthermore, it is impossible to worship God in a way which is pleasing to Him if it is not done out of a deep reverential love for God. Indeed, Mark 12:30 tells us to *“love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”*.

It is all too easy to be influenced by the false religious practices of other faiths and place too much importance on the external aspects of various religious activities. Even worse, some churches have *“contemporary worship services”* where the stimulation of the worshippers’ carnal senses is of greater importance than pleasing God with reverential worship. The Bible teaches us that it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). This means that everything we do for God can be pleasing to Him only if it is done with the right heart condition, and this includes worship.

While having a better understanding of God’s Word, church service and fellowship with other believers are all important aspects of our church life, we should be mindful that God alone should be the supreme object of our focus and adoration during worship. Let us therefore worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Thought: What should I do if I am having difficulty approaching God with the right heart condition during worship service?

Prayer: Help me, O Lord, that I may come to Thy throne of grace with clean hands and a pure heart.

WHY MUST I ONLY WORSHIP GOD?

When a person is jealous it can mean that he is resentful of what someone else has. This comes about because he feels that something good has gone to someone less deserving than himself, and he should rightfully be the one who enjoys that particular benefit. Jealousy can also apply, rightly or wrongly, to a situation when more attention is given to someone else other than himself.

Exodus 34:14 describes God as a jealous God. Although the same word is used, the way that it describes God here is vastly different from what we are familiar with. God, the Creator of all, owns everything and has no reason to resent anyone for the blessings that He freely gives (and can take away). However, because God is righteous, He will not tolerate the sin of idolatry whereby worship is given to anything other than Himself. He alone is worthy to receive our worship because He is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour and Judge of the universe, and beside Him there is none other (Isaiah 45:18, 22).

It would be strange that a husband has no reaction to his wife flirting with another man. We would expect that he would have feelings of anger and betrayal in response to this, and he would be right to feel this way. Likewise, God's jealousy is the kind of righteous jealousy that one should expect as a reaction to man's unfaithfulness towards Him. God alone is worthy of worship simply because of who He is, and also because the Bible commands us to worship only Him.

There are such things as idols in the heart. These idols may not be things that are outwardly sinful. They can sometimes even appear to be virtuous such as being diligent at work or studies. However, even something like this can unknowingly displace God from His rightful place in our hearts, yet the outward manifestations of idolatry may not be obvious. We are to guard ourselves against this.

Thought: Even as I strive to do my best in everything, I must always ensure that I am striving for God's glory and not my own.

Prayer: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my Redeemer.

WHAT MUST MY ATTITUDE BE IN WORSHIP?

Just as there are idols of the heart, there is also such a thing called the attitude of the heart, or heart condition. The attitude of the heart is something that only the worshipper and the Lord will be able to discern. Luke 18:10-14 gives us a very simple yet graphic illustration of what Jesus considers to be acceptable and what is unacceptable when worshipping God. To come to God in a proud and self-righteous manner will only invoke God's displeasure. However, to come to God with a broken and contrite heart is pleasing to Him.

This is not to say that we must take self abasement to the extreme and shy away from God, but rather, we have to approach Him while acknowledging in our hearts that we are unworthy people who look to Him alone for our needs. In fact, Hebrews 4:16 tells us to *“come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need”*, and indeed, we can all approach God in prayer and worship with the confidence that He will receive us as His children because we do so in the name of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our justification.

Although having a right inward attitude during worship is not something that can readily be seen outwardly, there definitely are certain outward attitudes or postures which are incompatible with approaching God in a reverential manner during worship. Carnal and provocative dressing, adopting a casual and disrespectful posture, eating, drinking, laughing and getting distracted during worship and prayer are unacceptable. If we know who God really is and what we are before Him, we should have no trouble understanding the need for both inward and outward reverence during worship.

How often have we really thought about what goes through our hearts and minds during worship? Do we come to church joyfully because we have had a good week only to appear in church next week angry and resentful because we had a bad week? If this is the case then we have allowed the cares of the world to displace God from His rightful position in our hearts.

Thought: Thinking that I lack nothing, I have everything to lose. Knowing that I am needy, I have everything to gain.

Prayer: Help me see, O Lord, my need for Thee and keep me from pride that I may enjoy the riches of Thy grace forever more.

WHAT IS THE PLACE OF GOD’S WORD IN WORSHIP?

God’s Word is central to proper Christian worship. So important is God’s Word in worship that everything that is done during worship must be consistent with Biblical instruction, and nothing must be done outside of this. This refers to both personal worship as well as corporate worship which includes worship service on the Sabbath day. Worship service consists of various activities such as the singing of hymns and spiritual songs, the giving of tithes, prayer, the faithful exposition of God’s Word and perhaps other special items during certain occasions. Some of us may enjoy certain parts of the service more than others, but there must be earnest participation in every aspect of the worship service and not just one or a few parts of it in order to make our worship complete.

Those of us who are more musically inclined may be tempted to pay more attention only when there is singing involved. Likewise, those of us who enjoy hearing messages may only give our undivided attention when the pastor delivers the sermon. However, every component of worship is equally important, and everything done during worship must praise and glorify God. It therefore follows that we are to be fervently involved throughout every part of the worship service from beginning to end. When we say that God’s Word is central to proper worship, it does not mean that the sermon is the most important, and we can pay less attention to the other parts of the worship.

Done rightly, every part of the worship service ought to magnify God and His Word, for we do all things according to God’s written revelation to us. The prayers that we pray and the hymns that we sing all take root from our understanding of Scripture. That is why when David ponders on the topic of worship, he praises God for His truth, and proclaims that God has magnified His word above even His name! What the Psalmist means here is God’s revelations to man ought to be so highly esteemed, for it is able to teach and guide man, even more than the revelation of God’s name to us can.

Thought: If I truly love God, I must do as He commands through His Word, even in matters of worship.

Prayer: Grant me the grace, O Lord, to live by Thy every word.

WHAT IS THE LORD’S HOLY TEMPLE?

The Lord’s Holy Temple as mentioned in Habakkuk 2:20 refers to His heavenly abode where the throne of God is found. It is not a physical place but a spiritual one. Decades ago some NASA astronauts went into space thinking that they might be able to behold the glory of heaven by physically ascending “heavenward” as it were. In their arrogance and unbelief, they concluded afterwards that heaven does not exist because they did not see it while they were in outer space. Of course this is not surprising since heaven is a spiritual realm and not a physical one.

In Isaiah 6:5, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed after God gave him a vision of His own glory, *“...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts”*. Had the astronauts been truly able to behold the glory of God and the heavenly place their reaction would have undoubtedly been the same. This is because man’s utterly wicked and depraved condition becomes glaringly obvious next to God’s infinite and perfect holiness. The truth of this situation would strike so hard that any man would react the way Isaiah did: *“Woe is me, I am undone!”*

That is why when we understand what it means for God to be in his holy temple, reigning from on high, seated upon his heavenly throne, our response must be one of reverential awe and worship. God is sovereign over all things, and is an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present God. He is not like the ‘dumb idols’ that cannot do anything, and do not even have breath within them. No, God is the great Almighty God who is in control of all things. Thus when we begin each worship service with the singing of ‘The Lord is in His Holy Temple’, we are in effect acknowledging the sovereign presence of God, and that will set us in the right frame of mind to come before Him in holy worship. We quieten our hearts, as we ponder on the greatness of God, and seek to glorify Him through our sincere heartfelt worship.

Thought: Am I waiting expectantly and joyfully for the soon return of my King and Redeemer Jesus that I may behold His glory?

Prayer: Keep me safe, sanctified and fervent in Your affairs, O Lord, that I will not be found wanting upon Your return.

CAN'T I WORSHIP GOD IN THE WAY I WANT?

When Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's two elder sons, offered “*strange fire*” before the Lord, they did it their own way. Today's passage shows us the serious consequences of worshipping God in any way we like, and not obeying His instructions.

By our subjective standards, we may think that their transgression was quite small, and should not be regarded as very serious. After all, there had only taken some small liberties with the manner of worship, adding in some extra elements which were not commanded by God. While this may seem trivial and excusable in the eyes of men, it was a grave transgression in the eyes of God! The fact that they were struck dead immediately, shows that trifling with the worship of God is no small sin. God had already given them clear guidelines as to how He was to be worshipped. Through their reckless and thoughtless actions, Nadab and Abihu had shown a clear disregard for the proper worship of God, and therefore had to face the consequences of their sin.

The above brings to mind another O.T. character by the name of Uzzah who was struck dead by God for reaching out to prevent the ark from falling while it was being transported (2 Samuel 6:1-8). This was because God had commanded that no Levite was to lay a hand on the ark. Uzzah's intention was certainly sincere, but his act was displeasing to God all the same because it was done in error.

Worship is not subject to the whims and fancies of man, but to that which is prescribed in the Bible, and God wants us to worship Him sincerely and correctly at all times.

Many modern churches have worship services which are termed as “more contemporary” and this seems to appeal to the youth of today. They find the “old” style of worship monotonous and boring and the modern style of worship refreshing, lively and liberating. However, any style of worship is wrong if it is not based on biblical principles, and the “same old style” is the right style as long as it is biblically sound.

Thought: Am I in God's house to worship and please Him, or to “worship” Him and please myself?

Prayer: O Lord, Thou art a consuming fire and a respecter of no man. Teach me how I ought to approach Thee in reverence.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT WAY OF WORSHIP THEN?

Jesus tells us to worship in spirit and in truth. Today we focus on the ‘truth’ aspect of worship, where we see there is a manner of worship that is stipulated in the truth of God’s Word. These are some regulative principles drawn from our understanding of God’s Word which must be applied to the way we worship God.

Firstly, we must acknowledge God as the supreme object of worship. Every item of worship must bring the worshipper closer to God without itself becoming a distraction. Contemporary music, ecstatic utterances, wild movements and exotic gestures cannot but keep us from meditating on God’s awesome splendour. This means that worship must be orderly, sober, purposeful and done for His glory while reflecting His perfection. Secondly, our thoughts of God must be expressed to Him in a joyous yet solemn and dignified manner rather than in a frivolous way. We can see this, for example, when we see that commoners behave in a controlled fashion when they meet someone of great importance, such as their political Queen, even though they may be swelling with joy in their hearts. How much more so, then, before the Creator and Lord of all? Thirdly, worship must be Word-centred. Sound doctrines must be preached. Hymns which reinforce the truth of God’s Word must be sung. These serve to edify believers and help them grow spiritually. Fourthly, worshippers must dress and behave appropriately. They should be presentable, modest, calm and orderly. Finally, we must have the right inward attitude during worship. God is pleased when we approach Him with clean hands and pure hearts, therefore we must make sure that we do not have any unconfessed sins. We must be humble, meek and contrite yet be joyful and filled with gratitude not just for God’s blessings but also for the tremendous privilege of sweet fellowship with Him through worship and prayer.

Dear teen, are these evident in the manner in which you worship God?

Thought: Do I enjoy the same faithful and sound worship service in church week after week or secretly yearn for something different?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your way is always the best way and I thank You for showing me how I ought to worship You.

WHY MUST I GIVE OFFERINGS IN WORSHIP?

Genesis 14 gives us an account of Abram giving a tenth of all his spoils to Melchizedek after defeating the 5 kings of Canaan (Genesis 14:20). Melchizedek was God’s high priest and therefore His representative. The giving of tithes by Abram (later known as Abraham) to Melchizedek was in fact Abram giving to God through Melchizedek and sets the example for us to follow in our giving of offerings in worship. Simply put, our worship to God is incomplete if we approach Him with empty hands. David understood that such giving is certainly part of worship, for when we bring an offering, we are giving unto the LORD the glory due unto His name, and worshipping Him in the beauty of holiness (1 Chronicles 16:29).

Giving of a portion of our increase back to God is not only necessary in worship, the manner in which we give it is also important. 2 Corinthians 9:7 tells us, *“Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver”*. We are to give willingly, cheerfully and wholeheartedly with no selfish thoughts of God returning us any favours and no motive other than to do so out of gratitude and love.

God does not demand exorbitant offerings. Even the widow pleased the Lord with her 2 mites for it was all she had (Luke 21:2-4). Returning to Him a tenth of our increase without being anxious about whether we have sufficient funds for our own needs is evidence of our faith in His sufficiency to meet our needs. This also helps us not to focus too much on “our own” resources and abilities lest we begin to place our faith in these things rather than in Him alone.

Just like every other item of worship, the giving of tithes is an outward manifestation of an inward faith in God and of gratitude to Him. We do not give to atone for our sins. Also, because God owns everything, even that which we give to Him are His to begin with, so rather than seeing the offerings as a burden, we should consider it a privilege to be allowed to use our God-given resources in this manner.

Thought: All that I have is from God, yet giving back to Him what is rightfully His in the first place pleases Him.

Prayer: O Lord, thank You for the great privilege of allowing us to show forth our gratitude through our offerings.

WHY MUST I SING DURING WORSHIP?

A pastor once noted that with all the singing that pop and rock stars were doing, it was all but vain noise, and Christians are really the only ones who have anything to sing about. Thinking about what the world is concerned with, and where the world is heading, and what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, we realise that this is indeed a most astute observation. What does the world sing about apart from romantic love, selfish desires, lust, pride, fornication and other godless sentiments? Even the most wholesome secular songs are about things that are transient, fleeting and superficial, for the Bible tells us that the world is reserved for destruction by fire.

Hymns and spiritual songs, however, are altogether different and are centred upon the eternal, heavenly and godly things. There are songs of praise to God and the Lord Jesus, of comfort in times of adversity, of joy in salvation and of things to come for those who have been redeemed. The themes of such hymns ought to cause us to rejoice so much that we cannot help but break into song out of sheer delight in the Lord! As the Psalmist triumphantly cries out in Psalm 9:11, we ought to *“sing praises to the LORD... declare among the people his doings”*, Sadly, we oftentimes sing with such lifeless dread and monotony, and seem to have a rather apathetic response to God’s wonderful doings in our lives.

If we are to be living sacrifices for God and desire to love Him with all our heart, mind and strength then it follows that we are to glorify God through every possible means as prescribed in the Bible. Undoubtedly, this includes singing, so rather than to merely sing unto God because we must, let us also sing unto Him because we want to.

Every child of God has talents and spiritual gifts which he can use to glorify God. It does not matter to God that not all of us are tenors or sopranos, but it does matter that we do whatever is within our abilities to praise and worship Him. If we are able to use our voices to this end, then praise God for it!

Thought: I may not be able to sing very well, but as long as I am able to I shall sing from the heart and please God in so doing.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, that we may be able to lift our voices heavenward unto Thee as an offering that is pleasing to Thee.

CAN'T I WORSHIP FROM HOME?

In Psalm 27:4, David yearns to dwell in the Lord's house forever. Here he refers to his eternal dwelling place in heaven with God. Right here on earth, Christians can actually begin to partake of this heavenly joy in some small measure by worshipping in church. Going to church for worship serves to remind us sinful and fallen people of the glories of heaven and to immerse ourselves in praise and worship together with other members of God's eternal family. In this manner, we can encourage each other in the faith and to spur each other on in our co-labouring for the Lord. This would not be possible if we chose to stay at home on the Lord's Day. But can we worship from home?

Ideally, Lord's Day worship should take place in the Lord's house, which is the local church, together with other believers after the pattern set for us in the N. T. when Jesus' disciples gathered for worship on the first day of every week after Jesus' resurrection (Acts 20:7). The key point to note is that it is not about the actual physical location of the meeting (for there are churches that meet in people's homes), but it is about the people that make up the church. God's instruction to His people was that they are not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). The purpose is so that we can come together to mutually encourage one another, and to provoke one another unto love and to good works. These things can only be accomplished when we gather together for the common purpose of worshipping and serving the Lord.

We often ask ourselves the wrong questions and end up frustrated because we do not get the answers we seek. Instead of asking whether we can or cannot worship from home, we are far better off asking what it would take to keep us from going to church on the Lord's Day for worship. Our response to this question will reveal the true condition of our relationship with the Lord.

Thought: If I look forward to vacations overseas here on earth, then shouldn't I look forward to having a foretaste of heaven every Lord's Day even more?

Prayer: Lord, help me to love Thee by loving to come to Thy House to worship Thee.

WHAT DO I DO DURING THE LORD’S SUPPER?

Today’s reading gives an account of Jesus teaching His disciples how they ought to commemorate His death on the cross the night He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, and this is what Christians continue to do today. However, participating in the Lord’s Supper is more than just an exercise in commemoration and remembrance; it is a sacrament that we ought to observe in obedience to Jesus and in the presence of His spirit.

The Roman Catholics believe that the bread and cup magically become Jesus’ actual flesh and blood. This is transubstantiation. The Lutherans, however, believe in consubstantiation whereby Jesus’ flesh and blood are present in, with and under the bread and wine. Some worshippers take the position of mere symbolic commemoration where believers gather to commemorate Jesus’ work on the cross. All these views of the Lord’s Supper are to be rejected.

While we are commanded to commemorate Jesus’ death on the cross, participating in the Lord’s Supper is a spiritual exercise rather than an intellectual or even an emotional one, and this is done in the spiritual presence of Christ. Those who participate in it must do so prayerfully and with deep reverence, failing which sickness, or even death may ensue (1 Corinthians 11:30). This means that the very same attitude we take during worship whereby we must have no unconfessed sin, no ulterior motive and no distraction also applies here.

When we talk about a departed person that we have high regard for, we do so respectfully. We would not speak ill of such a person in public even though he was never perfect and had his flaws. We should therefore participate in the Lord’s Supper with an even greater reverence, knowing that Jesus, unlike other mere humans, was perfectly sinless and yet He willingly laid His life down at the cross for our transgressions. When we keep the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded of his precious life which was given for our sins, and we look forward to the day of His return.

Thought: The Lord’s Supper draws me ever nearer to my Saviour in a world intent on denying His very existence.

Prayer: I thank You Lord for going to the cross for my sake out of love and not obligation. Help me to love You more and more each day in return.

WHY MUST I MEMORISE SCRIPTURE?

Physiologically the heart is a vital organ. The presence of a heartbeat indicates life. Figuratively, the heart is the centre of our being. It is where our feelings, thoughts, intellect and mind reside. In both senses, the heart is where life is. So who is this person described in verse 31 who has the law of his God in his heart? He is known as the righteous (verses 29-30). The law is in his heart because he knows it intimately. It is precious. There is nowhere else that he could but keep it. Nor is there anywhere else wherein placing it will have such power. The result is that none, not a single one of his steps shall slide. The Word of God will guide and keep each step that he takes. He will not slip and fall.

Consider how easy it is to slip or stumble when the ground is just a little slippery or uneven, or you are not paying attention to where you are going. When we slip, we fall and can get hurt. Even the possibility of slipping can fill us with fear. We walk gingerly and yet hesitantly and tentatively. That is why having God's Word is important, for it will be our guide as we tread through the journey of life.

This world is not our home, it is a foreign place. Therefore it is easy to get lost and lose your way. How easy is it to fall into sin? How easily do you become fearful when the path ahead appears dark and difficult? How often do you find yourself at a loss as to what to do? God promises to direct our steps, but they cannot be ordered by the LORD if you have little knowledge of Him and His divine revelation to you through His Word. Each step is important. When we have the law of God in our hearts we live with confidence in Him and boldness for Him. We walk sure-footed. Notice how easily a toddler falls over but not so an adult. Why is this so? Are you content to remain as a spiritual babe, knowing only a handful of verses by heart?

Can you really know something without remembering it? Memorizing Scripture should not be an academic exercise, but because God is your God. His law is precious and dear to your heart. His laws safeguard you from sliding along the dangerous, sinful and temptation fraught path as you travel heavenward.

Thought: What are the things that I know by heart?

Prayer: May I hide God's Word in my heart and not sin against Him (Psalm 119:11).

ISN'T JUST HAVING FAITH ENOUGH FOR ME TO GROW?

In John 2:19-21, Jesus spoke of the future - of the destruction of the temple, which He would raise up in three days. At that time the disciples did not understand what He meant. Upon His death and resurrection the disciples remembered what Jesus had told them. They also knew Scripture (which prophesied of Christ's death and resurrection - Psalm 16:8-11). When Jesus rose, this knowledge was changed to belief and understanding. It is because of this prior knowledge that they later understood what was happening and were strengthened and comforted in their faith though Jesus was no longer with them. His death and resurrection was appointed to be so. The Scriptures were true and what Jesus had said came to pass.

Christ did not call the disciples and then leave them on their own. One meeting or lesson was not sufficient for the disciples to know everything there was to know about Him. Christ spent much time teaching them and building up their faith, so that they would be able to continue His ministry when He was gone. Imagine if the disciples had scant knowledge of Old Testament Scripture or could not remember what Christ had said. Would they have enough understanding or wisdom to be able to serve God effectively? Would their faith have grown?

Without faith it is impossible to grow spiritually. But your faith, like anything that grows needs to be constantly nurtured and fed in order to flourish and bear fruit. Otherwise, it will languish and be sickly and unproductive. Whilst we know more than we necessarily understand or fully comprehend, this knowledge can later progress to understanding. Knowledge is the foundation of understanding and wisdom. When there are trials in life, how will you be comforted? How will you know what to do and not sin? Will you emerge from the trial a stronger and more mature Christian?

Thought: Do you even desire to grow? Or are you satisfied with your present state?

Prayer: RPG – Read His Word, Pray without ceasing; and Grow in grace and knowledge.

IS IT ENOUGH TO JUST RELY ON MY CONSCIENCE?

Paul exhorts Timothy to first hold on to his faith – the truths of the Word. Then, to have a good conscience which is based on and aligned with the Word of God. A good conscience stems from one's understanding of the Bible. It's not merely about sincerity. An ignorant albeit sincere conscience is not a good one in the eyes of the Lord. In fact, Paul warns Timothy that there were some who had put away their faith based consciences, and what resulted was a 'shipwreck' of their lives! They had veered off course, and this ended only in a tragic life of sin in bondage to Satan.

Our conscience is like an inbuilt detector, that small little voice that is sensitive to what is right and wrong. At best, it is our moral compass that guides us to do good and to shun evil. However, we must realize that it does not exist in isolation nor form on its own accord – it is subjected to and influenced by our relationships, environments and upbringing. It is also so easily corrupted and rationalised by our sinful heart. The conscience can be unreliable and changeable, fooling us into thinking that we are doing right when in fact we are not. Is your conscience on all matters the same as your friend's? Who is right then?

Therefore, you cannot rely on your conscience alone, but a conscience that is anchored in faith and in the truths of the Bible. As you study the Word more and grow as a Christian, your conscience will lead you to become ever more sensitive to sin. Do you find this the case? Reflect upon your growth as a Christian. Are there sins that you committed and did not think was wrong at the time, but now in the light of Scripture realise that they were actually so? And as you become more sensitive to sin, do you follow your conscience or act against it?

Thought: Why do you think King David did not recognise himself when Nathan told him the story of the rich man who stole from the poor man? (2 Samuel 12)

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

WHY MEMORISE WHEN I CAN REFER TO THE BIBLE?

Suffering is an inevitable part of life which affects both believers and unbelievers alike. The context of this verse is a Christian's response to suffering for righteousness' sake. He sanctifies – honours the LORD in his heart. Again this verse is a reference to the heart. Before he can sanctify the LORD outwardly, he must first do so in his heart, and he does this by his knowledge of Scripture. Then he will be ready to explain the hope which makes him happy instead of being afraid or troubled (verse 14). There are two aspects to his hope - present and eternal. The Bible explains the purposes of suffering and gives comfort for the present; and we have eternal hope in the assurance of our salvation.

A Christian reacts to suffering differently from an unbeliever. Unbelievers may scoff or be puzzled at your response to suffering for righteousness' sake. How do you react when you fail an examination for which you studied really hard? Or when a loved one dies? Or when you are dealt with unjustly? These apparent disappointments and sorrows are opportunities to witness to others of the glorious hope that you have in Christ. They will often arise in casual and impromptu conversations with others. When they do, we will not always have the luxury to first study God's Word before we can give an answer during these conversations. When you know Scripture, it will naturally and automatically pervade your conversation. Whilst you search your Bible be it hardcopy or electronic, the opportunity may then have passed.

So why memorise Scripture? Firstly, knowing Scripture is to honour the LORD in your heart – it will keep you from sin and on the path of righteousness. Secondly, it will equip you to always testify proactively for the LORD with meekness and fear, not just when you have a Bible on hand.

Thought: What verses do you know by heart explaining the purposes of Christian suffering for righteousness' sake?

Prayer: LORD, please remove the obstacles and excuses that prevent me from remembering Your Word.

JUN 5

Hebrews 4:12

Memorise Psalm 19:7-10

*“...man shall not live by bread alone
but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”*

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF MEMORISING SCRIPTURE?

The Bible may be an ancient book, but it is far from being an out dated and irrelevant one. The Word of God is described as “quick” because it is alive and active. It is also powerful and sharper than the sharpest of swords. Most knives we use have only one sharp side and one blunt side, but not so the Word of God. There is no blunt side. It is able to divide the soul and spirit – to see into the very hearts of man to discern the innermost thoughts and intents which are well concealed even from their own selves. It is so sharp it pierces right through the joints and going right through the marrow which is the deepest part of the bone. Do you know any other book or words penned by man like the Word of God that has the power to utterly transform lives and save souls out of the deadness of sin?

I recently bought a very sharp knife. It slices food with precision and ease. Memorising Scripture can be likened to keeping your knife sharp, and knowing how to use it properly and effectively. This will enable you to live a godly life, shining forth in a sinful world. Not committing Scripture to memory can be likened to having a blunt, dull and even rusty knife. Ah, you think, I am satisfied with my blunt, dull knife. After all it is better than nothing at all. I am comfortable with it. Alas, dear teen, you will not be able to sit complacently in your one corner and live out your life quietly as you will have to wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places! (Ephesians 6:12)

Over the last few days the devotions have spoken about the importance of memorising Scripture. Memorising scripture takes discipline and requires a plan. It will just not happen on its own. It will mean less time and room in our hearts and minds for other things. Are you willing to do this? Can you afford not to do it?

Thought: Am I as diligent studying God’s Word as I am in my studies at school?

Prayer: LORD, may I study to show myself approved unto You, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

WHY MUST I RESIST TEMPTATION?

The reason to resist sin should not be unfamiliar. Romans 6:23 tells us that the ‘wages’ given for sin is death. Sin is hideous and destructive. Although sin often yields initial pleasure, it’s ultimate destination for the sinner is death. Hence we have no doubt about why we should resist sin. However, why should we resist temptation as our title suggests? While we are to resist sin, do we also resist temptation? Is temptation something so sinister that we should play an active part in resisting it? 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that the devil is like a roaring lion, a fierce and angry beast, with strong destructive power. Just as a lion can crush and tear its victim, we too are defenceless if not for the restraining hand of God. And what does 1 Peter 5:8 say he is doing? He *“walketh about”*; this means he is active, not lazy; he is busy finding those he can destroy. This is who he is. He is not compassionate, he has no mercy, he is full of hatred and he desires to destroy you the first opportunity he gets and the way he does that is to tempt you. He cannot force you to commit sin, but he can entice and tempt you within the limits that God sets (1 Corinthians 10:13) – remember Job? If you recognize that our adversary the devil seeks to tempt us unto sin and destruction, wouldn’t you also agree that we should then be actively resisting temptation? The answer is “yes”.

If the adversary is strong and means us nothing but harm, we should then take every precaution to stay far away from anything that can cause us to sin. Never assume that you are strong enough to resist a temptation. Remember, the devil is far stronger and smarter than you. We mustn’t take any chances. We must remove anything that hints of temptation. If we can, we must stay away from places or situations where we know there will be temptation. By their lifestyles, some of our friends will unwittingly become a source of temptation. We may have to reconsider our activities with such friends and perhaps sacrifice friendship for holiness. Ladies, be careful of how you dress as you may become the source of temptation yourself and become used by the devil to lead a brother into sin. Remember that with God’s enabling, we can all resist temptation and sin. The choice is yours.

Thought: Is a mature Christian less vulnerable to sin?

Prayer: Lord, give me strength today to resist all manner of sin.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T RESIST TEMPTATION?

The story of how King David sinned against the Lord is well known. It is an example of how one person failed miserably at resisting temptation and the resulting consequences he had to suffer. As his army went forth to battle with the Ammonites, David decided to take a break from battle and stayed behind in his palace. In the evening, he lazily rose from bed, and from the palace roof top he caught sight of Bathsheba bathing. David succumbed to temptation, committed adultery, resulting ultimately in Bathsheba becoming pregnant with David's child. David could have owned up to his sin at this point. However, he succumbed to further temptation and tried to hide the truth. To do so, David committed murder by deliberately sending Uriah to the battle front where he was killed. David then took Bathsheba for his wife. At each turn of these events, David was tempted and he gave in to each and every temptation. He allowed himself to succumb to his lust for Bathsheba, he tried to hide the truth which resulted in lying and even murder. David was an example of one who did not resist temptation and succumbed to every sin. 2 Samuel 11:27 tells us that David's deeds greatly displeased the LORD. Although David eventually repented, he had to subsequently suffer the consequences of his sinful actions. The Lord took the child and in later years, David's family was marked by discord, rebellion and even death. Further down the road, Solomon, David's son, ended his reign in shame and the kingdom of Israel fell into sin and was eventually divided.

What David did was dreadful. But before we conclude that we ourselves could not possibly be capable of such sin, remember that David was described as 'a man after God's own heart', and yet he fell in such a manner. We too are capable of similar sin if we are not careful. We are no better than David, we are just as vulnerable if not more so. Do not imagine that there are no consequences of sin that result from temptation. This record of David is for us to learn that if we too succumb to temptation, we will suffer the consequences. We must be vigilant and sober with ourselves and resist sin at all cost.

Thought: Can we say we are better than David?

Prayer: Lord, please forgive me, a sinner.

DOES GOD JUST STAND BY AND WATCH US FALL?

When one reads today's title, a related question comes to mind; "why does God allow temptation to come our way?" Understanding why God allows temptation can help us also understand how He looks upon us when we undergo temptation. 1 Peter 1:7 tells us that the trial of our faith, is much more precious than gold. The purpose of trying our faith is to build it up. God brings tests into our lives and when we overcome each test, our faith takes another step in growth. It is a long and often painful process, but it is well worth it because faith is more precious than gold or silver. Hence, God has our good in mind when He allows temptations. It is meant to help us, not cause us harm. Today's bible verse tells us the temptations we face are "*common to man*"; meaning "*such as human nature is liable to, and has been often subjected to*" (Barnes). The passage continues by saying that "*God is faithful*"; God does not forsake us, but is instead watchful and continues to provide for us as we undergo trial. He does not allow testing to come needlessly. Nor does He leave us to our demise and destruction whenever we are tempted. Instead, we read that He plans with each temptation; a way of escape. Every temptation will be accompanied by a way for us to triumph over it. We need only to choose to take it. God does not allow temptation with no way of escape and then to watch us fail. Hence, every temptation we face is not a result of God forsaking us, but is instead evidence that He seeks to help us grow by His loving hand.

The trouble is, we often choose to succumb to temptation. We put up little to no fight when tempted. We do so little to stay away from anything that tempts us. And when we fall into sin, we suffer the consequences and end up murmuring against God as if it was His fault. That is our nature – sinful, wicked, and not willing to take responsibility for our actions. But God's Word tells us clearly that He is faithful. He does not forsake us and the good news is every temptation has a way of escape. Ask God for strength and the will to resist temptation and take the escape that God provides, and may you experience what it means by the victorious Christian life!

Thought: Why do we blame God for our own mistakes?

Prayer: Lord please help us weak and sinful creatures to resist every sin.

WHAT IS THE REWARD FOR ENDURING TEMPTATION?

Today's bible verse tells us that those who endure temptation and come forth triumphant will receive a *“crown of life”* from Christ. A similar promise is found in Revelation 2:10 when Christ said to John that those who suffer tribulation for His sake and are faithful will be given a *“crown of life”*. Various other passages also describe other crowns that believers can receive. 2 Timothy 4:8 describes a *“crown of righteousness”* given to all who *“love His appearing”*. 1 Corinthians 9:25 describes an *“incorruptible”* crown, meaning a crown that will never rust nor disintegrate but will last forever.

This crown is, however, not the same sort of worldly crown that the world is familiar with. The world works hard to attain worldly crowns. They put in extra hours, they suffer deprivation of rest and sleep and they work by the sweat of their brow to become bosses of big companies. This is a worldly crown. 1 Corinthians 9:25 tell us that such a crown is corruptible which means it will not last. Everything that is not done for the Lord will perish. When Christ's judgment fire comes, these will burn up and amount to absolutely nothing just like fire burning up wood, hay and stubble (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

The incorruptible crown is instead given to those who are faithful, whose faith is built through trials, temptations and affliction and the Word of God (1 Peter 1:7, Isaiah 48:10). When we finally get to heaven, we will truly understand the value of these crowns, for they will be the tribute of praise that we can render to God, as we prostrate before the throne of God and case our crowns before Him, just as the four and twenty elders do in Revelation 4:10.

Dear teen, do not invest your efforts to gain worldly crowns and rewards, instead seek after the crown that will never perish, seek after service for God and to walk faithfully for His sake.

Thought: If I appear before Christ today, how will I fair?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to pursue after heavenly things that really matter.

CAN WE BLAME GOD FOR TEMPTING US?

In the rebelliousness and evilness of the heart, we may sometimes blame God for the sins that we commit. We may think, “If God had not allowed me to be tempted, then I would not have sinned and would not be guilty”. Although it seems silly that one should blame another for his own misdeeds, yet, that is what we do. In so doing, we imply that we regard God as one who is wicked and sadistic and delights to watch us suffer. This is so very far from the truth and we conjure these vain ideas from the depravity of our hearts. We are to be blamed, no one else, for the sins we commit. James 1:13 is very clear in stating that God cannot be tempted and does not tempt anyone to sin. Verse 14 then tells us that it is a man’s own lust that draws him away into sin. Hence although a man is tempted, it is when he succumbs to his own lust that he commits sin. God is not to be blamed at all. Man is responsible for every aspect of his own sin. Further, we have learnt from 1 Corinthians 10:13 that all temptations can be resisted if we choose to do so. We can choose to resist sin or we can choose to succumb to it. We are ultimately accountable and no one else should be held responsible for our sins, especially not God. If we blame God and accuse Him of being evil, then we make God a liar because God comes to us in love and has sacrificed His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. God who loves us cannot mean us harm.

Hence, we cannot at any time place the blame on God. It takes a very hardened heart to place the blame on God. We have to recognize the depravity of our own hearts and how deeply sinful we have been and continue to be. We have to humbly recognize our unworthiness and our weakness and accept the responsibility for our own sins. We deserve every accusation of sin that we have committed. We could have avoided sin, but our depraved hearts choose to commit it anyway. If we know the heart of God and what He desires for us, we would not think of blaming God. May you recognize the true state of your heart and the truth of who our loving God really is and His desire to save you, not hurt you.

Thought: How could anyone think that a thrice-holy God would cause us to sin?

Prayer: Lord, forgive me, I have spurned Your love for me and blame You for my own sins. Wash me pure again.

AREN'T WE SINNING ALREADY BY BEING TEMPTED?

James 1:14-15 describes the downward spiral of sin which starts with temptation and ultimately ends in death. The process starts with temptation, and reading closely tells us what follows and at which point sin is conceived. A man is tempted, he is drawn away by his own lust, which is conceived in the heart. When he succumbs to this lust, sin results. When this sin has been committed and there is no repentance, death results. Thus we see that sin occurs when the person succumbs to his lust when tempted. Instead of resisting, he gives in and indulges in the lusts of his heart. This can be not just in action, but also in heart, as we will see tomorrow. Thus we realize that the temptation itself is not a sin, for we can still chose to resist that temptation, and go away victorious. But if we allow the temptation to fester in our heart, and we give in to it, we have sinned.

That being said, resisting temptation is not a trivial affair. We must never be so complacent as to think that we can resist every temptation that comes along without much difficulty. In fact, the very opposite is true. Every temptation is strong and subtle and every single one has the potential to lead us to the ultimate and final consequence of death. No godly saint will ever declare that he has mastered the ability to resist temptation. Every good and wise Christian knows that while we are in the flesh, it will be a struggle and even a battle to our very last breath. Resisting sin is a daily fight. The devil will use every wit and power available to him to see to it that we fall into sin. Those well acquainted with the fight against personal sin will know to take every precaution necessary to avoid temptation. Exposing ourselves to temptation is playing with fire. Allowing ourselves to see and hear undesirable things only make a hard fight against sin even harder. Why then do we freely avail ourselves to sensual movies and music, violent computer games and materialistic pursuits? Why do we find friends in people who will lead us astray? We should instead take every step to be far away from things that will tempt us and lead us into sin. We should make it our focus each day to be aware of every temptation that comes along and resist it with all our heart and strength. May you join the battle as a faithful soldier.

Thought: Will you be ever strong at resisting sin?

Prayer: “God be merciful to me a sinner”.

HOW CAN IT BE A SIN IF I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING?

Many non-believers hold to the thought that they do not need Christ because they have not done anything bad. They think that they are decent morally good people, because they have not committed any terrible crimes. They have not murdered anyone neither have they robbed nor stolen. This is the standard that the world holds for guilt or innocence. However, this is not the standard that God holds. In today's passage, Christ in His Sermon on the Mount taught that sin starts from the heart. Adultery is committed simply by lusting in the heart. No actual act of adultery needs to take place for this sin to be committed. This is the same with God's other commandments. For example, we need not to bow before idols to be guilty of breaking commandment no. 2. Instead, the mere replacing of our love for God in the heart with anyone or anything else is idolatry already. We need not use God's name in vain but to condone others doing so and feel nothing when others mince God's name with a curse or a swearing is enough to have broken commandment no. 3. We need only hate someone and wish harm to come upon that person from our hearts to be guilty of murder. In the sight of God, sin starts from the heart.

If that is the case, then we are truly guilty indeed. No day goes by that there is no thought within us that runs errant and results in a sin. The police may not be looking for us, nor are we going into jail anytime soon, but our hearts are desperately wicked and full of vain imaginations. We harbour hatred, we are high-minded and look down on others, we covet in our hearts for things we do not have, we tell half-truths believing that it is not a lie, we indulge in a lustful glance... the list goes on. If not for what Christ has already done for us, we cannot appear before God guiltless. Christ in one act of sacrifice cleansed our sins and made us acceptable to Him. God accepts us because of what Christ has done. Dear reader, if you examine your heart and look back at what it has harboured, can you still claim that innocence? If you have not repented of your sins and accepted Christ as Saviour of your soul, do it today, do it now!

Thought: What would Christ say to me if I appeared before Him today?

Prayer: God please forgive me, for I am filled with sin and have a wretched heart.

WHAT KINDS OF TEMPTATION ARE THERE?

It is not often that one finds a single verse in the Bible that sums up everything about a subject. 1 John 2:16 is one such verse. In this verse, all possible forms of lusts are neatly described and defined. As we have seen in an earlier reading; sin originates from succumbing to lusts and hence, this verse can also be seen as neatly categorizing all forms of sins into the 3 mentioned. Lust of the flesh are lusts that originate from the body. Examples include things like an excessive desire for food, physical comfort, unlawful sex and even an addictive desire for thrills that come from playing computer games. Some love food so much they are ready to sin against God to obtain what they want. Same goes with the desire to attain physical comforts for the body. Given a choice between serving God and lazily relaxing in front of the TV, the latter often wins. Sexual sins in the form of thought or act if indulged outside of a marriage is a sin of the flesh. Lust of the eyes are lusts that relate to what one sees. Such lust is often related to lusts of the flesh because what one sees can feed sinful appetites of the flesh and cause us to sin. If certain things that we set our eyes upon tempt us to sin, such things cannot be good. The converse is also true, meaning, if we bear ourselves in such a manner so as to tempt others to see and be tempted, that is also not good. Finally, the pride of life. This occurs when we become proud, thinking of ourselves more highly than we should. The mature Christian will understand that everything we are and have is from the Lord. Hence, we have nothing good we can lay claim to. Despite this truth, we sometimes take credit and allow ourselves to be puffed up when praised. Some even go all out to be noticed and wait for that word of recognition that simply feels so good. This is sinful pride of life that seeks to puff up our ego, and takes glory away from God.

1 John 2:16 makes it easy for us to identify the temptations and sins in our own lives and in the process helps us reject them more easily. Identifying a sin is not enough if we do not consciously reject it. We have to do our part in overcoming temptation and being holy. May you renew your effort to resist temptation through this knowledge.

Thought: What is your greatest weakness?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to desire a life of holiness.

HOW CAN WE AVOID SUCH GREAT TEMPTATIONS?

Many temptations that we face can actually be avoided. We can actively try to stay away from places that create temptation, be careful to avoid friends who by their behaviour may influence us to sin and shun things and situations that may cause us to sin. However, there are times when we cannot avoid certain situations. It could be for example when in the course of fulfilling a rightful duty, we are challenged by difficult situations that can cause us to sin. In such situations, a temptation cannot be avoided, but must instead be confronted and resisted. However, today's bible passage shares a fact that is very comforting and helpful. The “high priest” referred to is none other than Christ. Christ while He was on earth was fully man and fully God. He experienced temptations like any other person would but did not sin. As such, this High Priest is not someone who is so far removed from us and cannot relate to our experiences as frail and fallible creatures, but is one who understands our human condition. Christ continues to pray for believers. He intercedes with God the Father on our behalf and as we ourselves approach God for help, Christ is ever there to be our advocate. Hence, the writer of Hebrews says we can boldly or bravely approach God for help when we are ever in need and this is especially so when we undergo temptation.

When faced with temptation, we must not imagine that we can successfully overcome it by our own strength. To try to resist any temptation without God's help is an endeavour that is certainly doomed to fail. While the temptations may come to test us, God has also prepared for us sufficient strength to successfully resist a temptation. However, we need to ask God for that strength. When you are tempted, do not hesitate to ask God to enable you to overcome that temptation. You will then see how God is there to help you do His will in obedience to Him.

Thought: We cannot successfully resist temptation without God's help.

Prayer: Lord, give me the strength to overcome sin and also the desire to be holy.

CAN'T I BLAME MY BODY FOR CAUSING ME TO SIN?

Gnostics are people who believe that anything in the material world or that which relate to the flesh are imperfect and even evil. On a lesser extreme, but no less unbiblical, are the monks and nuns that exist among various religions. They believe that by living a life of abstinence and asceticism one can be more spiritual. Therefore, they withdraw from the world and anything that is perceived to be materialistic is “evil”. Romans 6:6 can be misinterpreted without understanding the context, and taken to describe the body as sinful and evil. Some may even conclude that while we are in the body, we cannot help but sin. This is of course not true. Reading on in Romans 6 we can understand this better. Upon conversion, the Holy Spirit works a miraculous work in us. We become dead to sin. What this means is that sin no longer has a stranglehold over us. We are no longer under its control. We have the ability to resist sin through the working of the Holy Spirit within us. Not only that, we now have a renewed ability to live lives pleasing unto God (v. 11).

As believers we definitely have the ability to resist sin. Although the needs and wants of the body can be a source of temptation, God has given us the power to overcome these temptations of the flesh. Our mortal body, despite its weaknesses and frailties, can be fashioned to honour and glorify God. We can learn to be moderate in our lifestyles and not live in excess (Philippians 4:5). Over-indulging in things of the flesh does not help the Spirit. Instead, it makes our souls weak and less able to resist temptation. Instead, being vigilant and sober in our study and practice of God’s Words will build up the soul. When we sin, we only have ourselves to blame, and we must be ready to take responsibility for our actions. We cannot keep trying to shift the blame away, and think that we are guiltless. We must all humble ourselves and admit that we are sinners who deserve the judgment of God, and that it is only by the grace and mercy of God that He has saved us and made us fit for heaven.

Thought: Which is preferred, a new movie or the study of God’s Word?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to enjoy the things that Thou has given in a manner that glorifies Thee.

*“...take unto you the whole armour of God,
that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.”*

HOW CAN WE RESIST THE DEVIL?

We have seen in earlier readings that the devil is like a roaring lion seeking to devour unsuspecting people (1 Peter 5:8). There is no doubt about his intentions, for he seeks to destroy anyone he can get his hands on. We have, however, also learnt that although the devil is powerful and wicked, he is nonetheless constrained by God and Christians are never tempted beyond their ability to resist. (1 Corinthians 10:13). Hence, we certainly have the ability to resist the devil. How then do we go about doing so? Ephesians 6:11-18 tells us that what we need is the “whole armour of God”. The armour consist of many components, each representing a necessary part the Christian needs in order to resist the attacks of the devil. This consist of; loins girded about with truth, breastplate of righteousness, shoes of the gospel, shield of faith, helmet of salvation, the sword of Spirit which is the Word of God, and prayer. As we look at this list closely, we learn a few things. To be able to resist the devil, we must first be saved. Only God’s children have the ability in the Holy Spirit to successfully resist each temptation. However, salvation only is not enough if the Christian is unfamiliar with God’s Word. The Word gives us instructions in righteousness and our ignorance of it results in our own jeopardy. Knowing God’s Word is also insufficient if we do not practice it to the building up of our faith. Finally, we need prayer. We need to ask God to enable us to resist temptation and we need to help our brethren by praying for them. No soldier who understands the dangers of war would step out in the battlefield unarmed and ill-equipped. Likewise, we would be foolhardy to imagine that we are strong enough to resist any temptation that comes our way unless we are prepared.

That leads us to recognize that we should always consider our ability to resist temptation with humility. In fact, even our ability to resist temptation is given to us by God. God has given us what is necessary in the armour mentioned in Ephesians 6. We only need to put into practice what the Bible teaches us. Our problem is we think we do not need God’s armour and fail miserably when tempted. May you put on the armour of God.

Thought: When was the last time you failed to resist a temptation?

Prayer: Lord, help me to always have my armour on.

CAN'T I FOLLOW GOD AND SIN SIMULTANEOUSLY?

The call in 2 Timothy 2:22 for us to follow after righteousness is clear. The call is to flee youthful lusts and follow after righteousness, faith, charity and peace. One is to “*flee*” and another is to “*follow*”. There is no doubt about how different these two actions are. To flee is to run away, not walk or hang around casually, but to escape in fear as quickly as possible and with all the might one can muster. On the other hand, to follow is to pursue, with diligence and earnestness. To add to this, Christ taught in Matthew 6:24; “*No man can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and mammon*”. Mammon here symbolizes the things of this world. Christ taught that no one can serve both God and the things of the world. “*...for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other.*” Christ used the words “*love*” and “*hate*” to illustrate the stark contrast between the way we should feel about God compared with the things of the world which often leads us to sin.

The lusts of the world are often so tempting and by pursuing after them, it is not long before we end up in sin. Some of us cannot give up our pet desires even when it infringes on God’s Word and would continue to harbour a love for some so-called “*little*” sins while assuming that we can still please God with other aspects of our lives. We continue to go to church, even serve in ministries and we think there is nothing wrong, for life seems to go on. Dear Teen, be careful, God is not mocked. By living this double life, your soul continues to take a downward spiral as sin takes a greater stronghold over you. Before long, sin would have run its full course (James 1:15). It is clear from our study that we cannot serve two masters. It is not possible to love sin and claim to love God at the same time. Whether we admit it, if we love sin, we would have already hated God. We have to hate sin if we are to follow after God in sincerity and purity. It is simply not possible to have both.

Thought: Are there still “*pet*” sins in my life that I am not willing to give up?

Prayer: Lord, please reveal to me all unrepented sins in my life.

DOESN'T GOD CAUSE EVIL MEN TO SIN?

There are passages in Scripture that clearly tell us that God gives evil men up over to their lusts and sins. Besides today's verse, this fact can also be found in Romans 1:24-27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:11. We also know from Exodus 7:13 that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so that he would pursue after a self-destructive course by refusing to heed the warning of Moses. This ultimately led to God's divine judgment upon him through the death of his firstborn son, and his armies being destroyed under the Red Sea. Hence, it is Scriptural truth that God's patience towards the sins of men is not infinite. There is an end to it and judgment follows. One form of judgment is that God hardens the hearts of men. It is an ultimate judgment and will result in eternal condemnation. But is God justified in doing so? Does man deserve this condemnation? The answer is yes on both counts. If you study the passages above and understand the context, we see that these individuals tested God's patience to its limit through their recalcitrant rebellion. As we consider this, we must also bear in mind that these individuals were given more opportunities to repent than they deserved and yet they turned against God with their fists held high in rebellion. Are we any different? Before conversion, we were probably no better, and may even have committed the most heinous of sins, yet God saved us. We cannot fathom why God saved us apart from His mercy towards us. We also do not know why He hardens the hearts of some, but we know with certainty that it is His righteous judgment.

If you are unsaved, does it not strike fear in your heart that you may belong to the group whose hearts have been hardened? Whether God will harden your heart in judgment we do not know, but we know that He is willing to save you by the blood of His Son Christ Jesus. You only need to believe on Him as your personal Saviour. In His love for you, He is always ready to take you unto Himself. All you need to do is to come to Him with a broken and humble heart, acknowledging your sins and your deep unworthiness and accept Christ as your Saviour. Do it today, do it now. Do not persist in rebellion and sin anymore.

Thought: Condemnation is eternal.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I'm sorry for my sins, please save me!

WHAT IS THE ANTIDOTE TO TEMPTATION?

We can see from our passage today that lusts and temptations will pass away only when the world passes away. We will only be free of sin and temptation when either the Lord takes us to be with Him in heaven or when the earth is destroyed and a new earth is put in its place after the Millennium reign of Christ (Revelation 21, 22). Hence while this is the long term solution for temptation this is not to be until such time as is determined by God. We also learn from this passage that everything in the world is temporal. No matter how wonderful they may seem to us today, it will one day be destroyed. Therefore for us in the present, the simple advice given is that we must strive to do only the will of God. This then becomes our present antidote to temptation – the desire to seek God’s will and to do it. When this becomes the focus of our lives, then our attention will be fixed on doing God’s will, rather than fulfilling our own lusts.

In the Parable of the Ten Pounds, the noble man, which represents Christ, tells his servants to *“occupy till I come”* (Luke 19:13). This is a call by Christ for us to be faithful in all that we do, seeking the will of God until Christ returns. We are to continue to grow in our understanding of God through His Word. We are to put into practice all that is commanded and we are continue to fulfil the Great Commission and be good witnesses for the Lord to a dying world. We are to continue in the vocations that God has called us to and we are to do well in these to glorify God’s name. While God may take us away to be with Him, He has instead chosen for us to remain in this world with all its imperfections. As believers, this world will continue to present trials and temptations to us according to God’s will as such experiences strengthen our faith (1 Peter 1:7). The world continues on but in spite of this God’s sovereign will and purpose shall be fulfilled. The day will come when the old world will be no more than a memory. Are you going to be there that day with Christ? You can if only you believe, repent and come to trust on the Christ the Saviour.

Thought: Nothing will last except the things of God.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to live with eternity’s values in mind.

WHAT IS GOD’S WILL FOR MY LIFE?

All of us have our favourite verses from the Bible. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*”. This is my favourite verse! It has helped me very often in making the right decisions!

But you may ask: What does “*to the glory of God*” mean? It means “to His honour”. So whatever we do, we want to honour His name. We don’t want to bring shame to His name. We don’t want to do things in such a way that our friends would look at us and say, “he calls himself a Christian, but look at the way he behaves!”

Another thing to note in this verse is that we can honour God by the simple things that we do everyday! Paul says “*whether (you) eat or drink*”. We may feel that we are not doing any ‘great’ or ‘heroic’ things, but all of us eat and drink everyday, and we can honour God by these simple things. Think, dear teen – how can you eat (or drink) to the glory of God?

We want to discipline our appetite! So we want to choose more “healthy” foods (which usually means a balanced diet, including greens and fruits). Do not be gluttonous. At the dinner table, always think of others! When you go for a buffet, don’t be the first to go to the buffet spread! Let others (especially the very young and the elderly) take their food first! The oysters and the most expensive food items may be gone by then, but what does it matter? We should put others first, maintain a good testimony for Him, and let God’s name be glorified!

I am sure you can think of other ways to honour God’s name, not only during meal-times, but at all times! Glorifying God does not necessarily require us to do “great” things. God is happy that we honour Him in the little things that we do everyday! When you wake up every morning, remind yourself – I want to honour and glorify God today. When you are faced with difficult choices, ask yourself: “which option is the one that glorifies God”?

Thought: We should not live for ourselves, but for God.

Prayer: Lord, may I learn to deny myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus. (Matthew 16:24)

MUST I UNDERSTAND GOD'S WILL?

I am sure that none of us want to be known as an 'unwise' person. I am sure we want to make right decisions, to be able to discern between right and wrong, and to live useful fulfilling and purposeful lives for the Lord. The Bible clearly tells us here in Ephesians 5:17 that the opposite of being unwise, is to understand what the will of the Lord is. Through this we realize that it is of paramount importance that we understand God's will for our lives, if we want to be a wise Christian.

You may ask, what does it mean to understand God's Will? The word for 'understand' here actually comes from a Greek word which means 'to bring together'. That is really what we are doing in our mind when we try to understand a particular matter – we piece various thoughts and ideas together in order to comprehend it better.

When it comes to the will of God, what are the things that we need to put together? Well to know someone's will or desires, we need to know the person better. The only way for us to know God better is to know His Word. Therefore what we need to 'bring together' is really all of Scripture. We need to be able to piece and understand God's Word together, such that through the careful study of God's dealing with man, of His divine character and nature, of His attributes and abilities, of His perfect plan of redemption, we will gradually be able to understand Him better. When that happens, then we will be able to better discern His will for our lives, and want to obey it.

Therefore we must let God's word soak into our hearts and our mind, so that our will is aligned with His, that we will not be unwise, but to understand the will of the Lord.

Thought: Our sinful mind puts us at enmity with God. We can align it more and more with God's will by obedience to and application of God's word in our lives.

Prayer: Lord, let my will be so aligned with Yours that I can glorify Thy name daily, in all that I do, big or small.

WHY MUST I OBEY GOD’S WILL?

Yesterday, we learnt that, to serve God well, it is not enough to be faithful and sincere, but we must also understand God’s will, through a deep understanding of His Word! But it is not enough to just understand God’s will, for after we know it, we must also make sure we do it! Knowledge of God’s will in itself is useless, if it is not obeyed.

That is why in Matthew 7:21, the Lord Jesus Christ gives a very stern warning to all of us. Not everyone who calls the name of the Lord is truly saved, and will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, there would be those who think they are saved, but are in actual fact not. They would even be prophesying, casting out devils and doing works in the name of the Lord, but God will not recognize those works. Jesus’ response in the subsequent verses showed that they were just doing those things out of their own selfish ignorance, and not serving God at all. Those works would be regarded by God as works of iniquity. Why? Because they never did the will of God (v. 21). They were works done from an unregenerate heart, based on a wrong understanding of God, built upon the foundation of sand and not rock. Ultimately these sinners will be rejected by God, and they have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

For us who know God and are certain of our salvation, it is important that we do our best to obey the will of God. Jesus says that this is how everyone who has a place in the kingdom of heaven would behave. It ought to be our natural response to all that God has done for us. Just like a filial child would want to please his parents by obeying them, we as the children of God would love to do the will of our Father which is in heaven.

Thought: Is it possible to be a Christian but not want to do the will of God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, our minds are prone to wander. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us through the strait gate, into the narrow way, to the glorious destination.

HOW DO I DELIGHT MYSELF IN THE LORD?

Today's verse is one of a duet! These two verses were among the favourite memory verses I remember as a young Christian!

Everyone wants God to give us the desires of our hearts! But how? It is not by praying and petitioning to God. It is not by doing everything the “right way” so that God will grant us our desires. In fact, it is the other way round! The Christian life has a different “sequence” from the life of other religions.

Many religions require their followers to live a good moral life, so as to earn the approval of their gods. They think that just because they do good deeds, then they deserve some sort of blessing from their god. Thus their motivation for doing good deeds is not really to please their god, but it is so that they can have some personal gain.

This is not so for our God! God teaches us to first delight in Him. What this means is that we take pleasure in the matters that He takes pleasure in, and are delighted in the things that He is delighted in. When that happens, our desires and wills shall be aligned with His. Then we will forget our own selfish desires. Our desires will then be His. That is what it means when the Bible tells us that we will be given the desires of our heart. It is not that our selfish carnal wants will be fulfilled, but that we, having the mind of Christ, will want the things that God wants us to have.

But how can this happen? Again it comes down to seeking, understanding and obeying God's will for our lives. As we study God's Word and know Him better, these things will naturally fall into place. Psalm 37:5 tells us to simply commit our way unto the LORD; trust also in Him. We are to fully commit our lives to God and yield ourselves to Him. We let Him take the lead in our lives, for we trust in His goodness.

Dear teen, don't consider studying God's Word and quiet time as chores. Do these with a loving heart and they shall become a joy to our souls!

Thought: The Christian life is a life of delight, joy, love and gratitude. The more we know God, the more we will love Him, and the more we will know God's will.

Prayer: O LORD, may we know and love You more and more, day by day.

HOW CAN I BE IN GOD'S WILL (1)?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)

Dear teen, can you memorise these two verses? I hope you do! These are among the most wonderful of verses in the Bible! More importantly, do you understand what they mean? Even more importantly, do you have them in your heart and practice them daily?

These two verses come from Paul's mighty epistle to the Romans. We should all aim to understand this epistle. Martin Luther says we should memorise the whole epistle!

In the first 11 chapters of Romans, Paul gave a very detailed and wonderful exposition of the gospel. Then in the first two verses of chapter 12, he tells us what we should do because of what we understand from the first 11 chapters! That is why he uses the word 'therefore', for he makes his case in light of all that he has said in the first 11 chapters. As they have learnt about the great mercies of God in saving them, they must now put this knowledge into practice by desiring to offer their lives in gratitude, for their whole lives to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.

Our Christian life is a logical life! Right doctrine leads to right practice, from a heart which is right with God! Why do we present our bodies a living sacrifice to God? Why do we have our mind transformed? It is because we are grateful people. It is because we have tasted the mercies of God! We owe God everything – heart, mind and soul. Our daily life is an offering to Him who loves us and gave Himself for us.

Thought: The way to know God's will is to understand what our Lord Jesus has done for us. As we present our bodies a living sacrifice to Him in gratitude, we will learn to understand His will.

Prayer: Saviour, Thy dying love Thou gavest me. Nor should I aught withhold, dear Lord, from Thee. In love my soul would bow, my heart fulfill its vow, Some offering bring Thee now, something for Thee.

HOW CAN I BE IN GOD’S WILL (2)?

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Romans 12:1-2)

Do you remember what you read yesterday? “Our Christian life is a logical life!” – and so our service to God is a reasonable service!

The first 11 chapters of Romans present a grand presentation of the gospel. Paul convicts both Jew and Gentile of sin in chapter 1-3. His conclusion in Romans 3:23 explains: *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”*. In the second part of chapter 3 he presented the gospel (the cure for sin – *“righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ”* Romans 3:22) – this is justification by faith. The rest of Romans up to chapter 11 dealt with various objections and misunderstanding of the gospel, and also sanctification and glorification.

Chapter 12 is then a logical follow-up of chapters 1-11 – Paul is saying – “in view of what God has done for us, what should we do, logically speaking?” And our answer can only be – “if we have any sense of gratitude at all, we will fall down and worship Him, and love Him with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our minds, and with all our strength!”

How can we be in God’s will? By understanding His will (as set forth in Romans 1-12), and obeying it. We can understand His will intellectually (in our mind) by reading the Bible, but we can fully understand and be in His will only as we love him with all our hearts, souls, mind and strength, and apply what we have read into our lives. We will then begin to realize how sinful the world is, and desire not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed through the refreshment that comes from reading and meditating on God’s Word. In all this, we are discerning the good, acceptable and perfect will of God for our lives. Dear teen, do you see these things happening in your life?

Thought: God gives us our mind, our strength, our will – we want to use all these to glorify Him – then we will be in His will.

Prayer: Lord, You have blessed me with much – help me to use these talents to glorify Your name!

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT OBEY GOD’S WILL?

Some people (and I must confess this includes me when I was a young Christian) imagine God as a nice gentle grandfather who never gets angry, and pampers His grandchildren whatever they do! But we must get rid of such incorrect ideas! Our own imaginations are almost always wrong, as we have inherited Adam’s sinful nature, and spiritually speaking cannot “think straight”. That is why it is so important to know God’s word well, so we can “think straight, and think right”!

The verse today should have dispelled such nonsense about our God being a pampering old grandfather!

Hebrews 12:6 says, *“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth”*.

God’s will for us is not an easy, cushy life, without pain or suffering. What He sets for us is a standard that is far beyond any human standards of goodness. 1 Peter 1:16 says, *“be ye holy; for I am holy”*!

So it is no wonder that we read in the verse today that He disciplines us when we deserve it. If you understand His will, then you would not be surprised. We know that when we misbehave or disobey our parents, they would certainly discipline us. This is their responsibility as parents. They do so not because they hate us and want us to suffer. In fact the very opposite is true. They do so because they love us and don’t want us to make mistakes in our lives that would only cause us greater pain and suffering.

Likewise when we sin, our loving Father in heaven will chastise us, for He is definitely not a derelict Father. He will certainly give us what is best for us, and that includes discipline when needed. Dear teen, when troubles happen in your life, it could be that you are being chastised of the Lord. We then ought to think - what have I done wrong? What is God’s will?

Thought: It is much better to know God’s will and do it, than to be chastised and scourged! So discipline yourself to know God’s will and do it, out of love.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to be sensitive to Thy Word, both in instruction and in chastisement.

DOES GOD’S WILL INCLUDE SUFFERING?

Yesterday, we learned that God’s will may include chastisement (discipline) to help us to turn back into the path of righteousness. Nobody enjoys chastisement when it happens.

Today, we learn about another form of suffering – suffering not due to God’s chastisement, but suffering *“for righteousness’ sake”*. 1 Peter 3:14 says, *“But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye”*. And then he further encourages us in 1 Peter 3:17, *“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing”*.

So, it can be the will of God for us to suffer even when (and often because) we are doing His will! The best example of this is from the life of our Lord Jesus. He *“did no sin”* (1 Peter 2:22). In fact He came to save us from our sins! And yet, *“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief”* (Isaiah 53:3). His Apostles also suffered for their faith (all the Apostles were martyred except for John). We also know of numerous *“heroes of the faith”* who have suffered for His sake! Did it happen because God forsook them? No! In fact the disciples rejoiced *“that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name”* (Acts 5:41).

Dear teen, what about you? Have you ever suffered for His sake?

Some of you may have parents who are unbelievers, and they may persecute you because of your faith. Some of you may try to witness to your friends and loved ones, and suffer rejection, mocking, and may even be ostracized because of that. Understand that these all happen in the will of God. He is always in control, and He has a good reason for putting you through these trials. As you experience these sufferings and difficulties in life, you must continue to trust in the Lord, for He calls us to *“be not afraid of their terror, neither by troubled”*. We must continue to persevere in the Lord and maintain a good testimony for Him, for in so doing, we may even lead someone to Christ!

Thought: When we suffer, if we are sure it is because of our faithful stand for our Lord, let us rejoice, that we are worthy to suffer for His sake.

Prayer: Lord, help me to stand firm in defence of the faith, and not be afraid of suffering.

DOES SEEKING GOD’S WILL INCLUDE EVERYTHING IN MY LIFE?

Today’s verse properly starts in James 4:13. We read: “Go to now, ye that say, today or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain”. (“Go to now” is an old English phrase meaning “come now”). This is a concrete image of a businessman who is full of himself. He must have been a successful, rich man, like Richard Branson or Rupert Murdoch! He is a very confident man. He thinks that he is the master of his own fate. He makes long term plans, travelling from city to city to clinch multi-million dollar business deals. But what does James say to such people?

“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

The lesson is clear. It is a stern warning to anyone who tries to forge their own destiny without seeking God’s will. He presumptuously imagines that he alone is responsible for his own future and success, and God does not factor in any of his plans. He is like the fool in the parable in Luke 12:16-21 who thinks he can amass treasures on this earth for his own carnal enjoyments, not realizing that God can take his life away any moment, and all his wealth will be for nought. Likewise James’ warning here is clear – our life is but a swirling temporal vapour that so quickly dissipates and disappears with a light gust of wind. Therefore instead of pinning our hopes and dreams on this temporal world, and trying to wilfully devise our own future, we ought rather to trust in God.

For the believer, our daily prayer is to say ‘if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that’. Realize that the phrase ‘this or that’ really encompasses everything in our lives. There is nothing outside of God’s control, and neither should we ever seek to do anything outside of His will. The best thing we can possibly do is to seek His perfect will in everything in our lives.

Thought: God is sovereign over all aspects of our lives. We should not be disappointed when things do not turn out our way! God’s way is always the best!

Prayer: Lord, I thank You that You are Lord of all, that everything in my life is under Your control. Help me to be conscious of Thy will.

BUT FOLLOWING GOD’S WILL IS SO HARD!

Do these verses sound familiar to you? They should! You must have heard them being read at the end of worship services, as a form of benediction (a formal blessing) by the pastor! What wonderful verses they are. They are the perfect answer when you say, “but following God’s will is so hard”.

Read these verses slowly, and think through. In it we see a wonderful promise from God that will assure us in our quest to follow His will. Focusing on verse 21, see the work of God that will take place in every believer. Firstly He will *‘make you perfect in every good work to do His will’*. The phrase ‘make you perfect’ has the idea of to mend, repair or to make complete. This describes the process whereby God through the power of His Holy Spirit, strengthens us to enable us to obey His will. As His beloved children, God will continue to work on us, to sanctify us and equip us for the spiritual challenges that await us. Everything that happens in our lives are experiences that are specifically crafted by God so that daily we can be further ‘mended’ spiritually, such that we can be moulded into the person that He wants us to be.

Secondly, God is *‘working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight’*. As a potter works on his clay, God is like a master craftsman, and we are His subjects. He is working in us, transforming us and fashioning us to become servants who are well pleasing in His sight, able to bring glory to Him.

Thus we realize that God is the one doing all this. Yes, by ourselves we may feel like it is so difficult to obey God and to do His bidding. But we must remember that we are never left alone. God will never give up on us, but will guide us, strengthen us and equip us to do His will. What we have to do is to yield ourselves to Him, and allow Him to take control of our lives.

Thought: God has “high expectations” of us, but He is also ready to give us the power to achieve these expectations.

Prayer: Lord, may You guide us and strengthen us to do Thy will in all that we do.

MUST I PRAY ABOUT GOD’S WILL?

Colossians is one of Paul’s “prison epistles”, written when Paul was in the prison in Rome. He wrote to the Christians in Colossae to encourage them in the faith, and to correct the heresies brought in by others. As he ends the letter, he brings greetings from the many fellow servants that were with him. One of them was a man known as Epaphras, and from him, we learn an important lesson about praying for God’s will.

Do you know Epaphras? Few can recognize the name, but he is a hero of faith! He has worked very hard for the Colossians, and is now helping Paul in prison. He is one of the disciples who can truly sing from the heart “I will follow you wherever you want me to go” – including the dark smelly dungeons in Rome where Paul was incarcerated!

Paul obviously has a very high regard for Epaphras. Can you see the very strong words he used of Epaphras? – a servant (or slave) of Christ; “labouring fervently for you in prayers”! Do you see such faithful servants of the Lord in our church? Among your friends? What about you yourself?

What did he pray so fervently for? – that the Colossians “may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” – not that they will be healthy and wealthy! He aims very high for the Colossians whom he obviously loves! His concern is a spiritual one. Though he was presently in Rome, far away from his brethren in Colossae, yet he had a great zeal for them, desiring that as a church, they would fulfil the will of God. Furthermore, it was not just a desire that they would fulfil some of God’s will, but that they would be perfect and complete in all of it! He prayed that they would leave no stone unturned in their bid to do God’s will, that every single aspect of their lives and ministry would be done in accordance to what God wants.

So, now, to answer the question: “must I pray about God’s will”? Isn’t the answer obvious? May this be our daily prayer as well, as we seek God in all things, and desire to do His will!

Thought: Think twice (if not more!) before we pray, so that we can pray for the right things, that is, God’s will.

Prayer: Lord, we cannot live out Thy will on our own strength. We pray that You will reveal Thy will to us, and enable us to live our lives according to Thy will.

Notes

Notes

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