

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

“As wise as Solomon.” Have you heard this before? Who is Solomon? He was King David’s son and successor. He prayed for wisdom instead of riches. He became a very wise ruler, as well as an excellent architect, astronomer and writer. Sadly, he became proud later in his life and did many foolish things. Because of his sins, he was in a sorry state. However, he was inspired by God to write almost the whole book of Proverbs.

Proverbs is a poetic book of godly wisdom. It teaches Christians how to behave towards family, friends and even enemies in a godly manner. It warns us against temptations of the world and teaches us how to avoid sin. It also guides us on how we should speak and what we should do with our time, energy and money.

Proverbs tells us the differences between a wise and a foolish man. First of all, who is a wise man? A wise man believes and loves the true and living God. Because he wants to know what he can do to please God, he will seek knowledge and understanding of God’s Word. On the contrary, the foolish man hates instructions. He has no respect for God’s Word because he says in his heart that there is no God. (Psalm 14:1).

God is all-knowing. Who can be wiser than God? Let us be like the wise man that never stops searching God’s Word and doing His Will. God blesses the wise man.

Put these words in the correct column.

Godly Wisdom	Truth	Knowledge of Christ
Earthly Riches	Craftiness	Sinful Pleasures

A Wise Man seeks after

A Foolish Man seeks after

Thought: Never too young to be wise!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me wisdom so that I can live each day wisely. Help me to study Your Word diligently and live according to the teachings from Your Word. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

FEAR THE LORD

“Come to my office at once.” When Alvin heard his school principal’s thunderous voice, his heart beat really fast and his knees started knocking against each other. He had cheated in his exam and his mind was now racing to see where he could run to hide. However, he knew that he would get into bigger trouble if he did not submit and obey the principal so he decided not to anger him further. Alvin feared because the principal has power to punish him for breaking a school rule.

The Bible says that we are all born sinners and penalty for sin is death. The Bible is the Word of God and it will always be true. So children, we ought to believe that God means what He says and has the power to punish us because He has created us and is all-powerful.

Yes, we ought to fear God and fear breaking His commandments. First, we must believe in the true and living God who has sent Jesus to save us from the penalty of sin. Then, we will begin to know more and more of Him.

Strike off the wrong words in this statement:

*The fear / neglect
of God is the
end / beginning
of knowledge
and wisdom.*



Thought: Only when I believe and have a deep respect or reverence for God will I receive godly wisdom.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please increase my knowledge of Your love and power. Help me to worship You in the right way, always keeping quiet and paying attention during Junior Worship. Most of all, may what I learn be applied in my life. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

OBEDIENT CHILDREN MAKE A BEAUTIFUL HOME

“Ming! Don’t run so fast. Wait for me!” shouted Mom at the top of her voice. She was pushing the pram, with Baby Ling snoozing in it. She pushed as fast as she could to catch up with Ming. Startled by the jerks, Baby Ling started to bawl. Mom was afraid of losing sight of Ming and did not stop to comfort Baby Ling. Then, Ming came to a stop abruptly and pointed to a water gun and demanded, “I want that Mommy!” As soon as Mom caught her breath, she replied, “No, Ming. I am not buying that.” Then, came the stomping of feet and a bawl of protest from Ming. He was not listening to Mom’s pleas for him to stop the tantrum. He was not prepared to obey her. Mom was flustered and embarrassed. Isn’t this an ugly scene common at shopping malls?

Let us look at a different scene. Jia Ern’s family was taking an evening stroll in the park. Auntie Angela came along and commented; “Hey I have been watching your family every time you take a walk. You are a picture of peace and joy. What a beautiful family!” Indeed it was. Jia Ern is an obedient child to Mom and Dad. She honours her parents by doing her share of housework and plays only after she has done all her homework. Whenever her parents say “no” to her, she willingly accepts their decision. She understands that her parents love her and mean good.

God wants children to obey their parents. Parents are given the wisdom to protect their children from harm, feed and clothe them, teach them to do the right things and guide them in their use of time, money and energy. Together with godly parents, obedient children make a home beautiful.

Circle and colour the happy home.



Thought: Happy is the home where children obey parents.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me an obedient heart that I may please You and my parents. Help me to do willingly what my parents ask me to. Help me too, Heavenly Father, to appreciate them more! In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

BE CAREFUL IN CHOICE OF FRIENDS

“A teen was slashed by a gang of teens armed with parangs.” This recent news headline shocked many. Did it shock you? It resulted from a gang fight. How did gangs come about? Gangs are usually formed by lonely teens who band up with other lonely girls and boys to provide companionship and feel a sense of belonging. Being part of a gang makes them appear cool as it guarantees support and protection in case of attack. Many gang activities involve vices like smoking, drug abuse, vandalism and even violent crimes.

You may say, “I am not that stupid to be involved.” But think again. Prov 1:10 says, “...if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.” It is a warning to Christian boys and girls against bad company. No matter how young or old we are, we can be easily influenced whether you believe it or not. Look around you and see how your friends and you tend to dress alike, like the same kind of music, speak like each other or even have the same habits.

God wants us to be good. He knows how easily we can be influenced. So, He warns us to choose our friends carefully. Beware of those who are proud, lazy, dishonest, disobedient and are troublemakers. If someone asks you to throw your homework aside and go and watch a movie instead, don't say yes. If someone asks you to take some money from your parents' drawer, be sure to avoid him. If someone offers to help you cheat in an exam, report him to your teacher. You ought to be friendly, kind and helpful to everybody but don't make friends with anyone who tempts you to sin.

Draw a picture of your best friend. Write down three of his or her good qualities or habits.



Thought: True friends are treasures, precious and rare.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to be a true friend to others by obeying Your commandments. Keep me from falling into bad company but keep me close to the Lord Jesus. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

WANT TO BE A FOOL?

Do you want to be a fool? If yes, don't read the following. If no, please continue!

Have you been on a hike in the Bukit Timah Nature Reserve? It is only about 80 hectares in area. Though very small compared to nature reserves in America, Australia or even Malaysia, it is the largest in Singapore. The paths to the top meander along the slopes and you can get lost easily if you are not familiar with them. You would need a guide. If you are on a school trip, your teachers would have checked out the place and studied the map before leading you and your schoolmates in the hike. Therefore, it is important that you follow all the instructions closely. Otherwise you may lose your way or fall down some slippery slopes.

God is our best guide in life because He created us and all things. He knows everything about everything. God wants us to take the path laid out in His Holy Word. There are instructions and commandments for us in His Book – the Bible. They will guide us and lead us safely in the way we should go. Just like a hiker, we must pay attention to the instructions of the guide and do as instructed.

What do you think will happen to people who do not believe in the Bible? The Bible tells us that these people have chosen not to fear God and have rejected wisdom. They are called fools. So, when they get into trouble, they can only blame themselves. Children, love and treasure the Word of God. God will direct your path and keep you safe from destruction. Love godly instructions.

How does the Bible guide you in life's path?
The answer is found in Psalm 119:105:

Thought: Only fools doubt God and hate knowledge. The wise will be wiser because they love knowledge.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I love Thy Word and grow in knowledge of Thy truth. Help me to apply this knowledge in my life, and not to be a fool. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

TRUST IN THE LORD

“Give me back my money!” Tiny Tim was muttering under his breath while struggling to free himself from Big Bully Ben’s grasp. A gang of boys was surrounding Tim and Joel stood by, petrified. “Don’t you dare tell the teachers! We will beat you up. So, don’t forget the money next week.” The gang then stormed off. Tim and Joel were scared stiff by their threat.

When Tim caught his breath, he told Joel, “I shall ask my older cousin for help. He is strong and has many bodybuilder friends from the gym.” After a while, Joel said, “No, Tim. That is not right. Remember what we learnt in Sunday school? Let us trust God to show us what to do. Let us pray.” The boys then prayed. They were still shaken, but after the prayer, they felt better. Recalling that the discipline master had told them once that they must report any bullying incidents to the teachers, they decided to tell their form teacher.

Sometimes, it is difficult to do what is right. But, one thing is sure. No problem is too hard for God and no matter too small to escape God’s attention. So, children, let us tell the Lord our problems and ask Him for directions in whatever we do. Trust in the Lord always. He will show us the right way and protect us.

Look at some of the difficult tasks people of the New and Old Testaments had to do. However, by trusting God, they were able to achieve success. Link the person/s to the task. If you need help, ask your Junior Worship teacher ...

Gideon

healed the lame man at the Temple gate

Daniel

fought the enemies with 300 soldiers

Moses

survived the lions’ den

Peter & John

conquered Jericho by walking round the city

Joshua

led the Israelites across the Red Sea

Thought: I can trust God for directions and need not try to solve my problems alone.

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, it is wonderful to know that we can always depend on You. Help us to remember this when we’re in trouble. Help us to trust in You always. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GIVE OUR BEST TO THE LORD

God’s people are taught to tithe one-tenth of what they receive to the Lord as this belongs to Him. Some children happily put 10 % of their weekly pocket money into the offering bag at Church every Sunday. That is pleasing to the Lord for God loves a cheerful giver.

Suppose you win a cash prize of \$200 for an essay competition, how will you spend the money? Will you first think of showing your gratitude to God for making you a winner? Then do as Prov 3:9 says, “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase” Or will you say, “Uhm! It has been hard work for me. Therefore I must first reward myself with that Nintendo Wii play station. I must persuade Dad to pay the balance! I am sure God will not mind. He can wait for my next win.”

Do you know that God told His people to give the first fruits of their harvests to Him? After they had harvested their crops they set aside the first and best for the Lord. God does not need these grains or lambs but He wants us to think of Him first, and He wants us to love Him more than anything else. Will God be pleased if you place Him last in your heart? When you ask God for something, would you like the answer, “Next time, my child!”?

How would you choose to use your weekly pocket money of \$20 if you want to honour God? Tick the plan of your choice

() Plan A or () Plan B

Buy food in the canteen	\$12
Buy drinks	\$ 5
Buy snacks, pens	\$ 3
Offering in church	\$ 0

Offering in church	\$ 2
Buy food from canteen	\$10
Buy snacks, pens	\$ 4
Buy a drink once only (carry a water-bottle)	\$ 1
Save/give to the needy	\$ 3

Thought: Offering our best to the Lord is worshipping Him.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, teach me to honour Thee by giving You the best from what I have received from You. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

DO GOOD TO GLORIFY GOD

“Do you have an extra pen? May I borrow it?”

“Can you help me with Questions 4 and 5 of the problem sums, please?”

“May I have a look at your Social Studies notes? I really could not catch up with the teacher. She was speaking too fast for me.”

When your classmates approach you for help, what do you usually do? Do you curtly tell them, “I’m busy. Don’t bother me now.” Prov 3:27-28 says that if you can spare what they asked for, do not hesitate to help or give to your friends.

We are all born sinners and in need of a saviour. God did not withhold giving us Jesus Christ His only begotten Son to die for us. It cost Him dearly. So, when God gives us talents and things, we are to use them to do good deeds. Helping others and giving to those in need are good deeds. Christians do good works so that we can show others that we are followers of the Lord Jesus who is righteous and good.

Read Matthew 5:16 and write down what Jesus said good works will do.

In what ways may you serve others?

Thought: Serve God and others willingly!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a good Christian so that my friends and relatives may see how good and wonderful a Saviour Jesus is. I pray that they will come to believe and trust Him like I do. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

KEEP YOUR HEART PURE

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” This verse teaches us many important lessons. Most important of all, it urges us to keep our heart pure.

Jesus taught us that a good tree will bear good fruits while a corrupt tree will bear corrupt fruit. That means only a man with a good heart will do good deeds. If we fill our mind with evil thoughts, our actions will also be evil. When we love God with all our hearts, we will choose to please God and not want to sin or do evil deeds like lying, stealing, cheating, fighting, using foul language, telling dirty jokes or boasting. All these sins begin in the heart, so guard your heart diligently.

How can we keep our hearts pure? Only two things can cleanse our hearts of sin – the blood of Jesus and God’s word. Believe that you are born a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. Your confession will make you a child of God. As children of God, we will face many temptations. However, our hearts can overcome evil temptations through prayers for God’s protection and by studying and keeping God’s word in your heart.

Do you know why your Sunday school teachers encourage you to memorise Bible verses? Read Psalm 119:11 to find the reason. Unscramble the following words to form that verse:

**Word might not hid in Thy I thee
my heart that I. against sin have**

Psalm 119:11

Thought: A pure heart will produce godly deeds.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, keep my heart pure for Thee. Help me to hide Your word in my heart so that I might not sin against You. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

DON'T WASTE TIME

Why learn from ants? To have the same number of brain cells as one human being, it takes 40,000 ants. However, an ant is 'much stronger' than a human being relatively because it can lift 20 times its own body weight. Surely no man can do even half of that! Yet, man lives a good 80 years on the average, compared to the ant's 2 months. So, what exactly can we learn from ants?

Ants are always busy. Sometimes, you get dizzy just looking at them! Ants are hardworking and well organised. Do you know all ants have duties? There are babysitters that look after the young, guards that defend the nest, and housekeepers that clean the house. The most common duty is foraging for food. Not only do ants gather food for the present, they also collect food for the future. They do not waste time lazing around but prepare for their future.

Laziness will soon make us poor. Let us take note and spend our time on earth wisely. Do you know that God will commend us in heaven for good works that we have done for Him on earth? So, let us be wise and work hard for God now.

Which of the following activities are a waste of your time?
Cross them out.

1. Staying up till 2 am to watch the last episode of a Korean drama serial.
2. Spending some time with Grandpa who is sick and lying in bed.
3. Doing the dishes so that Mom can have a rest.
4. Trying every dress on to make sure you look your best at tomorrow's party.
5. Reading up the text books and preparing for tomorrow's lessons in class.
6. Memorising Bible verses.

Thought: I must treasure time and use it wisely for God.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for teaching me not to waste time on things that do not matter. Give me the discipline to carry out my duties. May I be a hardworking and helpful Christian child. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

CHOOSE ETERNAL LIFE

When you take a stroll in the Singapore Botanical Gardens, do you notice the many junctions where you have to choose a path to take? You will choose according to your preference of destination, won't you? God has set only two pathways for everybody in this world. Everyone has to make a decision and our decision will determine where we will end up for all eternity. One way leads to eternal life; the other to eternal death.

The only way to eternal life is Jesus Christ, who has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me". If you have chosen to believe and follow Jesus, you will live forever in heaven. God says He will bless you if you love God and choose to obey His commandments. Have you decided to follow Jesus?

Listen to what God says about those who choose to continue in their sinful path. Those who hate God have chosen destruction of their own souls and will burn forever in the Lake of Fire. They have chosen death.

Will you knowingly choose death? Some may tell you that you need not choose because you can be a free thinker. It is as good as saying that there is no God. Only fools say that there is no God. Don't believe in this lie, for God has said that there are only two ways. A free thinker's way is the same as the sinful path.

Children, if you have not chosen to follow Jesus, be wise and do so today. If you have, share your joyous experience with your friends so that they will also want to follow Jesus.

The Bible says "...wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction,..." and "...strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life,...."

Write the words,
"LIFE" and "DEATH"
at the correct destination.



Thought: Jesus is the only way to life; any other way leads to death.

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, thank You for the gift of salvation and eternal life through the Lord Jesus. Help me to love You more and more each day. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

BE WISE CHILDREN

Summer is the season of harvests. It is when many hands are required to work in the farms to bring in the fruits and crops. In ancient times, many farming families welcomed the birth of many sons because they could work in the fields when they grew up. If a son grew up to be obedient and diligent, loving and caring toward his family, he would do his parents proud. Our Heavenly Father calls him a wise son.

On the contrary, when the son developed a couldn't-care-less attitude and remained idle while others slogged in the fields, he would disappoint his parents. He would be a disgrace to them. God looks at this sin seriously. He wants us to honour our parents so much that it is stated as the fifth Commandment.

Surely you will like God to call you a wise son or daughter, won't you? But, do you know that there are things you need to do to earn that title?

1. First begin with a check on your attitude.

Do I feel responsible for keeping my _____?

Do I care if Mom is _____?

Do I bother to ask if Brother needs _____?

Do I ask Dad for permission _____?

2. Next, pray and confess your sin of not honouring / caring for your parents / sister or brother

3. Finally, make a list of what you can do to show your love and care:

Thought: I should be wise in choosing to be diligent with my God given duties at home.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, help me to be that wise son/daughter. Give me strength to change my couldn't-care-less and lazy attitude. I know I've been unhelpful or even selfish in the past, so please help me to begin to do right by doing the tasks I have listed down. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

FORGIVE!

There was once an incident reported in the newspapers about two neighbours in Katong who hated each other. They quarreled and did awful things and ended up suing each other in court. It was a very ugly affair. The Bible wisely says in Proverbs 10: 12, "Hatred stirreth up strifes." This is one good example.

Let us imagine what could happen if one party had shown love instead of retaliating. As the saying goes, it takes two to fight. So, if one party could apologise and even offer a love gift, it is more likely that the other party would simmer down. Proverbs 10:12 also says, "...love covereth all sins." A Christian must be the first to keep peace because he must follow Jesus' example.

Jesus was beaten, mocked at and led to die on the cross, but He did not murmur or send down legions of angels to kill His enemies. God did not stop the rain or the sun from falling or shining onto those who hate Him. He is merciful, good and kind to even the vilest sinner for He loves us all. The children of God must continue to love the unlovable like Jesus does. Was Jesus angry? Did He want to "take revenge"?

What about you? When was the last time you were angry? Why were you angry? Perhaps it was a sibling or parent who misunderstood you? Or perhaps they heard wrongly and blamed you? Or perhaps you were offended by someone who does not even know he offended you! What then do you do?

Forgive and do not harbour resentment or hate.

Dear child, to be a Christian means to be forgiving. A true Christian remembers that he or she has been forgiven of so much by God the Father that he or she is prepared to forgive others of anything. Would it be easy? No, but this we must try.

Thought: God wants us to forgive as we have been forgiven.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is not easy to forgive others, especially my enemies. Please help me to be able to forgive and to love my enemies as You have commanded in Your Word. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ALWAYS BE HONEST

“It’s not fair!” Don’t you often hear your sister or brother say this? “You cheated.” is also a popular complaint from friends at play. Even young children know how to cry for justice. Do you know that God loves justice much more than anyone? He hates cheats because He is holy and just. He will never bless those who use unfair means to gain profits in business. That is why we can be sure that cheats never prosper.

Look at the example of one market stall owner. He sold all kinds of foodstuff like rice, sugar, salt, beans and canned food. He cheated by using a tampered weighing machine or what the Bible calls a false balance. One day his malpractices were discovered by a long-time customer. She began to boycott his stall and told all her friends and the whole neighbourhood about the stall holder. All his customers joined in the boycott. Eventually, he had to pack up his business and move elsewhere.

Once, a lady sent her car to the carwash to have the carpets vacuumed. The cleaner found a five dollar note under the passenger’s seat. He immediately returned the note to its owner. Guess what? The lady was so touched by his honesty that she gave the note to him!

God is watching even when things are done in secret. The Lord hates liars and cheats but He delights in honest people. So in whatever you do, remember that honesty is the best policy.

Thought: Nobody may know we are cheating, but the Lord does.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be honest even when nobody is looking. Help me to admit it if I do not know how to do my homework and not be afraid to ask my teachers for help. May I never want to cheat in my tests and exams. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

NEVER BE PROUD!

“She is so artistic! She draws so well! I think she can be an architect when she grows up.” Ten-year-old Janice received praises like this very often. Her artworks were often displayed on the notice boards near the canteen. She had been winning prizes at children’s arts competitions held at the community centre. One day, her mother enrolled her into a national art competition.

All the praises of people had entered her head and she was puffed up. “Janice, you have to complete your art piece before next Friday. Otherwise you won’t qualify for the competition. Do it early so that Cousin Ling Ling can give you some comments.” Janice heard but did not heed Mom’s advice. Though she did not reply, she boasted in her heart, “Why do I need any comments? Cousin Ling Ling has not won any competitions. She is only teaching Art to Kindergarten children. Let me show Mom my talent.”

The days went by and Janice has yet to start work on her art piece. Whenever Mom reminded her to, she would promptly reply, “It’s ok Mom. I can manage!” When Thursday night came, Janice wanted to spring into action but she also had to prepare for a science quiz that her teacher had just told them about that afternoon. Janice was in a fix. She just could not concentrate on either. In the end, she failed her quiz and her artwork did not qualify her for the competition.

The Bible tells us not to be proud because pride will bring shame. Janice became proud and forgot that all her talents were given by God. To be humble is to acknowledge that every talent is a gift from God. It is wise to be humble for God loves the humble.

Complete the following:

1. Pride goes before a _____.
2. Humility means thinking that others are _____ than you.
3. Humility is telling others that all our talents come from _____.
4. God loves the humble but hates the _____.

Thought: To be proud will bring disgrace.

Prayer: May I walk humbly with Thee, O Heavenly Father. Let me remember that Jesus, the Son of God in Heaven, came down to earth to live as a humble man so that I can become a child of God. I thank and praise You in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DO NOT GOSSIP

What is gossip? Gossip is telling unpleasant and usually untrue things or secrets of other people behind their backs. That includes telling things in emails and chats through the computer. It is carrying tales about people which they do not want others to know.

Gossip can hurt the persons you talk about and the persons you talk to. Most of all, it hurts God. God looks at gossip as idle talk and He will judge us for every idle word we utter. So, it also hurts the talebearer. God wants us to be faithful friends to each other.

Let us take a look at a scenario which shows what gossip can do to three friends:

“I’m not going to talk to Tammie anymore. She’s so lazy that she borrowed my Maths book to copy. Now she has forgotten to bring it. She cannot be trusted,” Candice complained to her friend, Linda.

Later, Tammie came charging angrily at Candice. Tammie stared at her and fiercely said, “You don’t have to tell everybody bad things about me. I borrowed your book once but how many times have I lent you my books?” With that, she stormed off. Linda had earlier gone to tell Tammie what Candice had said.

Now, who started this mess? Linda? Yes, the right thing for her to do was to point out to Candice that it is wrong to carry tales about Tammie. Instead of gossiping, Linda could have been a peacemaker. One piece of gossip can really break friends up.

Based on the incident, check out if the following statements are true or false:

1. A faithful friend will try to stop a gossip and tell the talebearer her fault. T/F
2. Whatever Candice said about Tammie was true. T/F
3. Linda was being a faithful friend to Tammie by telling her what Candice said. T/F

Thought: Be a faithful friend, not a great gossip.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, guard my heart and tongue. Teach me to faithfully obey Your Word and help me to control what I say so that I will not hurt my family and friends by being a talebearer. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GIVING AND RECEIVING

Jason is a very generous boy. Whenever he hears that any of his friends is short of something, he would try to buy it for him. It could be a pencil, an eraser or a notebook. Of course, he could only buy what he could afford with his own pocket money.

Jason's parents are not rich but they have taught him that God loves a cheerful giver. He never once forgets to put his offering into the offering bag during church service. Once, when his friend was sick in hospital, he spent his whole week's allowance on a well-illustrated Bible storybook for him to read. That week, he did not spend any money on his favourite chocolate drink.

Jason's parents are also helpful and equally generous people and he respects them very much. He makes it a point to tell his parents how he spends his money. That way he learns how to spend his money wisely because his parents can correct his mistakes. Jason also discovers that whenever he spends his pocket money on gifts for friends, his parents would increase his allowance. He always has enough to spend.

God has made some rich and some poor so that the rich can show their love by giving to the poor. Jesus has said that whoever gives to a poor needy person is giving to the Lord. So giving to others is giving to God. God never fails to meet our needs if we give generously.

Unscramble the words to form a message:

**wise It is to will bless God
because the generous be generous.**

Thought: It is good to adopt this motto: "Freely receive; freely give"

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to give generously and cheerfully to others as You have given to me. Help me not to hoard what I can give to help a friend in need. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

BE A SOUL WINNER

A century ago, many countries were not developed. Africa was a continent with many of these countries. She was full of jungles and wild animals like lions and many of her natives were cannibals. That means that any foreigners may either be eaten up by wild animals or people. The natives were illiterate and they did not have the Bible. But God is merciful. He sent many missionaries to bring the Gospel to them so that their souls might be saved.

You may think in your heart, "Wow! Missionaries must be very brave people. They are neither afraid of losing their lives nor living under difficult conditions without clean water and proper medical care. They are so admirable. I want to be a missionary when I grow up. I want to win souls for Christ!"

Do you know that you need not go to a foreign land to be a soul winner? You can be a soul winner wherever you are. Your school, your neighbourhood and your home are all parts of your mission field. You can invite your friends to church, give them tracts to read and tell them how God has answered your prayers and what you have learnt from the word of God about faith and God's grace and mercy.

There was a ten-year-old girl who attended our Daily Vacation Bible School and was converted. The first thing she did when she reached home was to tell her mom, "I have become a Christian. Let me tell you how to be one too." Of course, action speaks louder than words., so you must behave like a good Christian so that others will want to know Jesus, too. This girl did the right thing: if Jesus was so great to her, she would surely want to share Jesus with her loved ones and friends! How about you?

Write the names of your friends in the space below and pray for their salvation during your quiet time with God:

Thought: May I be a little missionary for Jesus!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, just as I have received the Gospel and have been saved, help me to freely share the Gospel with others, so that they may be saved too. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ALWAYS TELL THE TRUTH

“Lying lips are abomination to the Lord...” What is the meaning of abomination? It is a very strong word which expresses feelings of extreme disgust or hate towards something. God is holy and righteous. The Bible says that God hates lying lips.

“Hey Wei Ling. That was a good plunge.” Jocelyn lied to Wei Ling so that she would not get to improve her technique and become a faster swimmer than her. They were supposed to be close friends and were both training hard to compete in the school swimming competition.

“But I felt some pain in my tummy when I hit the water. Didn’t Coach say that it is because I didn’t jump high enough?” Wei Ling wanted to confirm her suspicion with her trusted friend. Suppose Wei Ling finds out that Jocelyn could not be trusted, what do you think will happen? It really hurts when your close friend turns out to be a liar. One example of such a friend was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus.

Lies do hurt people. They cause people to have wrong thoughts and do the wrong things. Do you know who is known as the Father of Lies? Yes it is the devil. Adam and Eve believed his lie about God’s words regarding the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That caused Adam to sin and his disobedience landed the whole human race into trouble. We are all born sinners bound for hell. People who love to lie, do not love God.

Telling the truth delights God. That is why we must always tell the truth if we love God. Some people may tell you that some lies, called white lies, are harmless because they help to shield people from pain. Never believe that because lies always hurt and a lie is a lie, no matter what you call it.

Can you guess who is called the Father of lies?

Do you know who the Bible says the first liar was?

Thought: God hates liars but loves those who are truthful.

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, help me understand how much it hurts You when I tell a lie. Help me to repent if I have done anything wrong and not lie to get out of trouble. I want to be truthful always because it pleases You. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

THE DILIGENT SHALL RULE

“She is hardworking and consistent in her work.” Do you often receive such remarks in your report card? If you do, Mom and Dad must be very pleased and your grades should not be bad.

Hardworking children are likeable and earn the respect of others. Teachers do not need to breathe down their necks to get their homework done. Those who top the class are more likely to belong to this group of hardworking students. On the other hand, lazy children are the ones who are often scolded by parents and teachers. They tend to worry and grieve parents. Therefore, it is not surprising that diligent pupils are often chosen to be class monitors and prefects. They are also more likely to represent the class or school in quizzes and competitions.

The Bible says the diligent shall rule. They are the ones who will be put in charge of important jobs and the lazy ones shall be under them. They will become servants of the diligent. Children, what do you choose to be?

There are some examples in the Bible of men/women who were diligent. Can you identify them? Unscramble the letters to form their names:

1. J _____ (Jsehpo)
(He became Prime Minister of Egypt)
2. D _____ (Dielna)
(He became Prime Minister in Babylon)
3. M _____ (Mseso)
(As leader, he served 2 million people in the Wilderness)
4. R _____ (Rhtu)
(She worked long in the fields to feed herself and her mother-in-law)

Thought: God wants us to be diligent. I must not be lazy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to work hard at whatever You have given me to do. I want to give of my best in whatever I do so that I will glorify You. Whether I become successful or not, my hard work will bring glory to You. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

HOW MUCH DO YOUR PARENTS LOVE YOU?

“Where is the cane?” The angry father bellowed. One of the two brothers must have hidden the cane their father used on them.

“Oh no, he is sure to beat me to death this time.” Wei Yang thought to himself. He ran to hide behind Grandma because she loved him dearly and would surely protect him. To his horror, Grandma came out of her room with the cane in her hand. Wei Yang had hidden it in her room thinking that his father would never find it.

Wei Yang was given two strokes: one on his left palm; the other on his right shin. That was just punishment for pushing his brother off the chair and kicking him with his right foot. Father had taught him to love his brother and not to bully him but Wei Yang disobeyed yet another time.

Grandma held his hand, brought him to her room and sat him next to her. “How could you betray me Grandma? I thought you loved me.” Wei Yang asked Grandma between sobs.

“Of course, I love you. So does your father.” Grandma promptly replied. “He caned you because he loves you.”

Grandma then read and explained Proverbs 13:24 to Wei Yang: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.”

God has instructed godly parents to use the cane when necessary and to chastise or discipline their sons and daughters when they disobey and do wrong. In other words, if parents love their children, they must not spoil them. Wei Yang’s father was obedient to God. Surely, it pained him to cane his own son but he loves his son too much to spare the cane.

Fill in the blanks:

Dad canes me for being naughty because he _____ me.

When he disciplines me, he is being _____ to God.

Spare the rod and _____ the child.

Thought: A good parent teaches by using the cane sometimes.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I thank You for loving parents. Help me to understand that they are being obedient to Your word when they discipline and correct me for doing wrong. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU QUICK TO LOSE YOUR TEMPER?

Examples of terrible consequences of bad temper abound: A fight broke out at a coffee shop when someone accidentally spilled hot coffee on a teenager. A driver punched another driver because the latter had cut into his lane without signaling. An unemployed man threw a toddler down a building after quarrelling with his uncle. All these news reports tell of the consequences of being quick to anger and not taking time to understand the truth.

Much trouble can be easily avoided if we control our temper. Proverbs 14:29 teaches us this fact. Do you know that God is slow to anger? He is so powerful that he can do all things at an instant yet He chooses to be slow to anger.

Why do you think God is longsuffering towards us even when we keep on sinning? It is because He loves us dearly and does not want to punish us straightaway. He is giving us time to repent and to return to worshipping Him. As sinners, we all deserve death right away but God is patient and kind. He is full of mercy. However, God is also a fair and just judge. There will be a time when He will show His wrath or extreme anger. Look at the great earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and nuclear radiations. These are previews of even greater catastrophes to come!

Take time to understand God's Word. The understanding of God's love for you will make you slow to anger and keep you from danger.

Fill in the missing letters:

1. ___ anger is a letter away from anger.
2. You will lose your ___ riends when you lose your temper often.
3. An ___ nderstanding person is slow to anger.
4. No one can withstand the ___ rath of God in the last days of the world.

Thought: A person who is quick to anger is foolish.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, teach me to be like You. Help me to be understanding so that I will not have a bad temper. It is hard not to get angry sometimes, but with Your help, I know I can also be slow to anger. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

GIVE A SOFT ANSWER TO TURN ANGER AWAY

In the opinion of wise men, the hardest thing to control is our tongue. We have seen how anger is easily stirred up by unpleasant words. Fights, court cases and breaking up of friendship are often caused by grievous words. They usually begin with one party saying something angrily and the other party responding in an equally angry manner and soon, it grows into a shouting match and fist fights. This happens among children a lot, doesn't it?

Children, have you come across people who are always angry with something or somebody. When they shout at you, I am sure you want very much to shout back at them. However, you know that God will not be pleased if you do that. Look at the wise solution given in Proverbs 15:1: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

The Bible is always right. So, why not put this into practice? Of course you must not pretend but be sincere and desirous of keeping peace with those who are often angry. Remember that God loves even the most bad-tempered people. Remember to give a gentle answer no matter how loud the other party sounds. Your gentleness will achieve much peace.

Jesus set the best example of how to handle an angry crowd. Despite all the unfair accusations, He did not get angry. He was gentle in his replies to questions because He was forgiving. We ought to be like Jesus.

Give some examples of gentle answers when someone shouts at you.

1. I am _____ for hurting your feelings.
2. Next time, I _____ do it again.
3. Yes, you are _____, I must be mistaken.
4. I hope you know that I _____
mess up your things.

Helpful words sorry did not mean to right will not

Thought: I should respond gently and softly to avoid quarrels.

Prayer: Teach me Heavenly Father, to be gentle in my replies to angry and even unreasonable people I meet. It is so easy to get angry but please help me to remember your Word and to practise giving a soft answer instead. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PLEASANT WORDS DO WONDERS

Grandma Peggy was feeling sad and lonely. She has just returned home from the void deck of her apartment block where she had a chit chat with a few other grandmothers. She heard how Grandma Jasmine was called a stupid and useless old woman by her ungrateful grandson and she felt really sad. Such unpleasant terms hurt Grandma Peggy just as much because Grandma Jasmine was a close friend of hers.

Suddenly, the door bell rang. Grandma Peggy then slowly peeped through the peephole on the door before she reached for her keys. Then she heard her granddaughter, Elaine, calling out, "How are you today, Grandma? I came by today to give you a surprise. See, I brought you your favourite longans?" Her loneliness and sadness became history as soon as she heard Elaine's pleasant voice.

"Thank you Grandma. The advice you gave me last week helped me a lot. I didn't feel so bad anymore. I thank God for you everyday." Elaine was always grateful to God and her grandma.

"Grandma, how did you keep the floor so clean?" Elaine never failed to praise Grandma for her effort. It was not an easy task to mop the floor. "Is your back feeling better? I can give you a massage." Elaine was always caring. She wanted Grandma to be comfortable.

Grandma started smiling as soon as Elaine spoke to her. Elaine's words were sufficient to cheer her up. Grandma knew how much Elaine truly loves and cares for her. Her words were like candies and medicine to her. Just like Proverbs 16:24 says, "Pleasant words are as a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones." Grandma prayed and thanked God for Elaine everyday.

What can you say to cheer Mom or Dad up when they are sick or tired?

Thought: May I bring smiles with my words!

Prayer: Father in Heaven, please give me the wisdom to use pleasant words of healing and love so that what comes out of my mouth will bring joy to others. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

A TRUE FRIEND IS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

In some places, people are more friendly and helpful as they depend on each other's support. Neighbours can therefore become closer than blood relatives who live far away from us. In some countries, the people can appear very friendly. Some may even greet strangers with words like "Hi love" but do not really mean what they say. Friendly people will attract many friends. However, while we are friendly, we must also choose our friends carefully. We need to pray for true friends who will stick like a brother.

We have one true great friend in the Lord Jesus Christ. How do we know that? The Bible tells us he loves us and has given his life for us. He is faithful to share all our burdens, encourages us when we are downtrodden, and shelters us from harm. A genuine friend like Jesus will be faithful to the end, listening to our every problem and sticking with us through thick and thin.

For us to have true friends, we must first be sincere. Do you love your friends sincerely enough to tell them about Jesus if they are not Christians? Or do you sometimes deny knowing Jesus so that you can stay popular with some of them? Don't be tempted to do that. Stay close to the Lord Jesus and He will give you true and faithful friends to study and play with.

Complete the words of this famous hymn:

*What a friend we have in _____,
All our _____ and griefs to bear,
What a privilege to carry,
Everything to God in _____.*

Thought: One true friend is worth more than ten insincere ones.

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father, for the many friends you have given me. Help me to be a true friend myself. Please give me the wisdom to choose godly company, and also strive to be a good and godly friend to them too. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

SAFETY COMES FROM GOD

“Be careful when you cross the road.” As usual, Eddie’s mom reminded him to look left and right and wait for the green man to appear on the lights before crossing. Eddie would assure his mom: “Don’t worry Mom, I will do that.” Eddie’s mom knew Eddie was a very obedient and responsible boy, so she was not worried at all. However, an hour later, her mobile phone rang. It was a call from the police. Eddie had met with a car accident and had a fracture in his left leg.

“What happened, Eddie? I told you to be careful. Didn’t you wait for the green man?” Mom was feeling anxious and agitated by the thought of Eddie’s carelessness.

“I did Mom. I was very careful as usual but I know what went wrong. I forgot to pray for safety, but thank God that He protected me and saved my life.” Eddie’s mom was puzzled. She did not know safety comes from God because she did not know Jesus. Eddie then told Mom about Jesus and how she must trust God.

Very often, we trust our own intelligence and strength to keep us well and safe. We will make sure that we look out for traffic, eat right, exercise regularly and study diligently. We are like the armies in King David’s time, who depended on the number and power of horses to win battles. We often forget to pray for God’s protection!

Answers to these questions will help you to remember:

1. Do you know why we pray before we travel?
It is because safety is of _____ .
2. Who can keep us safe from earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and pestilence?
Safety comes from _____ .
3. Who can deliver us from evil?
Safety belongs to _____ .

Thought: Nothing and no one can guarantee us safety except God.

Prayer: Teach me Heavenly Father, to trust in You at all times for Thy protection from all danger and harm. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

A GOOD NAME

“Oh no, Russell is in my class this year.” His form teacher lamented. All the other teachers cast a look of sympathy. Russell is famous for all the wrong reasons. His nicknames include “Rascal”, “Terror of the school” and “The problem kid”. How did Russell earn such a bad name for himself?

Russell is not courteous and does not have respect for others. He snatches things from his classmates. He is dishonest and would deny breaking things in the school compound. Russell does not care what other people think of him. Everyone avoids him because of his bad reputation, and he has lost all his friends.

Businessmen also know the importance of a good name or a good reputation. If they are found to be dishonest, people would not trust them and will shun them. So, if they try to increase their profits through dishonest means, they may end up poorer. God hates dishonesty. He will not bless cheats.

As a Christian, it is even more important to have a good reputation. How can we win souls for the Lord if we cannot even win friends? As children of God, we must never bring shame to God’s name. Having a good name will point others to the glory of God.

What do you think others will say of you behind your back?

Do they have kind things to say of you, that perhaps you are a kind or generous child? Or if you could hear them, would you be sad to hear that they are afraid of befriending you because you’re a selfish or proud child?

Do you have a good or a bad name?

Thought: A good reputation is better than riches.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to be good so that Your name will be praised by people who are watching me. I know that is very tough because I tend to do things my way instead of considering others. So please remind me, Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

HOW TO TREAT YOUR ENEMIES

Joanne was almost in tears when she came home from school.

“Mom. I really cannot stand Jia Jia. She is really wicked. Grrrrr! I feel like strangling her. I don’t want to be her friend anymore.”

“Well, my young lady, what about applying the Christian love that you learn at church?” asked her mother.

“But Mom, you should see what she did to me! When nobody was looking, she pulled my hair and then pretended to look away. Today, she drew a big red cross on my journal notebook. Yesterday, she hid my pencil box behind the cupboard. Yi Min found it there. At physical education class, she kicked my water bottle under the bushes.”

“That is really mean. Does she do that to others in the class?”

“She used to but when they avoided her, she became very nice to them. Do you think I should start ignoring her?”

“Let’s see. What did Jesus do with those people who crucified Him? He prayed to His Heavenly Father to forgive them. What did he do to those who hated Him?”

“Ok Mommy. I got it. Do good to them that hate you. I will try. Can you pray for me too?”

“Sure Joanne. Let us pray.”

From then on, Joanne heeded her mother’s advice. Whenever she could, she would help Jia Jia with her homework. On Jia Jia’s birthday, she gave her a beautiful hairpin. Eventually, Jia Jia stopped her mean behaviour toward Joanne because she felt bad, and later went to Sunday school with her.

Complete the sentences to find out what Jesus will want you to do:

1. When your enemy is hungry, give him _____
2. When your enemy is thirsty, give him _____

Thought: God wants us to be kind and good, even to our enemies.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember how You loved me and sent the Lord Jesus to die for my sins. It is difficult for me to love mean people, but I want to be like You. So, help me, Lord. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

WORDS CAN WOUND DEEPLY

Fire can burn our fingers and a cut from a penknife can also cause a lot of pain. That is why we are warned not to play with fire. Similarly, we must exercise care when using a penknife. Did you know that words that come from our mouth can also hurt others like fire and knives can? The Bible says they can hurt right to the stomach. Can you imagine that?

We have learnt that words of truth and love can be so pleasant. They bring cheer to the downhearted, and give hope to those feeling hopeless. We also know that God hates lips that gossip and lie. Today we are reminded that lies and angry words hurt people deeply.

The words of a talebearer often cause quarrels between friends. They are like oil being added to fire. That is why friends must not allow small misunderstanding to spoil their friendship. A prompt apology can sometimes do wonders. So children, if you know a friend is angry with you, go straightaway to him or her to apologise or clear up any misunderstanding. This will prevent you from losing a friend.

Compare the pair of sentences that have the same message and cross out the one that will hurt:

- A. Mummy, you always don't care for me.
B. Mummy, you must be busy but may I have your attention for a while?
- A. I think I prefer you in the red dress you wore last Tuesday.
B. This dress makes you look very ugly.
- A. Why is your house so messy, you lazybones?
B. Do you need some help with tidying up your room?
- A. You are so lazy! You are good for nothing.
B. Can you help me with the dishes please?

Thought: We must be careful with the words we use.

Prayer: Forgive me Heavenly Father, for hurting others with the words I used. Fill me with Your love and make my speech gracious always. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

DONT BLOW YOUR OWN HORN

To “blow your own horn” is to boast. Often, a boastful person may despise or look down on others, that is why pride is such an ugly sin. To teach people not to despise others, Jesus told a story about a Pharisee and a tax collector praying at a temple.

The Pharisee stood proudly and prayed, “God, I thank thee that I am not like the cheats, the law breakers, the adulterers or even this tax collector. I fast twice a week and tithe faithfully.” At a corner stood the tax collector who hardly dared to lift up his head. He beat his breast, showing how unworthy he felt. He prayed sincerely, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

Whose prayer did God answer? It was the prayer of the humble tax collector who was truly sorry for his sins! What about the Pharisee? He boasted to God about how he had obeyed the law and considered himself better than other sinners. He thought that God would receive his prayer, but it was not so.

The Pharisee’s prayer was not a prayer at all. It was self-praise. He was just boasting about his own good behaviour. He was blowing his own horn. The Bible says, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth....” In other words, self-praise is no praise.

The Bible reminds us to be humble because we do not know what will happen to us even the next day. In fact, we do not know what can happen the next minute. There is really nothing that we can boast of. All the goodness we enjoy comes from above. Let us be wise never to boast.

Is every one of these persons blowing his own horn?

1. “Everyone says I am good at Maths!”
2. “All my aunts like the picture I painted. Isn’t it better than all my classmates?”
3. “I am not boasting Mommy, but all the other contestants are so dumb.”
4. “I will sure win that race tomorrow. I am so fit”

ANSWER: _____

Thought: I cannot even know what will happen tomorrow. What have I to boast about?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be humble always. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

CONFESS OUR SINS TO GOD

“Did any of you see Johnny’s composition book? He lost it before recess. If you have taken it, come and see me right after school.” The form teacher announced to the class.

Writing a composition has always been the hardest task for Matthew. On the other hand, Johnny has always been the best writer in his class. That day the pupils had to hand in their two-paged composition but Matthew could not write more than a paragraph. So, Matthew sneaked back into the classroom during recess and stole Johnny’s composition book. He copied and secretly hid Johnny’s book in the gap between the teacher’s cupboard and the wall.

The form teacher just happened to pass by and saw what happened. He was giving an opportunity to Matthew to confess his wrongdoing. Did Matthew seize it? Let us look at two possible endings to the story:

Scenario 1:

Matthew did not feel sorry. He thought that nobody saw him do what he did. So, nobody would know as long as he kept it a secret. He was planning to go straight home as soon as class was dismissed. Oh no, his form teacher was standing right at the gate and signaling him to follow her. What followed was punishment by the principal.

Scenario 2:

Matthew was sorry for what he did. He remembered that God was watching even though no one was supposed to know. He remembered the verse, 1 John 1:9 and he confessed and prayed for God’s forgiveness. He then stood up and owned up to the wrong he had done and picked up Johnny’s book to return it. He then apologised to Johnny and the teacher for his misdeed. The form teacher then dismissed the class and spoke gently to Matthew. She promised to give Matthew an extra lesson a week to help him with his writing.

Which ending to the story will you choose? It is wise to do what Matthew did in Scenario 2.

Thought: Trying to hide our sins is useless because God knows everything.

Prayer: Heavenly Father please help me to have a repentant attitude and seek Thy forgiveness every time I sin. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

FREELY FORGIVE...

“These books are so cool,” commented Jessica as she and sister Amanda looked through the stuff Grandma had made for them. “Look! Here’s a picture I drew when I was four years old.” The girls laughed together as they looked at the picture. “May we draw a new picture for a page in our books?” asked Amanda. “Sure,” agreed Grandma. “I want you to use special paper and markers that are acid free.”

“Acid free? What does that mean?” asked Amanda.

“Most paper contains an acid that will slowly ruin pictures,” explained Grandma. “Acid free materials won’t do that, and the paper will stay good much longer.”

Soon the girls were busy drawing. “I’m done!” announced Jessica after a while. “Me too!” said Amanda.

Grandma admired their artwork “Very good work, girls,” she said.

“I like my picture best,” declared Jessica as she inserted the new page into her memory book. “Not me,” retorted Amanda. “I think my colours are much prettier.” “No way!” exclaimed Jessica. “Mine are! I...”

Grandma frowned. “Girls! Girls!” she scolded. “Your quarrelling reminds me of the acid that damages paper and pictures but quarrelling is worse as it ruins your friendship with each other as well as with God.” Grandma looked sternly at the girls. “Is there something you’d like to say to each other?”

The girls looked at each other. “Sorry, Sis,” mumbled Jessica. Amanda hesitated. “I-I’m sorry, too,” she said.

“That’s better,” said Grandma. “These memory books will last a long time. They’ll remind you not to let the acid of quarrelling, or any other sin, destroy friendships with other people or with God. Be quick to apologise when you are wrong, and equally quick to forgive.”

“We’ll be friends forever, Grandma,” replied Amanda, wrapping an arm around her sister. “Come on, Jess. Let’s go play checkers.”

Thought: Aren’t you glad God is willing to forgive you when you confess your sin? Do you forgive other people, too?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that sin can destroy friendship with people and fellowship with God. Help me to be forgiving towards others just as You have forgiven me. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

FIGHT AGAINST DOING WRONG THINGS

“How many bags of potato chips do we eat each month?” Dad asked, looking up from the newspaper. Mom shrugged. “Quite a few,” she replied. “Why?”

“Well, this article says potato chips are the favorite salty snack of many countries, especially America,” said Dad. “It says the average American child eats twenty-one pounds of them each year.”

“For a writing assignment a few weeks ago, we had to make a report about some popular food snack, and I chose potato chips,” said Alicia. “I read they were first made when a chef in a New York restaurant got angry! He had made French fries for a customer, and the man said they were cut too thick. The chef tried again—and when the man still complained, the chef got mad. Then he cut the potatoes really thin and fried them so hard they couldn’t be eaten with a fork. And that was the very first potato chip!”

Alex laughed. “Thank you, Mr. Chef!” he exclaimed. “I love potato chips!” Dad smiled. “There used to be an ad on TV that said, ‘Bet you can’t eat just one.’ Have you ever tried that?” Alex and Alicia laughed. “No way!” replied Alex. Alicia agreed. “One chip makes you want more. You try them, and before you know it, you’re addicted,” she said.

Mom added, “For bad things that are addictive, it is easier to just avoid them rather than to risk getting addicted and struggle to stop,” she observed. Dad agreed and added, “Are you aware that sin can be addictive, too?”

“Good point,” agreed Mom. “That’s why we’re careful about what we watch on TV and on the internet or in movies, and why we allow only certain books and magazines in our house.” “And that’s why you warn us about drugs and smoking and alcohol, right?” asked Alex.

“Right.” Dad nodded. “It’s often easier to say no before you taste the devil’s food,” he replied. “If it’s questionable, don’t even try it.” “I understand now,” said Alicia. “We should say no right away because it might be addictive. Stick to potato chips – and don’t even eat too many of them!”

Thought: Have you ever tried something you knew was wrong? When Satan tempts you to say something nasty, tell a “white” lie, watch a show your parents have forbidden, or do some other wrong thing, don’t give in even one time.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder from today’s text that we are a special people. As such, I’m to glorify You and stay away from things that dishonour You. I know I’m tempted to do so at times, so Heavenly Father, teach me please. This is my prayer in Jesus’ name – amen.

DO YOU RESEMBLE YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

“Do that again, Lance,” said Grandma. “Do what again?” asked Lance.

“Laugh again, the way you just did,” Grandma answered. “You look and sound just like your father when you do that.”

“I do?” asked Lance. He jumped up and raced to the bathroom to gaze into the mirror. He studied his reflection from every angle, and tried repeating the laugh that had caught his grandmother’s attention.

“It doesn’t work,” he said when he returned a few moments later. “Besides, even when I’m not laughing, people always say I look like Dad.” “You do,” agreed Grandma, “but when you do certain things, the resemblance is even stronger than at other times.” Nodding her head, she added, “All of us should try to look more and more like our Father.”

“Hey!” protested Lance’s sister Leah. She frowned. “Everybody says I look like Mom. What’s wrong with that? I like it.”

Grandma laughed. “That’s good, too,” she agreed, “but I was thinking about our heavenly Father. The Bible says we’re made in God’s image, but I think we look even more like Him when we do certain things.”

“Like when we do good stuff?” suggested Leah. “When we obey Him and serve Him?”

Lance nodded. “And when we’re nice to everybody and are helpful?” he asked. “Then the resemblance is even stronger, like you said. Right, Grandma?”

“You’ve got it exactly right,” replied Grandma.

Lance looked at his sister. “Don’t worry, Leah,” he said. “I think you look like both Mom and our Heavenly Father.” Leah gave Lance a surprised glance, and he laughed.

“There,” said Grandma, “you did it again!” “Did what?” asked Lance. “You looked just like your father,” replied Grandma.

Lance grinned. “Which one, Grandma? God or Dad?” he asked. “Both,” said Grandma with twinkling eyes. “Both.”

Thought: Would anyone say you resemble your Father - your Heavenly Father, that is?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, indeed I should be more and more like You! I know it’s not easy for that means I’ve to submit more to You, I’ve to read more of the Bible, and I’ve to think more of others and less of myself. But Heavenly Father, please help me to do exactly that! In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

PRAY WITH A RIGHT MOTIVE!

“Mom!” called Anna. She was making party invitations on the computer. “Something’s wrong!” Mom came and looked over her shoulder. “See?” Anna pointed to two words at the top of the screen. “It says, ‘Invalid request.’ What does that mean?”

“It means you pressed a key that asked the computer to do something it’s not programmed to do,” explained Mom. “Here... I’ll get you going again.” Mom helped Anna, and soon the invitations were nicely printed.

Anna could hardly wait for the day of her party – and when she prayed, she even asked God to make her party the best party ever! But it wasn’t. It stormed the day of the party, Anna’s best friend was sick and couldn’t come, and Patty spilled fruit juice on the carpet and went home in tears! “What a flop!” moaned Anna when the last guest had gone. “All the while I’ve been hearing how nice Yeen Leng’s party was, and I wanted mine to be better than hers. I don’t like that girl and so I even prayed mine would be better!”

Mom stopped her washing and looked at her daughter in surprise. “You prayed that your party would be better than Yeen Leng’s because you don’t like her?” she repeated.

“Well...” Anna looked a little embarrassed. “It’s just that I’m tired of hearing the girls talk about how wonderful hers was.”

Mom looked thoughtful. “Anna,” she said after a moment, “do you remember the ‘invalid request’ you made on the computer when you were getting the invitations ready? When you made that request you didn’t get what you asked for. Now, I certainly don’t mean to insult God by comparing Him to a computer, but I’m afraid your prayer was an invalid request, too.”

Anna sighed. “You mean I shouldn’t have prayed for a good party?”

“It was okay to pray for a good party,” Mom said, “but I’m afraid you were asking for the wrong reasons. God’s Word says that when we pray with the wrong motives, like our own selfish reasons, we won’t get what we ask for.”

Thought: Will the things you pray for bring blessing to others and honour to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for teaching me not to expect you to answer my prayers when I pray with selfish motives. Please help me to be consistent in reading the Bible to discern your will and directions for my life so that I can be correctly motivated. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US!

“Megan, I’d like you to pat Matt for his nap today, please,” said Mom. “I need to make an important phone call.”

“Okay,” agreed Megan. “Nap time!” she announced to the energetic toddler. Laughing, Matt toddled away, wanting his sister to chase him. Megan caught him quickly. She took him to his crib, set him down, and raised the side. Little Matt scrambled around on the mattress, ignoring soft toys and stuffed animals. “Sweet dreams,” Megan whispered, backing out of his room.

“Blankee!” Matt protested. “Blankee!”

When Megan peeked in, Matt had already pulled himself up and began to shake the rail. Megan frowned and shook her head. “Where did he leave his blanket?” she wondered. She checked the TV room. She dug through the toy box. She searched the hall. She looked under the dining table. Finally, she found the blanket in a lower cupboard in the kitchen.

As soon as Matt saw his “blankee,” his crying stopped. He dropped to the mattress, clutching the blanket in his arms. After a few shaky breaths, he smiled contentedly at Megan. “Sweet dreams,” Megan said again as she left.

“Matt had to have his ‘blankee’ before he settled down,” Megan told her mother later. “Good thing I found it, or he never would have gone to sleep.”

Mom nodded. “That blanket is his security,” she said. “I guess we all need security – even grown-ups! What’s your security, Megan?”

Megan shrugged. “You, I guess,” she said. “I know you’re here to help me if I need you.” She grinned and added, “You’re my ‘blankee,’ I guess. What’s yours?”

Mom smiled. “Well, we all find some security in family and friends – but a Christian’s real security is in God and in His love and forgiveness,” she said. “He’s always available.” She ruffled Megan’s hair. “Quite frankly, I don’t know how I’d manage without God!”

Thought: Do you have a favourite blanket, stuffed animal, or toy? Do you have a special adult in your life to help you? Even parents can’t be with you all the time, but God can.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the comforting thought that You are with me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week! May I learn to depend on Your unfailing love and presence in my life. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

SIN CAN PARALYSE

Ming wasn't sure exactly what a stroke was, but his grandmother had one several months ago. Since then, she couldn't walk very well and her left arm hung loosely at her side. Mom said the stroke had partly paralysed one side of Grandma's body. "Grandma, I pray for you every day," Ming told her one afternoon. "I've been praying that you'll get all better."

"Thank you, Ming. I've been praying, too," said Grandma, "but I knew this old body would give out sooner or later. It happens to the best of us, you know." Grandma smiled. She was still able to smile, even though she was unable to do many of the things she had always done before. "That stroke paralysed some of my muscles. That's bad enough," she continued, "but did you know that many people in the world are paralysed in a different way without even knowing it?"

Ming was surprised. "How could anyone not know that he's paralysed?" he asked.

"Well, sometimes sin works like a stroke and paralyses people," said Grandma. After considering Grandma's words, Ming frowned. "I don't get it," he said.

Grandma took a pair of scissors from a nearby table and gently poked her left arm with the sharp point. "My arm has lost both its strength and its feeling," she said. "When I poke it, it doesn't hurt anymore. It's like that with sin. Sometimes people just keep on doing something wrong until it doesn't 'hurt' any more. They lose the feeling of guilt, just like I've lost the feeling in my arm."

Ming nodded solemnly. "That's even worse than being paralysed the way you are, isn't it?"

"It surely is," agreed Grandma. "I pray daily that whenever you're tempted to do something wrong, you'll turn from it quickly and never become paralysed by it."

Thought: Have you done something wrong a number of times and become less and less concerned about it? Have you even begun to think that the wrong thing is right?

Prayer: Thank you Heavenly Father that today's lesson teaches me that sin can paralyse me. I don't want to allow sin to paralyse my conscience. So please when I next am tempted to do something wrong, help me turn away from it immediately. This is my prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

DISCIPLINE IS GOOD FOR YOU!

Nicole, who lived along the Amazon River as a missionary kid, had a unique variety of pets. She especially loved Mickey, her kitten-sized monkey, but he was always a rascal. One day, he scampered to the bookcase and cautiously ran his hand across the tempting, paper-jacketed books. Then he began tearing off strips of paper and shredding them to bits.

“Mickey! What are you doing?” scolded Nicole as she entered the living room. She scooped him up and ruffled his fur. He swished his long bushy tail in aggravation. “Stop ripping the books or you’ll have to go outside,” she threatened. Mickey calmed down, he didn’t like to go outside. Nicole set him down and cleaned up the mess. Mickey turned and picked up his tail, combing his fingers through the long, silky, black fur while Nicole worked. But as soon as she disappeared into her room, Mickey hopped back to the bookcase and resumed the shredding.

The sound of tearing paper filtered down the hall to Nicole. She reappeared and gently but firmly spanked him. “Naughty monkey! Do you want to go outside?” she again asked sternly. She shooed Mickey away from the books and returned to her room.

Mickey immediately scooted back to the bookcase. He was having a great time when he suddenly found himself lifted into the air. He whirled his tail furiously and chattered his disapproval, but he couldn’t pull himself from Nicole’s grip.

“I don’t really want to put you outside, Mickey, but you have to learn to behave!” said Nicole sadly as she opened the door. Suddenly she thought of something. “Now I know how my parents feel when I disobey them,” she murmured. She tossed Mickey lightly down onto the hot cement patio.

As Nicole went back into the house, she thought of something else. When we sin, it must really hurt God to have to punish us, too, but He does it for our good. This story helps us to understand that a little better now.

Thought: Do you try to get away with sin? Your parents love you, but they must sometimes punish you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s reminder that discipline is good for me. I know both my earthly parents and my Heavenly Father have to discipline me because they love me. Please help me to grow in obedience so that I will need less discipline. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GOD SAVES...

From the window, Nicole watched Mickey, her pet monkey. He was not happy to be outside by himself. He sat on the step and unsuccessfully pulled at the edge of the door. Then he went behind the steps to the cooler crawling space under the house. There he waited for his chance to get back into the house.

After a while, Nicole had to run an errand for her mother. From his hiding place, Mickey saw her leave, and he was ready and waiting when she returned. When Nicole opened the door and went into the house, Mickey jumped out and ran in behind her. She didn't see him, and she let the heavy door snap shut. It closed on Mickey's tender tail.

Mickey turned around and grabbed his tail as though it were a rope. He chattered and cried in desperation. He pulled his hardest, but it was no use. His tail was stuck in the door.

"Poor Mickey!" gasped Nicole as she ran back to the door. With one hand she pushed the door open, and with the other she scooped Mickey into her arms. He swished his hurting tail and rubbed the spot where the door had slammed on it. "Oh, Mickey, your poor tail!" cried Nicole. "Why did you try to get in all by yourself?"

As Nicole cuddled him and soothe away his hurt, she saw some friends outside. A thought came. "You're just like some of my friends who try to get into heaven their own," she told Mickey. "You didn't make it into the house, and they won't make it into heaven by themselves." she said as she soothed her monkey. "I rescued you, and you're safe and loved. Maybe if I use you as an example, my friends will understand about trusting the Lord instead of trying to work their way to heaven."

Thought: Are you trying to get into heaven all by yourself or by the things you do? Why not admit you're a sinner and let Jesus rescue you? He loves you and died for you.

Prayer 1 (if you have believed): Heavenly Father, I thank You for the salvation in Jesus. Help me to rely on Your strength and be willing to change day by day to be a better Christian. In Jesus' name I pray – amen.

Prayer 2 (if you have not believed, you can be saved if you pray this prayer): Heavenly Father I confess that I am sinner in need of Your forgiveness. I accept the Lord Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

JESUS – THE BEST FOUNDATION!

“What causes an earthquake?” asked Tuan Hin when he heard a news report about the clean-up efforts in an area where an earthquake had recently occurred.

“Well, there are some places in the earth’s crust that have a certain type of split, called a fault,” explained Dad. “Sometimes the sides of the fault shift against each other, and that causes the earth to vibrate, or tremble. When they move against each other hard enough, it may even shake so much that buildings crumble and collapse.”

Jason, their neighbour who was riding with them, frowned. “Can that happen here?” he asked fearfully. He imagined his own house tumbling down. “No worries there - according to geological maps, we in Singapore are not living near any major faults in the earth’s crust,” said Dad. “Since we’re living on a more solid foundation, we’re not likely to experience an earthquake.”

“Good!” exclaimed Jason. “I’m glad our house is on solid ground!” Tuan Hin’s father nodded. “So am I,” he agreed. He smiled at Jason, “But do you know that we need to build our lives on a solid foundation, too? That’s even more important than having our homes built on a firm spot in the earth’s crust.”

The two boys looked at each other. They grinned as they started to sing. “The wise man built his house upon the rock...”

“Last verse,” said Tuan Hin, and Dad joined in as they sang, “So build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ...” When they finished, Tuan Hin grinned at his dad. “Just last week in church, we had a lesson about the wise man who built his house on a rock,” said Tuan Hin.

“And as Christians, we’re like the wise man,” added Jason, “because we’re building our lives on Jesus.”

“That’s right,” agreed Dad. “Jesus is our firm, strong foundation, and God can hold us steady even when things in life seem all shaken up. We can trust Him with every part of our lives.”

Thought: Have you chosen the Lord Jesus as the foundation for your life? Are you sure you make decisions based on Him as your foundation? Or do you make decisions and act as if you are your own foundation?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me the Lord Jesus is my only sure foundation. Help me to build my life in obedience to Thy Word. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GOD LOVES PEOPLE OF ALL RACES

Brett struggled with the colour chart. “Why is Mrs. Lam making such a big deal about primary and secondary colours before letting anyone paint?”, he wondered.

“Brett, please come up front and take the red colour card,” said Mrs. Lam. Brett looked at the cards resting on the chalk ledge of the blackboard. Then he lifted a card, and everyone laughed. “That’s enough, class,” said Mrs. Lam sternly. She turned to Brett. “Take the red card, please,” she said. “Not the green one.”

Brett frowned. “I’m colour-blind,” he said softly. “It’s hard for me to tell red from green.” “Oh!” said Mrs. Lam in surprise. “I didn’t know that. We’ll excuse you then and let someone else help with this demonstration.” Brett returned to his seat, feeling like everyone was looking at him.

At recess time, Brett played with a boy of a different nationality from his own. “Hey, Brett,” called one of his classmates, “no wonder Siva is your best friend. You can’t tell that he’s a different colour.”

“Ignore him,” Brett told Siva. “He’s so dumb!” Brett could never understand people who decided to not like a person based on skin colour. During Science class a little later, the subject of colour-blindness came up again. Brett was asked several questions about it. “You mean that lots of times you don’t know what colour things are?” asked one girl.

Brett grinned. “It doesn’t matter what colour they are,” he said. “Red apples are good and so are yellow ones. Green grapes are good and so are purple or red ones. Colour isn’t what makes something good or bad.” He took a deep breath, and then continued. “That’s true of people, too. God made every person, and He made them all the same in value.” He looked at the boy who had teased him at recess, and added, “I think everyone should be ‘colour-blind’ when it comes to seeing people.”

“Good for you, Brett,” approved his teacher. “You’re absolutely right.”

Thought: Do you develop opinions about others based on skin colour? Don’t forget that God made everyone special. Outward appearance, or things like whether that person is good-looking or wealthy does not make him any more or less valuable in God’s sight, and it shouldn’t make him more or less valuable in your sight, either.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me indeed to understand today’s message that I must befriend people of all races and not be prejudiced by things like race, looks, wealth, etc. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

DELIGHT YOURSELF IN GOD'S WORD

"We did a fun thing during Science lesson," David told his mother as he packed for a weekend at his grandparents' house. "We had to get into small groups and decide which items we would include in our survival kit if we were taking a trip to the moon. Our teacher gave us a list of twenty things, and we had to choose eight of them for our kit."

"Did everyone agree on the same eight items?" asked Mom. David shook his head. "One girl in my group kept insisting that we take a map of the earth," he said. "What good would that do on the moon? Personally, I was disappointed that chocolate wasn't even on the list."

Mom chuckled. "You and your chocolate!" she exclaimed.

David laughed, too. "Since we couldn't take chocolate, I thought we should take vitamins because there are a lot of foods we can't take, and we might not get all the stuff we need to stay healthy."

A little later, David announced that he was all packed and ready for the visit to his grandparents. "Did you pack pyjamas?" asked Mom.

"Of course," answered David. "Toothbrush?" asked Mom.

"Yep," replied David. "Don't forget, Mom – I worked on a survival kit at school today. My mind is all geared up to pack all the necessary things." "What about daily vitamins?" Mom asked. David laughed. "Grandma will make sure I eat well," he said. "I won't need vitamins there."

"What I actually meant by 'daily vitamins' this time was your Bible," Mom told him. "You'll need spiritual nutrition, too. Absorbing the Word of God into your daily life will help you keep healthy spiritually."

David looked at the Bible on his bedside table. "Okay. I'll take it," he said, picking it up. He opened his suitcase and made room for it. "But even if I didn't, I'm sure Grandpa and Grandma would see to it that I got spiritual food. They talk about God a lot."

"Yes," said Mother, "but it's good to read the Bible for yourself, too." She smiled. "I'm sure it wasn't on your master list at school," she said, "but it would have been a good item to take to the moon, too."

What else would you add to the survival list to the moon?

Thought: If you prepared a survival kit, would the Bible be included?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today's lesson on the importance of the Bible in my life! Help me to delight in Your Word, read and obey what it says! In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PAY ATTENTION TO GOD'S WORD!

A-choo! Just as Miss Low was about to start the lesson, Alan sneezed loudly, and the other children in his Sunday school class giggled. Miss Low paused. When she started to speak once more... A-choo! Everyone laughed – even Miss Low. Some kids faked coughs and sneezes. Soon the class was in an uproar.

Miss Low smiled as she called the class to order. “It looks like the thief is here again today,” she said after the kids had settled down. She ignored the questioning glances as she directed the class to open their Bibles to Mark 4. Together they read the parable of the sower.

“God’s Word is like the seed,” said Miss Low. “Our hearts are like soil. Let’s think about the first kind of soil described here – the first condition of the heart. It’s called the ‘wayside.’ When the seed of God’s Word lands on this kind of soil, what happens to it? Can you tell us, Alan?”

“Satan quickly steals it before it can grow,” Alan replied.

Miss Low nodded. “Yes, and he uses many things that, like thieves, snatch the seed away. For example, this morning a thief came disguised as a sneeze. Alan couldn’t help it, but his sneezing took our minds off our lesson, and I think maybe Satan hoped to keep our minds occupied with such things,” said Miss Low. “Can any of you think of other thieves Satan might use to steal the seed of God’s Word?”

Susan raised her hand. “In church services, he might use hiccups or crying babies,” she suggested. “Or sleepiness.” “When we have devotions at home, it seems like the telephone or door bell often rings,” offered Alan.

“The thief could be something we’ve read or seen on TV,” suggested Patty. “That might make us think about silly or bad things instead of the lesson or sermon.”

Miss Low nodded. “Right,” she said. “Let’s all be on our guard so we don’t allow ourselves to be distracted and miss what God wants to teach us from His Word.”

Thought: Do you try hard to keep your mind on God’s Word when it’s being read or taught?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is true that often, I have difficulties paying attention during bible lessons or my Quiet Time. I pray that I won’t let Satan’s thieves steal Your Word from my heart or use me to steal Your Word from others. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU THANKFUL TO GOD?

Beng Lee and his family visited their granddad in Malaysia. Since it was a modest house, everyone had to squeeze a little over the next few days.

"I'll pray," said Beng Lee as they had dinner. He thanked God for the food. Then looking up, he groaned. "Oh, no! Not broccoli again! And I don't like chicken!" But he knew he had to eat some, so he took a small portion each. "This chicken is way too spicy," he complained between bites.

Dad frowned. "Beng Lee, do you suppose God heard your prayer tonight?" Beng Lee looked surprised. "Sure," he said. Dad asked again. "Did He hear your grumbling, too?" Beng Lee looked down at his plate. "I guess so," he admitted slowly. "Then which did God believe?" asked Dad. "Your prayer of thanks, or your complaints? After dinner, we're going out to the old well. I think it has something to teach you." Beng Lee was not sure what dad was talking about, but his father knew – he lived there as a boy.

When they arrived at the well later, Beng Lee watched as Dad let down the bucket and hauled up water. "Are we going to water the garden?" asked Beng Lee. He saw that the water was dirty, but guess they used it on the plants. Dad shook his head. "Here... have a drink," he said. "No! The water in this well is filthy," protested Beng Lee. "That's true," agreed Dad, "but you won't drink the water in the well. You'll drink the water in the bucket."

Beng Lee made a face. "If the water in the well isn't good, the water in the bucket won't be good either," he said. "It's the same thing."

Dad nodded. "Right again," he said. "What's in the well will come up in the bucket. That's something like what the Book of Matthew 12:34b teaches, 'For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.' Beng Lee, I've noticed lately that you thank God when you pray, but often you gripe about things. What is really in you?"

Beng Lee looked at the dirt and leaves floating in the water. He knew that his grumbling attitude was like that rubbish. He didn't know how to clean up the water in the well, but he knew he could confess his attitude to the Lord and ask for His help in making necessary changes.

Thought: What's in your heart? Try to be aware of all the good things God does for you each day.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, please teach me to recognise your goodness unto me and to have the right attitude of being truly thankful for all your blessings instead of complaining continually. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU READY TO MEET JESUS?

Miranda hung up the phone with a sigh. “Either I’m getting forgetful, or Jennifer is,” she told her mother. “I thought I was supposed to meet her at four o’clock, but she says we agreed on three o’clock. I feel bad – this is the second time I’ve kept her waiting.”

“Sounds like you ought to write things down,” suggested Mother. “I have something that might help you.” She took a small book from a shelf and handed it to Miranda. “An appointment book – this is perfect!” exclaimed Miranda. After that, she carefully recorded her appointments, and she kept every one.

“Pastor’s sermon last week was kind of scary,” said Miranda as they drove home one Sunday. “You know – the things he said about hell? It would be awful to go there!”

“Yes, it would,” replied Dad, “but Christians don’t have to be afraid, because they won’t go there. How about you Miranda? Have you trusted Jesus to save you? You’ve never really told us that you have.” Miranda shrugged. “Well, I’m real young,” she said. “I have plenty of time.”

“How do you know that?” asked Mother. “I was just thinking about your appointment book – how you set appointments, and then you keep them. Do you know that God sets appointments, too?” “He does?” asked Miranda. “What kind of appointments?”

“There’s a Bible verse that says it’s ‘appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.’ For some, this ‘appointment’ comes after a long life,” explained Mother, “but for others it comes early. Even babies die sometimes. Our appointment to meet God may come at any moment.” “You’re saying I might die young – any day now!” exclaimed Miranda.

“We hope not, but it is possible. Any one of us could die at any time,” said Dad. “However, our appointment may not come through death. God has also set a time for Jesus to return to earth and take believers to heaven to live with Him forever. But only God knows His time schedule. He simply tells us to be ready. He says, ‘Now is the day of salvation.’”

Miranda started thinking seriously about this for the rest of the car ride home.

Thought: Are you ready in case this is the day God has set for your appointment to meet Him – either in death or in His return?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be a good witness and testimony to others while I await the Lord Jesus’ return. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

MADE SPIRITUALLY ALIVE!

Jeffrey was so excited that he could hardly open his birthday gift. He was pretty sure it was a puppet – something he'd been wanting ever since he'd seen a missionary perform with one at church. He tore off the wrappings and opened the box. Sure enough, there was a puppet inside. His little sister, Debbie, looked on with wide-eyed wonder. "A doll?" she asked. "You're going to play with dolls?"

"No way!" responded Jeffrey. "This is a puppet like the one the missionary had at church. Remember? I'm a boy and boys don't play with dolls!" "His puppet was alive," said Debbie. "It could move and talk, but yours just lies there. I still think it's a doll."

"Mine will come to life, too," declared Jeffrey. "I'm going to learn to be a ventriloquist like that missionary. I'm naming my puppet 'Andy.'" And starting that very day, Jeffrey worked hard at learning how to make his puppet move and speak. "Andy is alive now," declared Debbie several weeks later. Jeffrey beamed. He figured he was truly getting good enough to perform as a ventriloquist.

During their family devotion one evening, Dad turned to the second chapter of Ephesians (see today's Scripture reading). "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)" read Dad.

"Dead!" exclaimed Debbie. "Who's dead?"

"God says everybody is a sinner, spiritually dead, and bound for hell" Dad told her. He looked at Jeffrey. "We're like Andy – Jeffrey's puppet. Andy is entirely limp and lifeless except when Jeffrey slips his hand inside him, operates the controls, and speaks for him. Andy needs Jeffrey to have any kind of life, and sinners need to trust Jesus as their personal Saviour to receive spiritual life. When we trust Him, He makes us alive and we will go to heaven one day."

Thought: If you believe in the Lord Jesus, you will be made spiritually alive and you will be in heaven one day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for making me spiritually alive through the Lord Jesus. Thank You also for the hope of heaven that awaits me. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PRAY SPECIFICALLY...

“God bless everyone. Amen.” Yin Leng ended her brief prayer after their family devotion one morning. Opening her eyes, she saw a slight frown on Mother’s face. “Is something wrong?” Yin Leng asked.

“What do you mean when you say ‘God bless everyone?’” she asked. “Exactly who is everyone?” “Well,” replied Yin Leng, “I mean Grandma, Tze Ern, my friends, missionaries – everyone.” “What do you want God to do for them?” asked Mother.

“Bless them,” answered Yin Leng. “You know -- friends with studies, Tze Ern’s having trouble sleeping. Those kinds of things.” “Then don’t you think you should tell God that those are the things that concern you?” asked Mother. Yin Leng shrugged. “I could, but I guess it’s easier to just say ‘bless everyone.’ Besides, God knows what I mean,” she said. She jumped up and changed the subject.

After school, Mother and Yin Leng went shopping. When a saleslady approached them, Mother smiled. “My daughter needs...” She paused. “Would you please show my daughter something to wear?” “Jeans?” asked the saleslady. “Or tops? Or shoes?” “Just something, anything, to wear,” answered Mother.

Yin Leng spoke quickly. “I need a pair of jeans,” she said, “and a T-shirt, too.” Soon she was busy in the fitting room. “That was so embarrassing, Mom!” complained Yin Leng. “Why didn’t you tell her what I needed? She must have thought we were weird!”

“Isn’t it easier not to go into details,” answered Mother. When Yin Leng looked at her suspiciously, Mother added, “I thought you knew that. I don’t know why, but your quick and easy ‘God bless everyone’ prayer came to my mind when the saleslady spoke to us. I thought maybe my answer to her would show you that it’s important to clearly communicate – both to people and to God. Take your time when you talk to Him. Be specific about the needs of those for whom you’re praying. Express your thoughts and feelings when you bring your requests to Him.”

Yin Leng nodded her head thoughtfully. “I guess that will help me recognise God’s answers to prayer, too,” she said.

Thought: Are you specific when you pray, or do you hurry and not bother with details?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s lesson – that I should be specific with my prayer requests and pray according to Your will. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

IS GOD'S WORD A DELIGHT TO YOU?

Angela read Mom's grocery list as she pushed her cart down the familiar aisles at NTUC Supermarket at the ground floor of her flat at Dover Road. From the corner of her eye, she could see a shelf filled with chocolate cream-filled snack cakes. Yummy! she thought. I wish Mom had put Choco-Cakes on this list.

All the way home, Angela thought about those Choco-Cakes and how good they would have tasted. Walking into the kitchen, she set the sack of groceries on the table just as Mom came in. "Why are you wearing such a scowl?" asked Mom.

"I didn't know I was," answered Angela, "but I was just wishing I could have bought Choco-Cakes instead of all this stuff. I just love Choco-Cakes." She rolled her eyes dramatically. "Sometimes when I walk past them in the store, I can almost hear them call out my name: 'Angela - I'm over here! Buy me! Eat me!' Oh, they're so good!" Mom and Angela giggled together.

"And what do the jars of honey say when you walk past them?" asked Mom as she took a jar of honey from the bag and put it in the cupboard. Angela shrugged. "They don't say a thing to me," she replied. "Do they say something to you?"

Mother smiled. "I was reading in the book of Psalms this morning," she said thoughtfully, "and there was a verse that mentioned honey. David said that God's words were sweeter to him than honey."

"I've read that verse before," said Angela, "but I sure don't understand it. Maybe it would make more sense if I liked honey better."

"I guess David must have liked it a lot," said Mother, "but he's saying that he likes God's Word even better. As for you..." Mother paused. "Why not think of it this way," she suggested. "God wants you to be hungry for His Word more than you're hungry for any of the things of this world - even more than you crave Choco-Cakes."

Thought: Are you "hungry" for God? For His Word?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to read the Bible faithfully and grow in my understanding of your truth so that I will hunger for your Word instead of desiring the pleasures of this world. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

DONE YOUR QUIET TIME?

It was early when Alex woke up. He knew it was early because there was only a little light outside and he could hear the early-morning sounds of birds and cars. Alex got out of bed and went to look for his mother. He looked in the kitchen, but she wasn't there. She wasn't in the living room either. Finally, Alex peeked into Mother's bedroom and found her sitting in a corner, her Bible on her lap. Her eyes were shut so he knew she was praying.

Alex wanted a hug, so he quietly crawled onto Mother's lap. "Good morning," said Mother, giving him a hug. "You're up early."

"Are you praying?" asked Alex. "Yes," replied Mother, "I am." "What about?" asked Alex.

"Oh, quite a few things," answered Mother, "but I was mostly just sitting here and waiting on God."

"Waiting on God?" asked Alex. He didn't understand that.

Mother nodded. "Just now you came in and climbed on my lap because you wanted to be with me," she told him. "I'm glad you did, because I love you, and I like to be with you, too. Well, sometimes I just like to be with God. Sometimes I like to sit with Him – thinking about how good He is, talking with Him a little, and just enjoying His goodness. I think He's glad I like to be with Him."

"Can I sit with Him, too?" asked Alex.

"Sure," said Mother. "Think about Him being with us right here, right now." Mother closed her eyes and Alex closed his eyes, too, and thought about Jesus sitting with them.



Thought: Do you have friends you just like to spend time with? Does that include Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please teach me to spend time reading and meditating on your Word during my Quiet Time each day. Help me to love to read the Bible and to rely on Your strength for each day. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

DO YOU LOVE OTHERS?

Jennie and her twin brother, James, skipped along happily – each holding one of Grandma’s hands. It was going to be a fun morning because Grandma was taking them to the park. They were nearly there when an old lady stopped them on the street. “Well, Helen,” she said in a shrill voice, “Wow! You’ve got those grandkids again! Wasn’t it enough that you raised three of your own?” Narrowing her eyes, she squinted at Jennie and James.

“Oh, Dorothy,” responded Grandma, “I enjoy having the children so much.” She chuckled softly, squeezing the hand of each twin. “Mommy went to see the doctor, so we’re going to the park to play at the swing,” Jennie piped up. “Doctor!” the lady exploded. “Don’t tell me there’s going to be another baby!”

“Wouldn’t that be nice?” answered Grandma sweetly. “Now we must hurry or all the swings will be taken.” As they went on their way, James scowled. “Grandma, that lady was a little strange,” he said.

“Yeah,” agreed Jennie. “Doesn’t she like kids?” “I’m sure she does, honey,” replied Grandma, “but I guess she just would rather not take care of them. She doesn’t know what fun she’s missing.” Grandma’s voice was quietly reassuring. “Do you like taking care of kids?” asked Jennie. “I like taking care of you!” Grandma answered positively.

James squeezed Grandma’s hand. “I think you’re the best babysitter in the world,” he declared. “Me, too!” said Jennie quickly. She walked a little closer to Grandma. “Why do you like to take care of us?” she asked. Grandma smiled. “Because I love you,” she said, “and I enjoy spending time with you. Besides, Jesus said that when we show love for one another, we show that we love Him, too.”

“Doesn’t that lady love Jesus, then?” asked James. “We don’t know that, but I hope we’ve shown her today that we love Him,” said Grandma with a smile. She released their hands as they approached the swings. “Let’s see how many ways we can find today to show that we love Jesus, okay?”

Solemnly, James turned to Jennie. “Want me to help by pushing you while you are on the swing?” he asked his sister.

Thought: Do you realise that one way you show your love for Jesus is by the things you do - things like being nice to a sister or brother, obeying your parents, running errands, or helping a neighbour?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the lesson that You are pleased when I help others. Help me, Heavenly Father to bear a good testimony for You. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

PROPER FOCUS DURING WORSHIP

Going home from church, Tony and Susan told their parents about the missionary who had spoken in Sunday school. "He told us that the people he works with worship a false god," said Todd. "They run round and round the altar, and each time they complete a round, they would drop a piece of wood into a box. By the time they finish, they're dead tired, but they think they've done a great service to their god." "Isn't that silly?" asked Susan. "I'm glad we know the true God and don't do stuff like that! We worship Him when we go to church." "Maybe we do, and maybe we don't," replied Dad. "We don't?" asked Tony. "Then why do we go to church?"

"We should worship Him," said Dad, "but, well... take this morning, for instance. While the pastor was preaching, Tony, Jeffrey and you were writing notes to each other. Do you think that's worshipping?" As Tony slowly shook his head, Dad added, "As for me, I'll have to confess that at one point, I was thinking about a problem at work instead of concentrating on worshipping God and hearing His Word."

"I'm sometimes guilty, too," admitted Susan. "At Sunday school last week, I whispered to Laura during our prayer time. After class, Mrs. Lim talked to me about it. I was really embarrassed." Susan looked at her parents. "Did she tell you?" Mother shook her head. "No... but I'm glad you realise that was wrong. And now I guess it's my turn to confess," she said. "Well, sometimes I catch myself thinking about something else while singing familiar songs." Mother added, "Colossians chapter 3 verses 1 to 3 tells us to set our affections which means our minds on things above that are spiritual rather than things on this earth. This means we must not be distracted by things of this world especially when we are worshipping God."

"We all could improve our worship, couldn't we?" asked Dad. "Let's make up our minds to consciously worship Him throughout the service."

Thought: What's going on in your mind when you're worshipping in church or when the Sunday School teacher is talking?

Prayer: Heavenly Father I must confess that at times, my mind wanders when a song is sung, or when a prayer is said, or when a lesson is taught. Help me to sleep early Saturday night, so I can be alert during Sunday morning worship. Help me to also pay full attention to the hymns and songs and message. When I come on Sundays to worship, may I do it right. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

RUNNING THE RACE!

Aaron stood in place on the race track, alert and ready to spring into action for his lap of the relay race. When the baton was passed to him, the two teams were almost dead even. Sprinting along the track at full speed and pushing himself to his limit, Aaron streaked ahead of his opponent. They were a full metre apart by the end of his run. The opposing team who had been unbeaten for four years did not manage to catch up, and Aaron's team won. Aaron was so excited!

A few weeks later, Aaron and his mother returned home from his grandfather's funeral feeling very sad. "I'm sure going to miss Grandpa," said Aaron, tears filling his eyes. "He was the best grandfather a guy could have. I guess he was extra special to me because Dad died when I was very young, so Grandpa was both a grandfather and a father to me."

"Yes," agreed Mother as Aaron picked up a picture of his grandfather and gazed at it. "Grandpa witnessed for Christ everywhere he went, and he always gave a lot of his time to help other Christians." Aaron nodded. "A lot of people will miss him," he said with a sigh. Mother smiled. "You see, the Bible says that living the Christian life is like running a race." explained Mother. "The Christians who have died and gone to heaven ran in their appointed time and place in life – some running well, and some not so well. But your Grandpa did run well."

"Grandpa sure ran well," said Aaron. "I think he was one of the best runners in life." He paused, then asked, "Am I also running the Christian race?"

"Yes," replied Mother. "Grandpa has run his race. In word and deed, he has set a good example for you to follow."

Thought: Do you know that as a Christian, you are a runner in life's race? Many "heroes of the faith" have run ahead of you and have gone to receive their reward.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today's lesson that I must run the race – that my Christian life is a race in itself. Help me to be a disciplined runner, to be alert, and to be a good example to others. This is my prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

SHOW YOUR LOVE TO OTHERS

A cold ache filled Kim's heart as she got ready for school. "No one ever talks to me at school," she told her parents that morning. "I hate it." She sighed. "We've started school two months, and I still don't have one friend – not one!"

Mother looked up with a smile. "Kim, a long time ago I learned a little poem. Listen," she said. "I went looking for a friend, but not one could be found. I went out to be a friend, and friends were all around."

Kim wiped her hands on a piece of tissue paper. "What does that mean?" she asked.

Mother explained gently. "It means that you shouldn't think so much about finding a friend. Instead, look for someone who needs a friend and be a friend to that person."

"The Bible gives the same advice in Proverbs 18:24a," said Dad, "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly." Dad stood, ready to leave for work. "You've been feeling sorry for yourself, girl, and that's understandable. But it's time to think about others," he said. "Now grab your bag. I'll give you a ride to school."

When they arrived at school, Dad encouraged her. "Do what God says Kim, be friendly today," he urged. "God's word is always right."

As Dad drove away, Kim noticed a girl going up the slope. That looks like the girl who sits across from me in class, thought Kim. What's her name? Oh, yes – Nadia. I wonder where all her friends are. Maybe she doesn't have any. Maybe...

"Nadia," called Kim. "Wait a second. Can I walk with you?"

As Nadia looked up, a smile spread over her face. "You sure can, and you're the first person who's asked to walk with me."

A warm feeling filled Kim, and it drove out the cold lonely ache. Dad's right, she thought. God's Word is always right.

Thought: Do you feel lonely? Left out? Do you always wait for others to speak to you first? Instead of waiting for someone to be a friend to you, do what God says – show love to others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for teaching me to reach out to others even as I hope others would reach out to me. May I really trust and obey You and Your Word. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

DO YOU APPROACH GOD?

“Doesn’t Justin ever quit talking?” complained Joanne. “He’s always bothering me. I wish he’d leave me alone.” She snapped her fingers. “I know what will fix him. I’ll give him the silent treatment!”

When Justin ran into the house a little later, Joanne retreated to her room. Soon Justin banged on her door and called out to her, but she turned up the volume on her radio so she couldn’t hear what he said. After several attempts to get her attention, Justin gave up and walked away.

As Joanne was watching TV later, Justin tried to speak, but Joanne covered her ears and began to hum. I’ll teach him, she thought. At dinner time, Joanne went to the kitchen. She noticed that Justin had changed clothes. “Are you going somewhere, Justin?” asked Dad. Justin nodded. “I’m going to our neighbour’s house to watch a short movie on the Grand Canyon,” he said. “Mrs Lee will bake her yummy cookies, too.” “That sounds like fun,” said Dad. He looked at Joanne. “You’re not going?” he asked. “I wasn’t invited,” Joanne answered crossly. “You were, too!” said Justin. “I tried to tell you, but you wouldn’t listen.” “Oh, no!” wailed Joanne.

Later that evening, Joanne approached her parents. “Can you help me with an assignment our Sunday school department is doing?” she asked. “We’ll be having some lessons on prayer, and our teacher is going to bring a treat for everybody who turns in a short essay on the subject. There’s a prize for the best paper from each class, too. But I don’t know what to write.”

“Hmmm,” murmured Dad. “Well, maybe you could talk about the importance of prayer. You could tell about how you missed out on some fun today by refusing to communicate with your brother. Then remind your readers that we all lose out on blessings when we fail to communicate with the Lord.” “I’m afraid you’re right,” agreed Mom. “When we do that, I believe He is grieved, and it certainly hurts us as well.” Dad nodded. “We need to keep open communication with Him and not try to work things out all on our own,” he said. “He wants us to talk with Him about everything.”

Thought: Do you talk to God about your problems? Do you ask Him to help you find the best way to solve them?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, indeed often I don’t pray enough. I don’t come to You enough to talk about my problems and worries. Help me to learn the habit of praying without ceasing for all my life. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

OBEY GOD'S WORD!

Brad was enjoying a Saturday hike at Bishan Park with his father. As they came to the entrance of a tunnel that went under a road, Brad called out, "Hello in there. Hello!"

"Hello," repeated an echo. "Hello..." "I'm Brad," shouted Brad. "I'm Brad." "Brad..." his voice echoed back.

Soon they were out of the tunnel and heading across the next open field. "Hello there," yelled Brad once again, but there was no answering echo. "Why was there an echo in the tunnel, but not out here?" Brad asked.

Dad smiled. "When sound waves hit the hard walls of the tunnel, they bounce back as an echo," he explained. "Out here in this open space, there aren't any obstacles like that, so the sound keeps going."

After a good hike, Brad and Dad headed home. "I hope Lisa and Ellen are gone somewhere by the time we get home," Brad told his dad. "All they ever do is giggle and scream."

"I recall that they have complaints about you, too – they say you pick on them all the time," observed Dad. "I think all of you should try harder to get along with each other."

Brad protested, "you know what a pain sisters can be. You had three sisters."

"Yes," agreed Dad, "I did, but I'm afraid they'd tell you what a pain brothers can be. Anyway, God says we're to love others and live at peace with them. That includes sisters."

"I've heard that enough," said Brad. "I hear it at home, in Sunday school, in Bible class – love others and be kind."

"That's good," said Dad. "I don't think we ever hear things like that too often." He ruffled Brad's hair playfully. "Remember how everything you said in the tunnel echoed back to you?" asked Dad. "Well, when you hear what God says about the way He wants you to live, your actions should echo His words. Don't be like an open field and allow God's message to just go off into space. Apply God's words to your relationship with your sisters."

Thought: Does your life reflect the Scripture lessons you learn?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to learn, apply and obey Your Word in my everyday relationships and activities. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ALL HAVE SINNED

Several old albums and loose pictures were scattered over the living room floor, and Sharon and Joanna were helping their mother sort them out. "I'd like to rearrange our albums with captions above them," said Mother. "See what you can come up with."

"Lifeguard blows whistle at Joanna," suggested Sharon, picking up one of the pictures. "This was the time we were at the beach and the lifeguard yelled at Joanna, remember?"

"Forget that one!" exclaimed Joanna. "But just look at these pictures of Christmas dinner. The food looks yummy!"

"The caption for that could say, 'Give thanks first; then eat,'" said Sharon promptly. "You were scolded for eating before we prayed." She picked up another photo. "Look at this one, Joanna. You're pouting in this snapshot," she said with a laugh.

"Will you quit bringing up all the bad things I've done," protested Joanna angrily. "After all, you're not so perfect yourself."

"None of these pictures remind you of bad things about me," Sharon said smugly. "Is that right?" challenged Mother. She picked up two photos. "In these I see not one, but two sinful little girls."

"Mom! Those are our baby pictures," objected Sharon. "You can't find anything bad about a baby."

Mother smiled. "You look sweet enough," she agreed, "but you and your sister are the same when it comes to sin. Every single baby is born a sinner – no one is better than anyone else."

"So there!" exclaimed Joanna. "Be quiet!" snapped Sharon. "There's no need to argue," said Mother. "The Bible clearly tells us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

"Including you, Sharon," added Joanna. She couldn't seem to keep from making that final jab but then she blushed as she realised her own sinful nature had shown itself again.

Thought: Thank God that though we are born sinners, God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that I am born a sinner. It is only by Your grace and mercy that I have been saved from my sins. Help me to live a life pleasing before You. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

HAVE YOU EVER TOLD SOMEONE ABOUT CHRIST?

“I hate my feet!” declared Susan. “They’re too big.” “Well, not everyone can have small feet,” replied Christine, her older sister, “and I don’t think you’d want to do what girls in China used to do years ago – wrap up your feet so tight that they can’t grow.”

Susan glanced at her long feet and frowned. “Did they really do that?”

“Yes.” Christine nodded. “In school, we read a story about a Chinese lady. She had her feet bound when she was very young, and they hardly grew at all. She was proud of them, but when she was older, she had to be carried to lots of places. Her feet were too delicate to walk over rough or uneven ground.”

“That might not be too bad,” said Susan, still staring at her feet. “Maybe mine should have been bound.”

“Well, you wouldn’t be able to run or even walk properly,” said Christine. “You wouldn’t like that.” She grinned at her sister. “But you know what?” she asked. “You can still have beautiful feet.”

“Who? Me?” “Yeah, right!” exclaimed Susan.

Christine laughed. “No, really,” she said. “Remember the Chinese lady? Well, she found out that small size feet doesn’t make feet beautiful, but something else does.” Susan looked doubtful as Christine continued. “To make a long story short, the lady became a Christian. After she got married, she and her husband became missionaries.”

“And?” prompted Susan.

“Don’t you see? This lady was using her feet to bring herself to various places to spread God’s Word, and the Bible says that people who witness have beautiful feet,” explained Christine. “Where does it say that?” Susan wanted to know.

“Somewhere in Romans,” answered Christine. “Let’s go ask Mom to help us find it.”

Thought: Do you witness for the Lord at school, at play, or even at home?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me and help me to share the Gospel with others so that they can be saved. I know it’s not easy, so help me Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

ANGRY AND BITTER?

As Stephe opened her eyes one morning, she had a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. She felt anger rising within her as it did so often lately. Dad came home drunk again last night, she remembered, and he was yelling at Mom as usual. Stephe reluctantly sat up in bed. "I hate him," she muttered. "Why does he have to drink?" As she tiptoed quietly out of her room and across the living room, she saw her dad, asleep on the couch. He'll be there all day, she thought with disgust as she went into the kitchen. She found her mother there, peeling vegetables.

"Good morning," Mother greeted her, smiling. "How did you sleep?"

"Oh... fair, I guess," muttered Stephe. She shrugged, and her eyes filled with tears. "How do you stand it, Mom?" she blurted out angrily. "How can you stand the way Dad gets drunk?"

Mother thought quietly for a moment. "I used to be quite bitter about it, especially before I knew the Lord," she admitted, "but the Lord has shown me that I need to forgive. The feelings of bitterness or resentment didn't go away quickly, however, so I learned to deal with it one day at a time." She picked up an onion. "If you would peel one layer at a time off an onion, some tears would come with each layer, but eventually there would be no more onion," she said. "Dealing with bitterness is something like that. It takes daily prayer. It can take weeks, months, and sometimes years before it's all gone – but you will see victory. You need to deal with bitterness one day at a time."

"So you're not really over it?" asked Stephe. Mother gave Sophie a hug. "Yes, honey. My 'onion of bitterness' is gone, but because your dad has not yet repented, I still need to forgive him each time he slips. Now, let's pray together for Dad – most of all that he'll one day accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour. And let's also pray we'll be able to forgive him once again."

Thought: Are you angry about things that are happening to you that you cannot change?

If you really have an unreasonable parent – what would you do?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to harbour bitterness against people who hurt me. Help me to forgive them just as You have forgiven me. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PRAISING GOD FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS

Betty had been very sad ever since the doctor said her little brother's allergies were caused by her kitten. Now they needed to find a new home for Betty's pet, and she and her family prayed about it often. "I'm worried about Shadow," Betty told her friends one day. "If we don't find a home for her soon, Dad says he'll have to take her to the SPCA and let them look for a home for her."

That evening, however, the elderly woman living 2 floors below Betty informed Betty's family that she had decided she would like to take Betty's kitten! "What an answer to prayer!" exclaimed Mother. Together they thanked God for providing a home for Shadow – one where Betty could probably see the kitten every day!

The next day, Betty eagerly told her friends that the kitten had a new home and wouldn't be going to the SPCA. "I think they were almost as glad as I was," she happily told her mother that evening. "Did you tell them it was an answer to prayer?" asked Mother. "Well... not really," said Betty.

"Do you remember the testimony Mr. Tan gave at church last Sunday night?" asked Mother thoughtfully.

"Sure," said Betty. "It was interesting. He talked about how he did a lot of very bad things for many years before accepting Jesus as Saviour. He told us how God had really changed his life and turned it around."

"Right," said Mother, "and I was blessed and encouraged by that, weren't you?" Betty nodded. "I believe the entire congregation was blessed by his testimony," continued Mother. "That's an example of why it's good to share the things God does for us. Christians are encouraged when they hear how God works, and it's a testimony to unbelievers. God is glorified when we tell others how He has answered prayer."

"Even about little things, like a home for a kitten?" asked Betty.

"Maybe especially about those kinds of things," replied Mother, "because those are the kinds of things we all deal with every day. Let's be sure to thank God for what He does for us, and ask Him to help us share those blessings with others."

Thought: Do you tell others when God answers your prayers or uses His Word to strengthen your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for answering my prayers. Help me to praise You by sharing Your goodness with others. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

MORE THAN THE WORDS OF MAN

Did you know that the word “God” is not mentioned in the book of Esther? You can read through the whole book, but you won’t find the name of God anywhere. For this reason, critics consider the book of Esther as not being completely trustworthy and reject it as part of the Bible. Is that a good reason to dismiss the book of Esther as merely the words of man?

Think about it this way: We may not see God, but we can see with our eyes the effects of His power. He reveals to us His existence and His power through His creation. Similarly, the name of God may not be mentioned in the book of Esther, but we can see how He works through every event. Everything that happened, whether big or small, didn’t happen by chance. It was God working all things together in order to protect and save His people, the Jews.

Let’s roll back the curtains to see the backdrop of this great story of God’s deliverance. The time period is 464-435 BC. Some of the greatest nations today may be America and China. But during this time, the empire of the Medes and



the Persians was the greatest and its king was Ahasuerus. The empire was made up of 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. That’s a very huge area covering Asia and Africa!

This sets the background of the book of Esther. Through the events that will soon unravel in this vast empire, we will witness how God is sovereign and in control over everything that happens. Everything. And we cannot help but acknowledge that this precious book of Esther is more than the words of man. It is the words of God, with the Holy Spirit as the divine author inspiring the earthly writer. We can boldly say of the book of Esther – Thus saith the Lord, it is written!

Thought: The Bible is not the words of men, but the Word of God.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, Your words are precious, inspired and preserved for my spiritual benefit. I pray that as I read Your Word, You would help me to understand all spiritual truths. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY?

Have you heard of the phrase – “Eat, Drink and Be Merry”? This is a popular way of life for many. Man likes pleasure – they will do whatever makes them feel good and happy. King Ahaseurus held 2 big parties to show off the power of his great empire. This made him feel good. There was a huge amount of food and non-stop entertainment for everyone to “eat, drink and be merry”. There was also wild partying. Pride, greed, drunkenness and gluttony, are some of the sins that they indulged in. It is the same today where the worldly parties of the rich and famous are glamourised by the media. Young people look up to them and read up on such party happenings in magazines. Especially in Singapore, many of these parties and top-end restaurants are promoted. What do you think? Should Christians also follow popular culture and live to “eat, drink, and be merry”?

Write out 1 Corinthians 10:31:

The Bible teaches us that whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must do all to the glory of God. In other words, all our activities must be God-centred, and not self-centred. They must glorify God by pointing others to Him and not leading them to sin. God is not a killjoy. But when we do things simply to satisfy our own selfish and fleshly desires, we sin against Him.

Dear young reader, do not be easily impressed with the popular culture of this sinful world and the lifestyles of the rich and famous. It is the way that leads to destruction. Guard your heart! Follow Jesus and His Word, not the world and its sinful ways. God wants us to be happy, but remember, don't follow blindly the pleasures of the world!

Thought: Have I allowed the world into my heart by spending precious time and money to satisfy sinful desires?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that You will help me to be careful and to guard my heart against all sin. May every area of my life, including what I do in my recreation, be pleasing in Your sight. Help me not to be attracted by the things of the world although I must confess sometimes they are so tempting. So help me Heavenly Father. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

THE ILL EFFECTS OF WINE

By the 7th day of the 2nd party, King Ahasuerus was drunk. Drinking wine or other types of alcohol, makes a person lose control over what he says, thinks and how he behaves. He could suddenly become very noisy and start speaking nonsense. He is also not able to think clearly and loses his sense of judgment. Many fights are started because men come under the influence of alcohol and become violent or aggressive. Under these circumstances, it was not surprising that the king commanded his queen to parade before others. She was his prize catch, a beautiful woman that he wanted to show off. Now, bear in mind this was a wild party and all the men were most likely very drunk. Instead of protecting Queen Vashti from danger or the lustful glances of men, King Ahasuerus wanted to expose her to possible harm! Why did he do this? Pride. He wanted to show off that he had a beautiful woman for his wife. When people are drunk they make wrong decisions.

Proverb 31:4 contains an instruction from a mother to her son – King Lemuel. She tells him “It is not for kings O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink.” Kings are men in a high position that requires them to make important decisions for the country. Therefore, they should not even drink a drop of wine, or it will influence them to sin and make wrong decisions. This was what happened to King Ahasuerus. But is this warning only for kings? Dear young friend, this warning is also for you! It is important for you to learn now, that as Christians, we have a high calling that requires us not to lead sinful lives or make wrong decisions. We are called to be a people set apart to worship and serve God. Therefore at all times, we must:

E B B S R O E

Drinking wine has become popular, even stylish. Many see it as a high-class way of life. Some of your classmates, even at the young and tender age you are at, may actually have drunk some alcohol! Dear child, don't. Stay strong and abstain from alcohol even as you grow older.

Thought: It is not for kings to drink wine. Neither is it for me as God's child.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to abstain from alcohol or anything that can destroy my life. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

THE QUEEN SAID “NO!”

King Ahasuerus' commanded Queen Vashti to parade herself before everyone at the party. He failed to protect his wife and look after her best interests. Instead he wanted to subject her to humiliating stares from lustful man. What was Queen Vashti's response? She refused to go at the king's command, knowing that the king and his guests had been drinking for 7 days and were all probably drunk. When people are drunk, they behave in a very rowdy and unpleasant manner. Hence, Queen Vashti did not want to be the centre of attention in such an atmosphere.

This was a very brave decision for Queen Vashti to make. Whoever dares to disobey the king must be prepared to face the consequences. In this case, the king could remove her as queen, or she could even lose her life. But Queen Vashti stood her ground. She did the right thing by saying no. Her defiance to the king made him so angry that it 'burned in him'. It was a snub to the proud king before all his princes and subjects!

Dear friend, have you faced situations where you are pressured to participate in a sinful activity that would bring you spiritual or even physical harm? Remember there are activities that we must say 'No' to, especially if they are against God's Word. Queen Vashti had only good morals, but for us, Christians, we have God to draw strength and courage from. We should be even bolder to say 'No' to being part of any sinful conversation or activity.

Can you think of one activity, that is sinful and you should stay away from? (*Hint: think of what you see in school, or some of the things that people do in their free time*)

Thought: Dare to say “No” to sinful activities

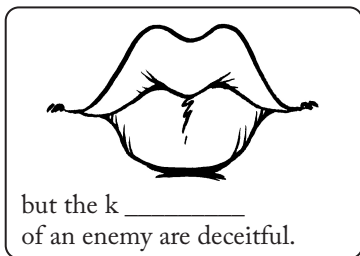
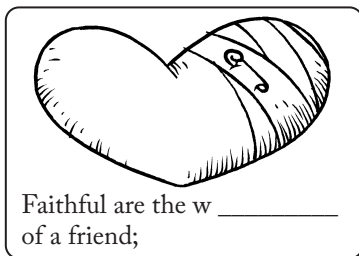
Prayer: Father in Heaven, teach me to always submit and obey Your commandments, and grant me the courage to say “No” to anything which does not please You. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

FAITHFUL GODLY FRIENDS TELL THE TRUTH

The king must have thought angrily to himself “I’m the king of this great empire. I’ve conquered lands and won wars. All the nobles and princes obey and fear me – but my wife, the queen, dares to defy me in front of everyone!”

When we get angry at someone, we often want others to support us in our anger and tell us that we are right even though we may not be. That’s what Ahasuerus did. He turned to his seven wise men, who were the top princes in the empire. He asked them, “What shall we do unto the Queen Vashti...” Ahasuerus wasn’t asking for wise advice. He turned to people that he knew would take his side and support him in his anger.

How about you dear child? When someone doesn’t agree with your bad behaviour or wrong choices, do you get offended and become angry? There are times that I get angry when others point out my faults and sins. I become angry because I don’t like to be told I am wrong. Have you felt the same way before? Like Ahasuerus, do we surround ourselves with people who will make us feel better by lying to us that we’re right? The Bible tells us in Proverbs 27:6:



Those who flatter you and don’t tell you the truth about your sins are not true friends; they may even be enemies. True friends are those who care enough to point out your faults and sins. The truth may hurt initially, but they are faithful wounds intended to save you from falling deeper in sin and to help you get right with God again. Thank God for such friends!

Thought: Which type of friend or adviser do you want in life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for good Christian friends who can give wise advice and tell me when I’m wrong. Help me to be humble when my sins are pointed out, that I may live a life that is pleasing in Your sight. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

QUEEN VASHTI DETHRONED

Memucan, one of the seven princes, spoke on behalf of the wise men. He exaggerated that Vashti did wrong not only to the king, but to all the nobles and princes. He reasoned that her act of disobedience would cause other women to disrespect their husbands. Therefore, Memucan recommended that the king remove Vashti from her position as queen and never appear before the king again.

He said what the king wanted to hear and it pleased Ahasuerus to pass the law immediately. The decree went out very quickly to all the 127 provinces by express horse-and-camel mail, to tell everyone of Vashti's disobedience, and her removal as queen. Vashti would no more appear before the king.

This lays the setting for the next scene of the story. The events move swiftly for the significant introduction of Esther, who will later replace Vashti as queen. King Ahasuerus and his men may be unaware of it, but God is the one who is in control of all that is happening. What seems to be the workings and plans of man, is used by God to save His chosen people, the Jews. It is for our sake also, for from the Jews shall come the Saviour of the world.

Do you think that the events in your life are driven by men? By sight alone, you may think that it is the decisions of your parents, teachers, or even your own decision that shapes your life. But we know that it is the Living God who is in control. He is the one who works all things together for your good. The school and the class that you are in, the people that He has placed in your social circle, are all for a purpose. May you view all events through the eyes of faith, with the full assurance that your Faithful God is working out His perfect will in your life.

Thought: God never moves without purpose or plan.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive me when I have little faith and walk by sight. I pray that you will grant me the faith and full assurance that You are working all things together for my good. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW QUEEN

The search was on for a new queen. King Ahasuerus appointed officers over the whole empire, to gather potential candidates. The criteria were simple. The women had to be virgins who were young and beautiful. If a woman was picked, she had no choice but to be brought to the king's palace in Shushan. The first year would be spent preparing themselves to look even more beautiful. After that, each woman had to present herself before the king, to let him choose his favourite as queen.

What does it mean to be beautiful? Many companies make lots of money by making people look beautiful. Whether it is selling make-up, fashionable clothes, or providing beauty services, companies know that people attach a high value to physical beauty. This is not much different from the criteria king Ahasuerus had for his new queen. He didn't request for other qualities besides the outward appearance. Is this what it means to be beautiful?

Christians ought to view beauty differently from the world. The Bible tells us about the qualities of a beautiful woman in God's sight. Let's see what they are!

Match these godly qualities to the verses

A meek and quiet spirit

Proverbs 31:30

Fears the Lord

Titus 2:5

**Honours and obeys
the word of God**

1 Peter 3:4

While outward beauty can be bought with money, inner beauty is priceless. Outward beauty will eventually fade with age and time, but a person's inner beauty grows even more as he or she walks close to the Lord. We shall soon read of how Esther had both outward and inner beauty.

The world shuns those who are not attractive and doesn't care if they are kind or patient or helpful. How about you?

Thought: True beauty is in the heart and spirit, not in the flesh.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I pray I'd not be as shallow as that king I read of but to treasure people who are beautiful inside, even if they are not attractive physically. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

WHO ARE ESTHER AND MORDECAI?

Today's scripture passage introduces to us, Esther and Mordecai. Both of them will be used mightily by God in the history of Israel, and of the world. They don't know it yet, but God was already working out His perfect plan in and through their lives. So who exactly are Esther and Mordecai?

Mordecai was a Jew who worked in the palace of Shushan. His great-grandfather, Kish, was carried away from Jerusalem by king Nebuchadnezzar, when the Babylonians ruled the empire about 100 years ago. Although he was brought up in a foreign land, Mordecai never forgot his Jewish roots. Mordecai's uncle had a daughter, whose name was Hadassah, or Esther. When Esther was very young, her parents died. Thus, Mordecai looked after Esther and treated her as his own daughter. Both of them shared a very close relationship. Mordecai was like a father to Esther, and Esther was obedient to him. Esther was a beautiful woman who met all the criteria to be the next queen. Later, she would be picked by the king's officials and had no choice but to follow them to the palace.

What can we learn from this short introduction of Mordecai and Esther? Both were Jews of the captivity, and not in any high position. Esther was an orphan, weak and helpless if not for Mordecai who looked after her. Esther and Mordecai were weak and sinful people like us, but God used them in a mighty way to save the Jews from being wiped out from the face of the earth.

Dear reader, God chooses the small and weak to serve Him in big ways that will have a lasting impact, regardless of what their status in life is. Your lack of strength is the means for God to manifest His perfect strength in your life. The important thing is to rely on the strength of God, and not on our own. We forget this fact too easily. We are told to work hard in our studies, to try our best and often we forget to seek God's help. Dear child, start and end the day with God. Pray for His guidance and help to rely on Him and not on ourselves.

Thought: Like Esther and Mordecai, you may not know but God is already working in your life.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I am weak, but You are strong. You alone are my strength and shield. I pray that Your strength will be made perfect in my weakness. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ESTHER WAS DIFFERENT

Many young and beautiful women in the empire were brought to the king's house in Shushan. It must have been a full house! The guardian of the house was Hegai, one of the king's officers. His job was to ensure every woman was given top beauty products and treatment, so that at the end of 12 months, she would be able to look her best before the king.

Hegai had a difficult job. There were so many women competing for his attention! Perhaps they hoped to get better treatment from the rest, to increase their chances of becoming queen. But there was something remarkably different about Esther that made Hegai notice her. This caused Hegai to be pleased with Esther and to treat her with kindness. What was different about Esther?

Esther didn't behave like the other women. Her meek and quiet spirit shone forth brightly. Esther's physical beauty was made all the more attractive because of her inner beauty.

What about you? In a big crowd of many, can others see the difference in you? In school there may be peer pressure to compete for better results, or to perform the best in a sport. There's nothing wrong with healthy competition. But if we become obsessed with being better, and start to put others down, or think about how to gain an unfair advantage over them, that is wrong.

Without Esther looking for it, Hegai gave her all the beauty products immediately. He also gave her the best room in the house to stay in, with 7 maid-servants at her beck and call. What can we learn from this? Christians need not buy the favour of men through cheating, bribery, gifts or flattery. It is how you live and conduct your life, that others can tell and admire the difference. When we live for God, He may also grant us the favour of men.

Do you dare to be different if that is necessary? Or are you like the rest of the kids? Do you dare to befriend someone unattractive, or new in class? Do you dare to tell the truth even if others told you to just "forget it"? Do you get angry or jealous easily, as other kids may be when you see mum or dad showering gifts on your sibling? Do you always want to be first, or do you dare to be different and give way to others?

Thought: Dare to be different for Jesus!

Prayer: Father in Heaven, set my affection on things above. Help me not to be conformed to this world, but to live according to Your Word, that Christ may be glorified. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

A CLOSE FAMILY

We can choose our friends - those we want to keep close to us, and others we prefer to keep at a distance. - but can we choose our family? We can't choose our parents, and neither can they choose us. God gave each of us parents and siblings by His divine appointment. He put us in our family for a special purpose. A closely-knit family is one where members love and care for one another. The children love and honour their parents by obeying and respecting their parents' authority. The parents love their children with a constant care and only desire their best interests. Their children are always on their mind.

We see this closeness and love of family between Mordecai and Esther. They only had each other. Mordecai was like a father to Esther, and Esther respected and trusted all his decisions. When Esther was brought to the king's house, Mordecai instructed her not to reveal her Jewish background. No reason was given, but Esther fully trusted him, and obeyed. She knew that he would not ask anything that was not in her best interests. Every day that Esther was away from Mordecai, did not mean that he forgot about her. Mordecai was always concerned and anxious over her, like every loving parent would be. He went to the king's house every day to find out how Esther was doing, and to find out the latest updates of her well-being. Mordecai and Esther cherished each other dearly as family.

How much do you cherish your family and thank God for them? Your family will never be perfect; your parents may get angry with you for wrong reasons; your sibling may be selfish. But you too are never perfect. So let's learn to appreciate them despite their failings.

Reflection: What are some practical ways that you can show love and care to your parents and siblings?

Thought: My family is God's gift to me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank You for the family that You have given to me. Grant me a spirit of humility and obedience to love and serve them in practical ways. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ESTHER OBTAINED FAVOUR FROM ALL

It seemed like sitting for an examination. After a year of intense preparation, the women would now take turns to be assessed by King Ahasuerus. He would then decide who was the most attractive based on his own preference. After such a long preparation, it must have been quite nerve-wrecking for them. Would their preparation pay off? Would the king take notice, or just ignore them?

Before each woman left the house, she could take whatever she desired with her. We can imagine that they wanted to look their best. Perhaps they took with them additional make-up, fragrances, or accessories. But what did Esther take? The Bible makes special mention that she requested for nothing else and only took what Hegai had given her. Yet, when it was Esther's turn to appear before the king, she did not look less beautiful, but even more than the rest.

Esther was not anxious to snatch or seek other means in order to impress the king. She just did her best within the means given to her. She had a quiet calm that was unlike the rest of the women. Again, we learn she dared to be different from the rest.

Dear child, this is such an important lesson – to dare to be different from the world. While it is good to work hard and do our best, we should never presume that we can work our way towards success by our efforts alone. God is the one ultimately in control. It was God who gave Esther the unanimous favour and acceptance from everyone that saw her!

Dear reader, are you trying to work your way to success by your own plans and strength? Commit your ways to the Lord and trust in Him, who is in control!

Read the verses below from Proverbs 3:5-6 and commit it to memory:

**Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;
and lean not unto thine own understanding.
In all thy ways acknowledge him,
and he shall direct thy paths**

Thought: God's way is perfect, and the best for me.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, forgive me for the times when I trusted in my own efforts and forgot that You are the one in control. Help me to trust in You to direct my paths. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

NEW QUEEN CROWNED, WITH HUMILITY

Four years have passed since Vashti was removed as queen. After seeing Esther, King Ahasuerus didn't take too long to decide to crown her as his new queen. To celebrate the occasion, he organised a great feast in honour of Esther. He also exempted the 127 provinces from taxes and gave gifts to the people. The coronation of Esther was announced to the whole empire. The stage was now set for Esther to use her role as queen to make an important decision later that would weigh heavily on the future of the Jews.

Many of you may probably not hold a high position like Esther but you don't need to be in a position of authority in order to make decisions that can influence others for the Lord. What matters is whether those you come in contact with can see that Christ is the difference in your life. Whatever role God gives to you, it is by His providence so that He can use you as His hands on earth, to be a channel of blessing to others. Isn't that such a wonderful thought? Just like Esther, we have the privilege to participate in God's plans!

Another thing we can learn from Esther is that she remained humble and obedient to Mordecai. Esther took no pride in her good looks, or that she was now queen of a great empire. Esther didn't become arrogant towards Mordecai but continued to respect him. She remembered his instruction not to reveal that she was a Jew. Although the reason was not told to her, she obeyed his command "like as when she was brought up with him". Esther remembered and was grateful to Mordecai for bringing her up. She truly had a humble spirit that looked to the Lord. We shall read more of this later in the story.

Colour this picture of the newly crowned Queen Esther!



Thought: Humility is the best policy!

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank you for placing me where I am. Help me to be Your witness by my actions and attitude, so that I can point others to Christ. And in whatever I do and say, teach me to be humble. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

GOD SEES YOUR GOOD DEEDS!

Do you feel disappointed when people don't show appreciation for what you've done? Today's story encourages us that though men may not notice our good deeds, God knows and sees everything that we do in His name.

During the time when Mordecai was given a position to handle the affairs of king Ahasuerus, he came to know of an evil scheme to kill the king. The men behind this scheme were the king's chamberlains (high ranking servants), Bigthan and Teresh, who guarded the king's house. For some reason, they were so full of anger toward the king, it led them to plot to kill him. Considering they were the guards of the king's house, the king didn't have any defence against them! Enemies from the inside are harder to detect, compared to enemies from the outside.

When this evil plot came to Mordecai's attention, he told it to Esther who reported the matter in Mordecai's name. After investigations, Bigthan and Teresh were hung and the matter recorded in the king's book of chronicles (some form of record book). But Ahasuerus did not reward Mordecai who saved his life!

This is a significant event which will be brought up later when Mordecai will be duly rewarded. Our deeds of service and good works may go unnoticed by men, but know that God sees, and will reward in His time. Remember that we have a fair and just God. Be honest, be true, God is watching over you! God shall reward your good deeds in His good timing.

What are some of the good deeds you can do? What are some you have done? If you have not done any, why is it so? If we say we are Christians, we must like to do good deeds. Good deeds can come in the form of:

- helping a classmate in his school work
- sending cards to someone who is sad
- standing up for someone who is bullied
- volunteering to assist the teacher

The list goes on. Such "good deeds" don't make us a Christian but being a Christian will make us do good deeds.

Thought: Others may not see, but God sees and that's all that matters.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I praise You for You are a fair and just God. You are the one who sees all things and will reward according to Your time. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

HAMAN MEETS MORDECAI

We are now introduced to the newly promoted Haman. King Ahasuerus promoted him to a very high position which was above all the princes of the empire. Haman was given such authority that even the king's servants who sat in the king's gate were commanded to bow to him. This was not a mutual polite bow (like the Japanese do), but a bowing down that was equivalent to worship. Should we do that even today? No!

Mordecai would not bow down to Haman. The Jews knew that God alone must be worshipped. The king's servants asked Mordecai to follow the commandment and bow. They pestered him about it everyday. But Mordecai would not listen to them. He told them that the reason was because he was a Jew.

Mordecai was obeying the 2nd commandment (see Exodus 20:4-5). We are not to bow down in worship to anyone or anything, but our Creator God. Dear friend, when others pressure you daily to disobey God, how do you respond? Be like Mordecai who did not succumb. He knew His God and would not bow down to any other. You must know your God personally too. They may taunt you daily, but if you daily draw strength from God by praying and reading the Bible, you will not be led astray.

The king's servants reported Mordecai to Haman, to see if it was true that being a Jew could excuse him from bowing down to Haman. What was Haman's response? A burning intense anger consumed him. How he hated Mordecai and even all the Jews! Haman was a proud man. He couldn't accept that Mordecai refused to bow to him. Haman decided to plot the destruction of Mordecai and the Jews. See how dangerous pride is! Let us also check ourselves if we harbour any pride in us.

Commit these areas to the Lord, ask Him help you live it out!

- To resist peer pressure to sin against God
- To be humble and not have a high opinion of yourself
- To dare to be different from friends who may want to teach you wrong things

Thought: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Psalm 119:11

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I pray that You will help me be steadfast in the faith and to humbly walk close to You everyday. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

AN EVIL PLOT

Haman hid the identity of the Jews from the king, and only referred to them as a ‘certain’ people. It was true that the Jews lived by a different set of laws given by God, but they were not the dangerous rebels that Haman made them out to be. Coming from his trusted right-hand man, the king completely believed him and didn’t even bother to investigate the matter.

Haman’s words were masked to deceive and were dripping with evil mischief. His hatred and anger toward Mordecai was no passing emotion but occupied the inner-most thoughts of his heart and mind. He knew the king’s approval was needed for such a massive operation throughout the whole empire. Therefore, his words were couched in such a way that the king would agree with him to kill the Jews.

The king gave Haman his ring, giving him permission to make the decree to destroy this ‘certain’ people. For the first time, Haman is referred to as the Jews’ enemy in Esther 3:10. He quickly got the king’s scribes to write out the decree “to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day...” This would take place in exactly 12 months’ time, and was chosen by Haman’s superstitious casting of lots. According to the law of the Medes and Persians, the decree could not be changed. The Jews went from a high note of rejoicing over Esther’s crowning as queen, to a very low and sad state. A great sorrow and sense of confusion overcame them.

Dear reader, if the Jews are destroyed, do you know what this would mean? If Haman had his way, the whole plan of salvation would come to an end. The Messiah – our Lord Jesus Christ – was to come from the Jews! It was not just a plot against the Jews but against the whole plan of salvation. Though the Jews couldn’t see it at that time, God’s protection and care over His chosen people was always present. His salvation plan for all men would not be hindered by evil men like Haman. How thankful we must be, that Christ Jesus came as promised into this world to save sinners.

Thought: Thank God He is always in full control despite the plots of evil men.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for preserving the Messianic line and for sending Christ Jesus into the world to save unworthy sinners such as myself. Without Christ, there would truly be eternal sorrow and sadness. Thank You for the gift of salvation. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

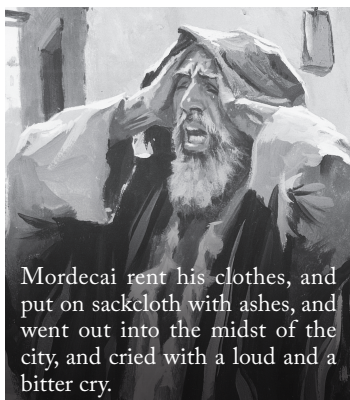
GREAT MOURNING

Upon hearing Haman's decree, Mordecai cried loudly and bitterly. He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes on his head – a sign of great mourning and sadness in those days. Throughout the empire, the Jews mourned, fasted, wept, wailed, and many, like Mordecai, sat in sackcloth and ashes. It was a painful scene, to see young and old crying, and parents struggling to explain to their children about what was happening.

Esther's servants saw Mordecai and told her what they saw. Though she was queen, she still had great respect and affection for Mordecai. Esther didn't know the reason for his mourning, but his grief became hers. She immediately sent clothes to him but he turned it away. Mordecai knew all this happened because he refused to bow before Haman. The injustice tore at his heart and caused his grief to be doubly heavy.

Although Mordecai held a position in the king's gate, he didn't care about how others would view him or what they would say. He openly showed himself to be a Jew and identified with his people before the king's gate. Mordecai made no attempt to hide or escape from his Jewish identity. His public mourning showed how great and terrible was the decree to destroy all the Jews.

Are there times where you see others in great sadness? You may or may not know the reason. Or like Mordecai, perhaps you are in great sadness together with them. Sometimes, there's nothing you can do but to unashamedly cry and share their sadness. There are no words to say during these times, only to let them know of your presence and prayers. Mordecai didn't run to anyone. He simply mourned, and cried to the God of Israel. When the walls around us keep pressing in, causing us to despair, look up and cry to God. He alone hears and can answer your prayers.



Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry.

Thought: God is the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort

Prayer: Father in Heaven, You are the God of all comfort. When I am in despair, help me to look up to You alone for divine comfort. May You also use me to comfort others when they are sad, too. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

The phrase “for such a time as this” refers to the calling of a person to answer a need at a particular point. It is used by Mordecai to call Esther into action at this pivotal point in Israel’s history. Esther had sent Hatach, her trusted servant, to ask Mordecai what was distressing him. Mordecai told Hatach everything that had happened and how the Jews were going to be destroyed. He gave Hatach a copy of the decree to show Esther and instructed her to go to the king to plead for her people, the Jews. Now was the time to reveal Esther’s Jewish identity, to save the Jews.

But Esther was afraid, not for the destruction of the Jews but for her own life. She could be put to death for going into the king’s presence without being summoned by him. Esther was afraid to die because the king had not called her for the past 30 days. Her reply to Mordecai was no, and Hatach passed the message to him.

This time, Mordecai rebuked her. He told her not to deceive herself into thinking that she would be spared because she was the queen. The decree was for all Jews without exception. The truth about Esther’s identity would eventually be revealed and she couldn’t escape. Mordecai then told her the consequences of keeping quiet. Deliverance would still come to the Jews from other means, but God would hold her accountable and destroy both her and her family if she kept quiet. Finally, Mordecai drove home the point that God had put her in this position for such a time as this – a time of great need. Esther was perfectly placed, both as Jew and as queen, to answer this need by pleading to the king on behalf of her people.

God has also perfectly placed us where we are for a purpose. Don’t think lightly of where God has put you. It may be to see how you react to someone who is rude to you. Do you get angry and try to take revenge? Or it may be God putting you through a test to see if you get jealous of your siblings when your parents give them something? Take that step of faith out of your comfort zone, to be used by God for a time such as this. Don’t just react, pray before you react in the same way as you may have done before you accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Thought: What are the needs of those around me that God can specifically use me to meet?

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to care for others and not just for myself. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH

Esther made up her mind to seek the king's audience. It was not an easy decision. She had to submit herself to the mercy of God to grant her smooth passage to speak to the king. Yes, Esther was afraid to die but the initial fear was soon replaced with the desire to do God's will for the deliverance of her people. She told Mordecai to command every Jew in Shushan to fast for her for three days. Esther and her maid servants would also fast. During this time of fasting and prayer, they would plead and beg for the mercies of God to be with Esther first, before she went to plead with the king. What an important lesson here! Before we take action especially for something important, we must seek God's help in prayer. For is it not the Lord who moves the hearts of men?

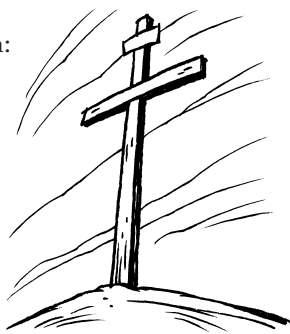
Esther's parting words to Mordecai were "and if I perish, I perish". Contrast this to verse 11, where Esther gave excuses not to speak to the king.

Dear reader, are you resisting God's will in your life to follow what He has called you to do? Has He put a burden in your heart? It may be to serve in church, or to be a friend to someone in need, or to share the gospel with your unbelieving family and friends. Like Esther, you are perfectly placed in that unique position to be used by the Lord. Why don't you trust in the Lord, and go?

Here's a song to sing and meditate upon:

*I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree?
To think of His great sacrifice at Calv'ry!
I know my Lord expects the best from me.*

*How many are the lost that I have lifted?
How many are the chained I've helped to free?
I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
When He has done so much for me?*



Thought: Consider the price of your salvation. Have you done your best for Jesus?

Prayer: Father in Heaven, I gladly submit to Your leading. Grant me strength and perfect peace to do that which You have called me to do. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

FAST, PRAY AND PREPARE

On the third day, Esther did as she had promised. There was no hesitation. She put on her royal garments, and stood in the inner court of the king's house. Esther was very brave and courageous. With every step that she took towards the king's house, her heart must have been beating very quickly, and her mind full of many things. But she kept moving forward. Esther was resolved that if she were to perish, so be it. Her call was to intercede for her people before the king. Come what may, she would still go. What gave Esther this strength and courage?

The purpose of fasting is to have an uninterrupted stretch of time in prayer that crosses over meal times. A person is so grieved or troubled that he only desires to pray to God. Eating is not even on his mind. Esther had spent the past 3 days fasting and praying. This spiritually strengthened and renewed her for the task ahead. Maybe you are picturing Esther sitting in a room with a very sad appearance, and doing nothing but pray for 3 days. Yes, Esther fasted and prayed. But she didn't just pray and not do anything else. Esther was also up and about, preparing and planning carefully what to say to the king.

Thank God that He answered the prayers of Esther and the Jews! Esther obtained favour from the king and he held out the golden sceptre to her. Esther knew exactly what to say when the king asked for her request. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet she had been busy preparing for the past 3 days. At this banquet, she would invite both of them to another banquet the next day where she would reveal her Jewish identity and Haman's evil deed. The plan was well thought out and not hasty to spill the beans.

We ought to earnestly pray and seek the Lord for help but what we do after that is equally important. We cannot just sit there and do nothing. We must pray and also do our part. Do you expect your loved one to suddenly become a Christian without your being a good witness? Or your friend to unexpectedly receive help when you don't lift a finger? Let's not only pray, but also be stirred up to do our part.

Thought: "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." Psalm 37:5

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for Esther's example which teaches me to pray and to also be stirred up to action. Strengthen my faith and quicken me to do Your bidding. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

THE MARKS OF A PROUD MAN

The queen invited Haman to a private banquet with the king! Wait, not just one, but two! He was extremely happy with himself. It suggested to him how great he was and how high he had risen in the empire. Queen Esther's personal invitation inflated his already huge ego. However, Mordecai remained a painful eyesore to Haman. He neither stood up nor moved for Haman, let alone bow down to him. On his way back from the first banquet, he saw Mordecai again and was filled with anger. Later when his wife and friends advised him that the solution was to build a gallows to hang Mordecai, it pleased Haman to build it that very night. (* 'Gallows' refers to a wooden frame, consisting of a crossbeam on two upright beams, on which condemned persons are executed by hanging.)

Today's reading shows us the marks of a proud man as evidenced in Haman. When he came home from the banquet, he immediately called his friends and wife together. After Mordecai's indifference, Haman was itching to receive their admiration. Haman boasted of his riches, his many children (Haman had 10 sons), and how he was promoted by the king above all the princes. And to put a feather in his cap of achievements, he just attended a private banquet with queen Esther and the king. He was also invited to part 2 of the banquet the next day! Haman wouldn't have guessed that these banquets were only leading to his end. He just couldn't stop talking about himself!

It's easy for us to point out how Haman had a high opinion of himself. But let's be honest with ourselves too. How about us? Do your possessions and achievements make you happy? Are you also itching to boast about your latest gadget or toy, or maybe how well you are doing in life, or in school? Haman's sin of pride is not too different from our own. We also like to think highly of ourselves and want others to think the same of us, too. These are the characteristics of a proud person.

How does God describe one who speaks with pride? (Prov 14:3a)

Q N N T B C E

Answer: _____

T	B	Q	N	E	C
L	I	F	O	H	S

Thought: Am I a proud and boastful person?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant me sensitivity to the sin of pride. I pray that I will not think of myself more highly than I ought to think, but to think soberly. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

GOD KNOWS EVERYTHING!

King Ahasuerus could not sleep on the night that Haman's workers were busy building the gallows to hang Mordecai. Haman's target was to complete the gallows that very night, so that Mordecai could be hanged before he went to enjoy part 2 of the queen's banquet. These two concurrent events may seem unrelated, but God would have it that the king's insomnia would save Mordecai from the gallows!

The king asked for the records of all the notable things of his reign to be read to him. Of all things, and of all books, Ahasuerus requested for this one to be read to him. As the servant flipped the pages of the chronicles, he inevitably flipped to the portion of how Mordecai had saved the king's life (Esther 2:21-23). Mordecai was a lesser known subject in the king's gate, and not at all popular among the king's servants. The servant had no reason to specially choose this portion but God would have it that the servant had no choice but to read it, to remind the king of how Mordecai saved his life.

Then the king asked his servants "What honour and dignity has been given to Mordecai for this?" and they replied that nothing had been done for Mordecai. Ah! The king didn't just let this deed pass by with the servant's reading. His ears perked up, he took great interest, and he desired to do justice to this man who had saved him. It was God's perfect timing to save, and in fact, reward Mordecai!

All this time, Mordecai was probably sleeping soundly, not knowing what was happening in Haman's backyard, or in the king's house. But his sovereign God was working everything out for his good! Dear reader, God may not show you what He's doing behind the scenes, but you can be very sure that He is moving circumstances and people.

Dear child, even though we know God will always protect and help us, we also know that often we are wrong. Have you ever been like Haman – planning to take revenge or wanting to do something bad to someone you may not like. Don't. Remember, God knows everything and sees the evil and the good.

Dear child, if you feel like taking revenge or know you are getting angry for the wrong reason, pray. Don't be like Haman.

Thought: God sees the evil and the good.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, when I am tempted to take revenge or plot evil against others like Haman did, please help me to remember that You behold the evil and the good. Help me not to be vengeful but to trust in Your sovereignty. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PRIDE AND PRESUMPTION

King Ahasuerus was eager to reward Mordecai for saving his life. At the same time, Haman was waiting in the king's court in the early hours of the morning, to seek the king's permission to hang Mordecai. What an interesting contrast! The king asked who was in the court. As Haman was the only one there, he was called in.

The king asked Haman how he should reward a man that he was pleased with. Upon hearing this, Haman presumptuously thought that the king wanted to honour him! What is presumption? It is to assume something to be true out of pride or arrogance, without reasonable or proven basis. Haman had no reason to think that the king was referring to him. But he was so proud, he immediately thought of himself and listed the ways he wanted to be honoured. In a humorous twist, the king tells Haman to make haste and do all these things to reward Mordecai!

Haman had to clothe Mordecai in the king's robes and a royal crown, and accompanied Mordecai as he rode on the king's horse through the city streets, proclaiming that this was the man the king was delighted to honour. Instead of hanging Mordecai, Haman honoured him. God saved Mordecai and rewarded him, while Haman tasted the sour effects of being presumptuous.

Dear child, don't you wonder how Haman felt when the king revealed that Mordecai was to be exalted, not him? It must have been a shock to him. Are you proud like Haman? Perhaps you excel in studies and assume you'd always top the class? Or you expect your classmates to praise you all the time?

Below are some other examples of presumptuous sins. Perhaps you can even think of more. If you have sinned in these, pray for God's forgiveness.

1. Doing things your way based on your own liking, presuming others will agree.
2. Making unkind comments about others, and presuming they would be okay and laugh it off.
3. Giving yourself excuses to commit a certain sin, and presuming that God will pardon you

Thought: Being presumptuous is a sin of pride.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, help me to guard my thoughts and keep me from pride and from being presumptuous. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PRIDE AND SELF-PITY

What is the difference between Haman's mourning and that of Mordecai and the Jews? The Jews mourned out of grief that their lives were decreed to be destroyed; Haman mourned out of embarrassment and self-pity. It was as though he might as well die after suffering this humiliation! After walking through the city with Mordecai, Haman hurried back to his house and cried, covering his head to mourn in self-pity. His pride was terribly bruised and he felt very sorry for himself.

Haman told his wife and his friends what had happened. Their plan to hang Mordecai on the gallows had failed. Instead, Haman had to honour him in public! Just the night before, Haman was boasting about how great he was. Now, he bemoaned how the events had turned against him. Truly, God was the one who made all this happen to punish wicked Haman!

Haman's wife and friends told him that if Mordecai was of the Jews, and had to be given honour, then Haman would not prevail but fall before Mordecai. While they were still talking, the king's chamberlains came to rush Haman to Queen Esther's banquet. Surely they didn't expect this foreboding comment to be fulfilled that very day!

Can you think of an example when things turned out with totally opposite results from what you had planned? Write it below.

What was your response? You could either acknowledge that God is sovereign and it happened for a reason. Or you could be like Haman, indulging in self-pity. Haman was proud. He just couldn't see beyond himself. Dear reader, when things don't happen according to your plans, see beyond yourself and the situation. Trust in God's higher purpose.

Thought: If all you care about is yourself, you'd tend to indulge in self-pity.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, when things don't go as expected, help me not to indulge in self-pity. Instead, grant me the ability to surrender and submit to Your higher purposes. I know that the thoughts that You have for me, are of peace, and not of evil. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ESTHER'S REQUEST

At this second banquet, King Ahasuerus asked Esther for her request the third time. He guaranteed that her request would be granted even if it required him to give her half of the kingdom. She started her request by saying “If I have found favour in thy sight, O king...” Esther knew she had obtained favour from the king, and established that to also soften his heart. He was willing to give anything to her. Thus, when she asked simply that her life and the lives of her people be spared, it must have shocked the king. She repeated the words of the decree. The Jews were sold to be “destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.” Esther humbly added that if they were sold to slavery, she would have let it be and not bring it up to the king. This naturally led the king to ask who this evil person was, who dared to plot to murder his beloved queen and her people!

Esther had fasted, prayed, and was responsible enough to plan and prepare. Not only was her life at risk when she approached the king, the lives of all the Jews were. She could not waste this opportunity. With carefully chosen words of wisdom, Esther led the king to agree that this was an evil decree against the Jews. She carried out her plan to perfection. Esther told the king plainly that “The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.” Only the king, Esther and Haman were at the table. With both of them staring down at him, and his evil plan exposed, Haman had nowhere to hide and became very afraid.

Our righteous God will expose the deeds of the wicked and punish them in His time. Truly vengeance is of the Lord! Esther fulfilled her promise to go to the king in faith. And God fulfilled His promise to protect His people and punish the wicked.



Thought: God keeps His promises to protect His people.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, 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. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

HAMAN'S SWIFT END

King Ahasuerus was very angry with Haman. Perhaps he was also angry with himself for signing such a decree and thought he may have been tricked into it by Haman. Without saying a word, he rose up from the banquet and went to the palace garden. This concerned Haman, the Prime Minister he trusted! What would he do to him? The king was so angry and shocked; he needed time to think alone in his garden. When he left the table, Haman saw that the end could be near. Fearing for his life, he pleaded with Esther. But as he begged for the queen's mercy, God would have it that he slipped and fell on the couch that Esther was seated. And right at this moment, the king returned and saw him in that questionable position!

This only fanned the king's fury even more! Was Haman trying to take advantage of the queen while he was away? Therefore, the king's chamberlains covered Haman's face and led him away. One of them, Harbonah, told the king about the gallows that Haman had built in his house for Mordecai. The king gave the instruction to hang Haman on it. Thus, was Haman hung in his very own house, on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

What a twist to the tale, and a bitter end to Haman's life. He found security in his status before the king, and prided himself on riches and achievements. But all these things could not save him. The judgment was swift. He deserved to be hanged for his evil plot to destroy the Jews, simply because he hated Mordecai for not bowing down to him.

Let Haman's life be a stern warning to us who may pride ourselves on riches, possessions, position, or achievements. Dear reader, pride starts in our hearts. We must confess it to the Lord and ask Him to humble us. If not, it will cause us to fall. For Haman, his pride led to anger and hatred; and caused him to sin presumptuously. When things didn't go his way, instead of reflecting and repenting, he only felt sorry for himself. Eventually, he only had himself to blame, for it was his pride that led to his death.

All humans have pride. It is a question of how they manage and control it. If they don't, pride will control them. How about you? How do you control your pride? Submit to God and ask Him to help you do so!

Thought: Pride cometh before a fall.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, may I keep myself humble and guard myself against pride. Help me to give glory to You in all that I do. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

PROMOTION

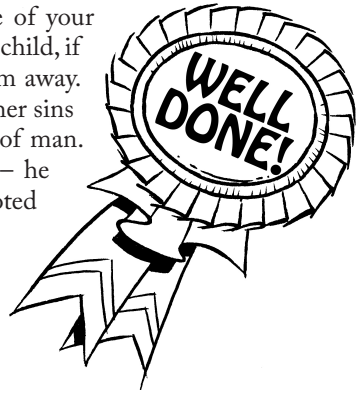
The king gave all of Haman's possessions to Esther. She then introduced Mordecai to the king and revealed how they were related. It was the first time that Ahasuerus met Mordecai, the one who saved his life.

Before Haman was hanged, the king's ring was removed from him. The ring signified power and authority to rule and make decisions in the king's name. Haman was only second to the king and governed the whole empire. Now the king gave the ring to Mordecai. From a servant, Mordecai was promoted above everyone, to a position second only to the king. Power shifted from Haman's evil hands, to Mordecai the man who trusted in God. Mordecai did not ask or seek after promotion. The king gave it of his own accord. Esther also put Mordecai in charge of Haman's estate.

From being persecuted and in a state of mourning, to being promoted, Mordecai experienced a total change in circumstances. Did God ever forget Mordecai when he was mourning and crying for mercy? No, definitely not. In times of utter despair when we cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, we must not think that God has left us. Mordecai experienced God's answer to his fervent prayers. Ultimately, the rewards and promotion were not what Mordecai desired, but the Lord moved the king's heart to give it to him.

All this was done for a testimony that God reigns and judges the wicked and righteous.

Do you seek attention? Do you crave for people's acknowledgement and praise of your contributions and achievements? Dear child, if you harbour such thoughts, throw them away. Those are ideas that will lead you to other sins such as pride and wanting the praise of man. Remember the account of Mordecai – he never sought promotion but God promoted him in due time.



Thought: Promotion comes from God and not men.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to seek recognition and honour, but instead, to seek only to obey and serve You in every situation that You have placed me in. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

ESTHER CONTINUES TO PLEAD

Haman was hanged; Esther and Mordecai were richly rewarded. It sounds like the story could just end here but don't forget about the evil decree! According to the law of the Medes and Persians, once a decree is signed in the king's name, it cannot be changed. The decree to destroy all the Jews still remained!

All the personal rewards didn't make Esther any happier because the decree was not reversed. Her heart was still heavy for her people. You see, she was not selfish and thought for her people more than for herself. Therefore, she continued to plead with the king. The king's anger may have been appeased by Haman's death, but Esther's burden was not lifted. She fell down before his feet and pleaded with tears to take away the evil decree that Haman had planned. When the king held out his sceptre (symbolic ornamental rod of power in the king's hand) toward Esther, it showed his favour toward her.

Esther was humble and wise in her plea. She didn't take the king's favour for granted; neither did she bring up the fact that he signed the decree. In whatever position we hold, we should never be high and mighty in our conduct, though we may have good reasons to insist we are right. If we need help from others, let us make these requests humbly and conduct ourselves with godly wisdom.

Esther's love for her people was deep and sincere. She identified with them in a personal way. Though she enjoyed all the palace comforts, she never forgot who she was and who her fellow men were. Do you love God's people? It's not a love based on feelings and emotions which can easily change, but a love based upon the unchanging truth of God's Word. When one is down and out, another is there to pull him up to comfort, encourage, and offer practical help.

Can you think of a Christian friend, that you would like to encourage this week and give 2 ways you may encourage him or her?

Thought: Humility is the best policy.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for Esther's godly example. Help me to follow her example so that I can be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

GOOD NEWS!

Mordecai's urgent priority as the new prime minister was to write the next decree. This decree granted the Jews legal permission to stand together and respond in self-defense. This decree had 2 objectives – to declare to the Jews the good news of deliverance and to be ready to fight; and to warn their enemies not to attack them. It was a reasonable and fair decree for self-defense.

Mordecai quickly sent out the decree to all the 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. All means and ways were used to reach each province with urgency, through horseback, mules and camels. It was a very organised and speedy delivery system, “being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment”. There was good news to be told to all the Jews!

The news spread with urgency to bring happiness and joy to the Jews. They would not perish by Haman's evil decree! Dear reader, do you know that we too have good news to tell to the people of the world? It's so precious because it concerns their souls! By hearing this news, and believing on it, their souls will not perish in hell. This good news is the gospel of Christ! Because God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Dear reader, do you believe in this good news, and accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour? This good news has been sent to you with urgency. Receive Jesus into your heart today, and there will be much joy and gladness! If you have already received Jesus as your Saviour, it's your responsibility now to share the good news with urgency to your family and friends. May God help us to be faithful delivery men to bring the good news of eternal joy to souls that are perishing.

A Song of Salvation
*Rescue the perishing, care for the dying,
Jesus is merciful, Jesus will save.*

Thought: Have you believed on the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour? Have you told your loved ones of the good news of salvation?

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for the good news of salvation. Thank You that Jesus Christ died in my place and rose from the dead, so that I may have everlasting life. Help me to faithfully and urgently share this good news with my unsaved loved ones. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

JOY AND GLADNESS!

The Jews thought they were going to die. But as suddenly as they heard Haman's decree of death, they received Mordecai's decree of life! How things changed! The sentence of death was lifted from their backs. Now the Jews experienced the joy and gladness of deliverance. Dear reader, does the good news of salvation bring you joy? For us, this salvation means more because it is able to save us from eternal death, and give eternal life.

God paid for your deliverance. If you haven't received Jesus as your Saviour, the sentence of death is still on you. Your sins are still not forgiven, God's holy law judges you. But when you receive Christ as Saviour, the sentence of death is lifted! Because Christ died in your place, you don't have to suffer eternity in hell, but enjoy eternity in heaven. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Rom 6:23

For the onlookers, this drastic change of power caused them to fear the Jews. Previously they saw Haman dressed in power and authority, and heard his decree to destroy the Jews. But shortly after, he was executed by the king's command. In his place, Mordecai the Jew who was once mourning and crying, was now dressed in the king's royal garments, and held power and authority. Everywhere, they saw their Jewish neighbours rejoicing, no longer in sackcloth and ashes!

Therefore, the onlookers feared the Jews and didn't want to go against them. Many of them became Jews! When God works in the lives of His people, others can see the results and effects. It may even lead them to change their lives too. Dear reader, once you are saved, may God's work in your life bring others to salvation!

Thought: The joy of salvation comes from knowing that Jesus has saved me from sin and one day I shall see Him in heaven.

Prayer (if you have not believed in Christ): Father in Heaven, I confess that I am a sinner. Please forgive me of all my sins. I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save me from my sins, and eternity in hell. I accept Him as my personal Lord and Saviour. Thank You for saving me, please use me to spread the good news of salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer (if you have believed in Christ): Father in Heaven, help me remember Christ who died in my place and had given me eternal life. Help me to be thankful for Your gift of salvation. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

THE BATTLE IS THE LORD'S

All preparation from both sides led to this day. In every province, the Jews gathered themselves together to fight for their lives. They were prepared to fight anyone who dared to hurt them. The Jews were not isolated. As Mordecai ruled the empire, he grew in power and his name was one to be feared. Anyone who went against Mordecai and his people, would end up like Haman. If a great figure like Haman was not spared, what more the rest! Thus, the Jews received great amounts of help from leaders of all the provinces.

Fierce battles took place around the empire. In Shushan the palace, the Jews destroyed 500 of their enemies. The battle even continued to the next day, with more attacking the Jews. The enemies failed and another 300 of them were destroyed. In other provinces, 75,000 enemies who tried to kill the Jews were destroyed.

As we consider the battles fought and won, we must ask ourselves how victory was won by the Jews. Was it by their strength, or clever war tactics? Dear reader, it was God who delivered them. They prepared and fought, but the victory was from the Lord! Even the leaders of the land helped them! All this was the mighty work of a sovereign God.

Dear young friend, are you in a battle not of your choosing? Perhaps because you are a Christian, you face opposition from family and friends. There may be those who try to challenge you and find ways to make you fall or give up. Don't be afraid of them. Stand with the Lord, He will provide you with help in times of need! Stand with other believers too, for you cannot fight alone. Have faith, for the battle is the Lord's.

To stand and fight the Lord's battles is to:

- Be a Christian
- Keep God's truth in your heart and mind
- Share the gospel with friends and loved ones
- Have faith in God
- Remember the hope of salvation
- Use God's Word to answer and overcome any attacks
- Pray always

Thought: I do my part to stand and fight. But victory is from the Lord.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, Help me to stand strong on Your Word without wavering, and stand together with fellow believers to fight Your battles. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

REMEMBERING WHAT GOD HAS DONE

What a victory! What an amazing deliverance from certain death! From start to finish, God was involved every step of the way. Queen Vashti was de-throned and Esther became the new queen. Wicked Haman was exposed for his evil decree and executed, while Mordecai, the Jew who was hated and despised, took over Haman's high post as prime minister. The Jews were mourning because they were decreed to be destroyed. But in a drastic turn of events, they destroyed all their enemies and celebrated God's deliverance.

We tend to forget very easily. We need to set reminders to remember the daily errands we have to run, or write in our notebooks the tasks for the day. We also mark our calendars with events for the week, or if there are upcoming special occasions. To remember this great deliverance from God, Mordecai wrote a decree to all the Jews. He instructed them to mark the 14th and 15th days of the month Adar, as days to remember when their sorrow was turned to joy. This festival is known as Purim. To this day, Purim is still celebrated among the Jews. They would read the book of Esther, send each other gifts, give charity to the poor and of course, there is great feasting and gladness!

In what ways has God worked in your life? Think about it. Through periods of trial and testing, joy and gladness, all this will work out to a good and beautiful end. This is guaranteed by God in Rom 8:28. It's good to have a system to reflect and remind yourself of what God has done in your life. Perhaps you can write in your diary. Or you can set aside time each day or each week, to think about what has gone by, and thank God for all the great things He has done! Don't let these events just be passing moments in your life!

Read Psalm 37:39-40, and write it down. It's a great verse to summarise God's work and deliverance to the Jews.

Thought: We should remember God's goodness to the Jews and give thanks in everything, knowing that, in the same way, God is always with us.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, thank You for this wonderful story of deliverance. I know You are sovereign and in control of all things. May my life also be a bright testimony of Your grace and mercy. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

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