
NEW YEAR, NEW COMMITMENT TO GOD

Carol sighed as she looked at her memory verse. “Grandma, in Old Testament times people had to sacrifice animals to God, didn’t they?” she asked. “Didn’t they have to be killed and placed on an altar?”

Grandma nodded. “Yes,” she said, “but when Jesus died for our sins, He was the perfect sacrifice. Animal sacrifices are no longer needed.”

“My memory verse says we are to present our bodies as a ‘living sacrifice’ to God,” said Carol. “That is so confusing. How can I be a living sacrifice when a sacrifice is something that is killed?”

“To be a living sacrifice means to give your all – your whole life – to God so He can use it,” replied Grandma. She picked up a small piece of yarn. “Pretend that this yarn is my life,” she continued. “It is my love, my family, my time, my actions – my everything. Here, honey. I give it to you.” Grandma handed one end of the yarn to Carol while she held the other end. “There – it is all yours now, right? I am sacrificing it to you.”

Carol giggled. “Well, if it is all mine, why are you still holding on to it?” she asked.

“Good point,” approved Grandma. “You see, sometimes Christians say they give everything into God’s control – that they have made their lives a living sacrifice to serve Him. But they leave a ‘string’ attached to an area of their lives – like music. Maybe they persist in listening to music with bad lyrics. Or perhaps they leave a ‘string’ attached to their friends. Maybe they continue to hang around with kids who have a bad influence on them. It is possible to hold something back in any number of areas. And then...” Grandma slid the string almost out of Carol’s grasp, “they may even try to pull their lives back out of God’s hands. That is not a sacrifice. When an Israelite took a sacrifice to the priest, he left it there.”

“So, to be a ‘living sacrifice’, I need to give my whole life to God and leave it there without any strings to pull it back. Right?” said Carol. “Exactly,” agreed Grandma. “Once a sacrifice is truly given, there is no taking it back.”

Thought: Have you given God control of every part of your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to commit my life to You. As I start the new year, may I start it right and submit every area of my life to You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Brian and his dad were watching football on TV one Saturday afternoon. “Watch out for that guy on your right!” yelled Brian. Dad waved his arms as if the players could see him. But it was no use – the man they were cheering for was down. “That was a silly move!” exclaimed Brian in disgust. “He should have seen that guy coming at him! He wasn’t paying attention.”

“After he sees a replay of that move, you had better believe he won’t make that mistake again,” said Dad.

As soon as the game was over, Mother had tea ready. “Hey! How come Gek Lin gets a hot turkey sandwich and the rest of us get yucky tuna casserole?” asked Brian, glancing at his sister’s plate as he came to the table. He yanked out his chair and bumped the table hard as he sat down. “You are just a spoiled brat,” he complained to Gek Lin. She began to speak, but Brian wouldn’t listen. He roughly shoved his plate around, spilling his milk in the process, and he continued to grumble.

“Brian, go to your room and think about what you just did,” ordered Dad. “Think about your words and your actions. They were not pleasing to us, and they certainly were not pleasing to God. When you are ready to apologise, you may come back to the table.”

Brian stomped off to his room, hungry and angry. He plopped down on his bed. But he did think. In his mind, he replayed what had happened. He knew he had made a mess, and he knew he had hurt his sister’s feelings. Then he thought of something else. He remembered that Gek Lin had been sick when they had turkey dinner the day before, and Mother had saved some turkey for her. “That is why she is getting it now,” he thought. “I should not have behaved that way.”

The rest of the family was almost finished when Brian again took his place at the table. “I am really sorry,” he said. He looked at his father. “Maybe if I watched instant replays of my actions more often, I wouldn’t keep on making mistakes like this.”

Thought: Do you sometimes do things you regret later?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me Lord to consider my ways – to be careful of what I do and say. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

EVOLUTION IS A BIG LIE!

"I didn't know you were going to choose evolution for our project!" exclaimed Carrie. "I wouldn't have joined this group if I had known that!" "Well, you did join, and we all voted," replied Desmond, one of Carrie's classmates. "Now you had better do your share of the work."

"But I don't believe in that stuff," argued Carrie. She felt the other group members' eyes upon her as she turned away.

After school, Carrie plopped down on a chair in the dining area just in time to hear the ending of a story her mother was reading to Carrie's little sister, Elly. "And they all lived happily ever after," finished Mother as she closed the book. "That was a fun story," she added, "but it was just make-believe. From which book do we read stories that are always true, Elly?" "The Bible," Elly answered promptly.

"Sometimes people believe things that aren't true," put in Carrie. "Scientists who believe in evolution, for example. My study group is doing a project about evolution. Desmond plans to give an oral book report. Jenny's going to draw a mural, and Tom is making up the front page of a newspaper from day one – the beginning of the world."

"And you?" asked Mother. Carrie shrugged. "I don't want to do anything," she replied. "But we are graded as a group, so if I don't do my part, it will hurt everyone." Mother frowned. "But if you teach false theory, it will hurt you and anyone who might believe it," she said. After a moment, she added, "When I read storybooks to your sister, I always remind her that they aren't true, and that the place to find truth is in the Bible. Perhaps you could do the same thing."

Carrie sat up straight. "I have got an idea!" she exclaimed after a moment. "I could make a booklet about the theory of evolution. After I read it to the class, I could tell them it is not true and that the Bible tells the true story. What do you think?"

"I think that is a great idea," approved Mother. "I am glad you will stand up for the truth about creation while still fulfilling your responsibility to your class at school."

Thought: God created all things in 6 days, not evolution in millions of years!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to trust in You and in Your Holy Word only. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE CAREFUL OF YOUR WORDS

Todd pushed away the bowl of oatmeal. "I hate oatmeal, Mom. May I have some cornflakes instead?" he asked. "Hate oatmeal! Want cornflakes!" Todd's little brother Danny screamed from his highchair as he pushed his little bowl off the tray. Mother caught it just before it hit the floor.

"Oh, Todd! See what you caused?" said Mother with a sigh. "Now I will have trouble getting Danny to eat his oatmeal." "Why does he always copy me?" grumbled Todd.

"Because he loves you," replied Mother. "You are his hero, and he watches everything you do."

Later that day, Mother asked Todd to help out with some kitchen chores. "I am watching TV," mumbled Todd. "I will do it later." It seemed to Todd that Mother always asked him to do things at the worst possible time.

"Do it now, Todd," Mother said firmly, "or you may forget it."

As Todd reluctantly got to his feet, he swore under his breath. He glanced uneasily at his mother, but the commercial came on just then, and she didn't hear him. He had finished the chore and returned to the house when Mother called Danny. "Come pick up your toys, Danny," she said. "Watching TV," Danny replied, not moving from his cozy position beside Todd.

"Danny," said Mother sternly, "don't make me come and get you."

Danny shrugged impatiently. Then mimicking Todd's words and tone, Danny swore softly. Todd was horrified. "Don't say that, Danny!" he scolded. "That is a no-no. Go and do what Mom says, and don't ever use that word again!"

"Okay," agreed Danny. As Todd watched him leave, he couldn't help but feel guilty. He knew that Danny looked up to him and that he had been a bad example, but he hadn't quite realised just how much influence he had on his brother. Todd resolved there and then that he would never use a swear word again. In fact, he didn't want to do anything that could be harmful to Danny – or to anyone else who might be watching.

Thought: Do you say things that could be harmful to those who are watching you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be very careful in what I say, so that I will not hurt others or cause anyone to sin. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S WAYS ARE THE BEST

"That is going to be neat when it is done," said Angie as she watched her mother work on a patchwork quilt. Mother smiled. "I hope so," she replied. "This project is very special to me." She picked up a few of the fabric squares. "Do you recognise these pieces of material?"

"Are some of them scraps from dresses I used to wear?" asked Angie.

Mother nodded. "Yes, and they remind me that God's way is best," she said. "You see, I used to become very disappointed and angry when I didn't get my way. I would even get upset with God when He didn't answer my prayers the way I wanted."

"Really?" asked Angie. She was eager to hear her mother's story. "How do these quilt pieces remind you of that?"

"Well," said Mother, "before you came to live with us, I wanted a little baby very much. I prayed that we would be able to adopt one right away. But that did not happen. Your father and I prayed and prayed, and we waited and waited. I sometimes felt angry at God for not giving me my way."

"But then you got me," Angie said.

"That is just the point," said Mother with a smile. "I didn't get my way. God had His way – and it was much better. God taught us so much during those years we were waiting. We learned a lot about patience and about trusting God to work out His best for us. And then, as you said, we adopted you."

"If you had gotten a baby earlier, you might not have gotten me," persisted Angie. "That is right," agreed Mother. "That is why this quilt is such a special project to me. I am sewing together little remembrances from your life. It is my way of reminding myself how wonderful God's way was – and is – for me."

"Whenever I begin to feel unhappy because God doesn't do things my way, I will try to remember that, too," promised Angie with a smile.

Thought: Are you patient when you don't get your own way?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to be insistent and impatient with the things I want. That would be disobedient and immature. Help me to desire Your ways for Your way is the best. Help me to trust You for Your perfect provision and perfect timing. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DO WHAT IS RIGHT!

Marcy marched into the house and headed for the kitchen where Mom was preparing dinner. “I am never going back to school again!” she announced, slamming her books on the table. “I hate it there! Some of the kids were acting up and misbehaving today, and they wanted me to join them in teasing the new girl in class. When I wouldn’t, they chanted, ‘Chicken! Chicken! Marcy is a chicken!’ They make me so mad.”

“Hmmm,” murmured Mom as she got out a pan and opened a can of food. “Why, look at this!” she exclaimed. “The label on this can says ‘green beans,’ but there are peaches inside.”

“Oh, good! I like peaches better than green beans,” said Marcy with a grin. Then she remembered her problem. “But what am I going to do about being called ‘chicken’ at school?”

“When I was a girl, we used to say a little rhyme,” said Mom. “It went like this: ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.’”

“But words do hurt sometimes, Mom,” said Marcy. “They hurt inside a person.” “Yes, they do – if you let them,” replied Mom. “What do the other kids mean when they call you ‘chicken’?”

“That I am scared. Chickens scare easily, I guess,” replied Marcy. She looked thoughtful. “Hey, you know what? I think some of those kids are the real chickens,” she added. “They are afraid they will be laughed at if they stand up for what is right.”

“Well, I am glad you weren’t afraid to do that,” said Mom. “You are not a chicken. You were not scared to do the right thing despite what the crowd did or said.”

“I knew I had to do what was right,” agreed Marcy.

“Mom picked up the can of peaches. “No matter what label was put on this can, these are still peaches, and that is what counts,” she said. “And Marcy, it is what you really are that counts – not what you are called. The next time this happens, you can say, ‘No, I am not a chicken. I am a Christian, and I am not scared to act like one.’”

Thought: Dare to stand up for Jesus!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me to stand up for Jesus. Help me to always stay true to Jesus. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE CONTENTED

Betsy smiled as she looked at her baby brother, still asleep in his crib. Rob is really cute, she thought, but I am so glad I am not a baby. All he does is eat and sleep. How boring! I have a lot more fun – swimming, biking...

At the breakfast table, Betsy watched Mom butter toast and pour coffee for her father. Betsy wondered if her mother knew how boring her life looked. She is always doing things for everyone else – like scrambling eggs just right, checking our schoolwork, and telling Dad he needs a haircut. Could anything be more dull?

Dad glanced at the clock and pushed his chair back. “I had better go,” he said. “Traffic is always heavy on Monday.” Betsy’s thoughts turned to her father’s life. Dad does the same thing Monday through Friday – eat breakfast, grab his briefcase, drive to the office to spend the day doing whatever he does there. After work, he comes home until the next day, and then he does it all over again. I wonder if he ever wishes every day could be Saturday. I would!

“It is almost time for you to catch your bus, Betsy, so let’s read our verse for today,” said Mom after Dad left. She opened her Bible as she spoke, and then began to read. “1 Corinthians 13:11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” Looking up, she asked, “What does that verse mean to you, girl?”

Betsy thought for a moment. “I guess it is that children and grown-ups don’t think and do the same things,” she said.

“That is right.” Mom smiled. “God has a plan for our lives. When we are young, life is busy with school, chores and fun times. As we grow older, there are more responsibilities and different kinds of fun times. But both ages can be good times – parents, at their work, can be as happy as children are at their play. Aren’t you glad Jesus gives us contentment whether we are eight years old or eighty?”

Betsy nodded as she heard the sound of the school bus. She picked up her books. “Have a good day, Mom,” she called as she left.

Thought: Do you sometimes wish that every day could be Saturday? God has given days to work and days to play.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please teach me to be content with each given day, for You know what is best for me! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HELP EACH OTHER!

Paul sighed in relief as he answered the last question on his test paper. He thought he had done well, and it made him feel good to know his studying had paid off. Just then, he noticed a movement in the next row. His friend Jeff was sliding a small paper out of sight before jotting down some figures. Then Jeff took another secret glance at the paper, finished the test, and handed it in to Mr. Lim. Paul's heart sank. "Oh, no!" he thought. "Jeff cheated!" All afternoon Paul wondered what he should do. Should he tell Mr. Lim? Accuse Jeff? Forget he had ever seen anything?

Walking home from the bus-stop, Paul remembered what his Sunday school teacher had told the class last week. "The Christian walk is not an easy one. It is also not a short one. That is why God gives us friends so we can help each other. Sometimes, helping each other means pointing out mistakes in a loving way to help the other not repeat the mistake," his Sunday school teacher had said.

As Paul remembered those words, he thought of Jeff. He knew Jeff was a Christian, and that in a moment of weakness he had given in to the temptation to cheat. Jeff needed a friend to encourage him to be strong in his Christian life – a friend to talk to him about what he had done. Paul sighed. He really didn't want to be the one to talk to Jeff. He might get mad about it, thought Paul. "Maybe my Sunday school teacher could talk to Jeff," thought Paul. But Paul was the one who had seen what had happened, and he knew what he needed to do.

When Paul reached home, he rang Jeff up. "Hi, Jeff," Paul greeted his friend. "I need to talk to you because I saw what happened during the test today." Jeff sounded stunned, and Paul rushed on. "I really think you need to tell Mr. Lim what happened, and that you are sorry," he said. "I will go with you if you want. Maybe he will let you take another test. If he does, I will help you study so you can pass because you understand it, not because you cheated."

Thought: When someone does something wrong, do you get angry and accuse him or tattle on him? Or do you take the easy way and pretend nothing happened?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give me the courage to lovingly help someone overcome sin and get back on track. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A SIN IS A SIN

“Come on, Greg. Try your luck,” called Choon. He and several classmates stood in a group on the playground. “Just stand on this chalk mark and throw your 50-cent coin as close to that other mark as you can,” instructed Choon. “The one who gets closest wins all the money!”

Greg hesitated. This sounded like gambling. Then he shrugged and joined the others. He played three games, losing each time. “Oh, well,” he said, “I will get my money back tomorrow, plus a little more.”

Each day the boys played. Sometimes Greg won, but usually he lost all he put in. One day he lost all his lunch money. Greg went home very hungry indeed.

When he raided the refrigerator, Mom asked, “Why are you so hungry, Greg?” As he fumbled for words, Mom continued. “Your sister tells me you have been changing your lunch money into 50-cent coins at the store. What is going on?” Knowing he could not hide it much longer from his mother, Greg told her about the game. “Why, Greg! That is clearly gambling!” said Mom.

“It is a game of skill,” protested Greg. “The trouble is – I am not very good at it. But I am getting better!”

“I wonder if you are really being fooled, Greg. Or maybe you just don’t want to admit that what you are doing is wrong – that it is a sin,” said Mom. She frowned. “Tell me... how many legs a sheep has if you called its tail a leg?”

Greg laughed. “What a funny question! If you called its tail a leg, a sheep would have five legs.”

Mom shook her head. “No, it would not. It would still have four legs,” she said. “Calling its tail a leg would not make it a leg. And calling gambling by some other name – like skill – doesn’t change it. You have been playing a game of chance and wasting money. That is not pleasing to God.”

Thought: Have you been trying to cover up a wrong action by calling it a habit, a mistake, an imperfection – or some other such thing?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to always obey Your Holy Word. Teach me to resist sin, and to flee from temptation and friends who may lead me to sin against You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

COMPLETE FAITH IS REQUIRED FOR SALVATION

“May I run the food processor to chop the zucchini?” asked Lisa. She was helping her mother make zucchini bread. “Sure,” agreed Mother. “Just be careful.”

Mum and Lisa were trying out what they saw on the Asian Food Channel, and they were both quite excited to try making zucchini bread for the first time.

Lisa got out the food processor, put some of the zucchini in it, and turned it on. She waited, but it didn't run. “Mom, what is wrong with this thing?” asked Lisa.

Mother looked at the appliance. “The container has to be placed in exactly the right spot or the machine won't work,” she said. “You should hear it snap into place.” She demonstrated what she meant.

After Lisa finished the chopping, the rest of the items were mixed quickly. Lisa brushed the pans with butter, and Mom poured the batter into them. Then they put the loaves in the oven and began to clean the kitchen. “Naughty old food processor,” complained Lisa as she washed the container. “It won't go unless it's just so.” Lisa laughed. “Hey! I'm a poet and didn't know it.”

Mother smiled. “Your episode with the food processor made me think of the Apostle Paul and King Agrippa,” she said.

“It did? Why would it make you think of them?” asked Lisa.

“Do you remember the account of Paul and King Agrippa?” asked Mother (Read Acts 26:1-29). Lisa nodded. “Well, you had the food processor set up almost right – and when Paul witnessed to King Agrippa, the king was almost persuaded to believe,” explained Mother. “Almost right wasn't enough to make the food processor work, and almost persuaded isn't enough for salvation.”

Thought: Are you like people who admit that the Bible might be right – but do not commit yourself to believe in Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I accept You as Lord and Saviour of my life. I know almost believing is not good enough. Teach me to trust in Your Holy Word, and to commit my life to You so that I may be able to experience real joy every day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WITHOUT CHRIST WE CAN DO NOTHING

One breezy Saturday, Dad took Angel and Jimmy to the park to try out their new kites. “My kite will fly higher than yours,” declared Jimmy, looking proudly at his bright yellow kite with its dark blue borders and perky red bows.

“We will see about that!” said Angel, tweaking her little brother’s ear and tossing her green and orange kite into the air. Not to be outdone, Jimmy quickly tossed his kite into the air, too. For a few minutes both kites sailed merrily across the sky, flying higher and higher, making Jimmy jump up and down and squeal with delight. “Go, kite! Go!” he yelled. “Show them that you are the best.”

Suddenly, Angel’s kite plunged down toward the ground. “See, Angel’s kite cannot fly right; my kite’s the KING of kites!” yelled Jimmy in -glee. But only a few moments later, his kite joined his sister’s on the ground. “What is the problem? Why isn’t my kite flying anymore?” cried Jimmy in despair as he began winding up his string. “Some king!” Angel teased him. “Aha!” said Dad. “What do you mean... ‘Aha?’” grumbled Jimmy as they went to pick up the fallen kites.

“You were so proud of your kite that you forgot what makes it fly,” said Dad. “The air is very still now – there is almost no breeze at all – that is why neither of your kites will fly.” He grinned at Jimmy. “You forgot about the breeze, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, I guess I did,” admitted Jimmy. “I guess I thought a super-good kite was all I needed, but I guess a super-good breeze is needed, too.” As they walked slowly home, Dad spoke thoughtfully. “Lots of people make the same mistake you did, Jimmy,” he said.

“They do?” Angel was surprised. “I thought everybody knew you need wind to fly a kite.” She looked at her brother. “Except Jimmy, of course,” she teased. Dad smiled. “Actually, I wasn’t thinking of kite flying. I was thinking that, just like Jimmy forgot that the wind was needed, people often forget that God is needed. They think they can do things all on their own and act like they don’t need God in their lives; they forget that it is God who gives them power to do just about everything, even just breathing in and breathing out.”

Thought: Are you intelligent? Smart? Talented? All these are from God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me never to be proud and help me to always remember I need You just as the kite needs the wind. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LOVING GOD MEANS OBEYING HIM

Dawn's new puppy wriggled in her arms as she hugged him tight. "I will call him Duke!" she announced.

"Well, Duke has lots of things to learn," commented Dad. "You will need to reward him when he is good and spank him when he does something bad. That is the way will learn what things he is not supposed to do."

Dawn frowned. "He won't be bad, Daddy. I will love him so much that he will want to be good. You will see. Duke will be the best dog in the world!"

But Duke was not a good puppy. He soiled the carpet and chewed on shoes. He didn't come when he was called. Dawn did scold and spank, but nothing seemed to help. Duke went right on chasing the cat and getting into places he didn't belong. "Why is Duke so bad?" Dawn asked sadly one day. "When I scold him, he acts like he is sorry. He licks my face and wags his tail, so I pet him and hug him. Then he turns around and is bad all over again. I love him so much, so why does he keep on being bad?"

Dad put down his paper and carried Dawn onto his lap. "Sometimes it takes a long time to train a puppy," he said. "I am sure Duke will learn eventually. But you know what? The way Duke responds to you is something like the way we often respond to God."

"What do you mean?" asked Dawn.

"Remember what you said when you got Duke?" asked Dad. "You said you were going to love him so much that he would want to be good and please you. Instead, he has been getting into a lot of trouble – and sometimes we are that way with God. He loves us so much that we should all want to be good and please Him. Instead, we often want to do things our own way and do things we know we shouldn't do."

Dawn nodded. "So, we have to learn to obey God like Duke has to learn to obey us." "Right," agreed Dad. "And remember how bad you feel when Duke disobeys you? Think how bad God must feel when the people He loves keep on ignoring His teaching."

Thought: Are you an obedient child of God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that You love me so much and want only the best for me. Teach me to always obey Your Holy Word. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOUR WORDS ACCEPTABLE TO THE LORD?

BANG! The door slammed behind Bee Hoon. Mother sighed. “It seems like she is often angry of late,” she said. “The house is peaceful until she comes home. In five minutes she can have Jeremy crying, and me upset.”

Dad folded the newspaper. “Part of being a teenager, maybe?”

Mother shrugged. “Maybe,” she said, “but we can’t live with this for very long. Bee Hoon has to learn to control herself.”

Just then five-year-old Jeremy burst into the kitchen. “Sister threw my markers on the floor and called me a brat!” he said with a sob. Mother gave a tired sigh. “I will talk with her, Jeremy,” she promised. “Would you like to watch for Uncle John? He is coming for dinner. He will be here any minute.”

“Uncle John is coming? Oh, goody!” Jeremy went jumping down the hall, his problems forgotten. During dinner, everyone – even Bee Hoon – laughed and talked and listened. “I am so glad you are here, Uncle John,” said Bee Hoon with a smile. “You make us all feel so good.”

“That is because he says funny, happy things,” stated Jeremy.

The elderly gentleman winked at the little boy. “Let’s have a little quiz. Tell me – how did God create the world?” Bee Hoon answered quickly. “God just spoke, and whatever He said should be there, was there.”

Uncle John nodded. “Right. Hebrews 11:3 says that the worlds were formed by the word of God. Now here is something interesting to think about. God has given us the ability to create things with our words, too. We can create happiness or gloom.”

“Bee Hoon makes storms with her words,” Jeremy declared, “but you make sunshine, Uncle John. That is why we like you to come to our house.”

For once, Bee Hoon did not argue.

Thought: How does the way you speak make others feel? Are people glad to see you come?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to use my words wisely to bring happiness and joy, so to be a blessing to others, and to live as an obedient child who reflects the joy of the Lord. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DO NOT JUDGE!

Oh, no!" cried Nicole as her little brother pushed the magazines off the coffee table. "What an awful day! James threw his food at me during breakfast, then tried to drown my doll in the bathtub, and now this!"

"Some people call his age 'The Terrible Twos,'" said Mother, "but I prefer to think of it as 'The Curious Twos.' It is an age when children are learning so much."

Nicole helped her mother rearrange the magazines. "It must be hard having such a naughty boy after having had a perfect child like me," she said with a mischievous grin.

Mother laughed. "You will get a chance to see yourself at that age when Aunt Gina comes," she said. "She is going to bring a video recording she made of the morning of her wedding." "Good," Nicole smiled. "I will make sure James watches and sees how a two-year-old should behave."

The next week Nicole and her family all gathered in the living room to watch the video recording made several years earlier. "Oh, look!" exclaimed Nicole as the screen showed the family seated around a table. "That is me in my high chair, saying grace – how sweet."

"Look again," said Aunt Gina. "I cannot believe it!" gasped Nicole. "I am pouring milk onto the floor." More scenes passed. "Why is the dog under the chair?" asked Nicole. "You pulled his tail," replied Dad. Nicole was shocked.

"Here you are... dressed for the wedding," said Mother. "How cute."

Nicole smiled. "Such a pretty white dress with blue bows." But a moment later, Nicole again saw herself on the screen – this time the white dress was covered with brown streaks.

"Just before we were to leave for the church, you got outside and stomped through a mud puddle," explained Aunt Gina. Nicole grinned as James climbed up on her lap. "Hey, little brother," she said, "from now on, I will be more patient with you. I promise."

Thought: Do you judge your little brothers or sisters or others too harshly?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be patient and not to judge others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE KIND TO OLD FOLKS

Greg was hiding in the bushes with his friends, Tom and Alan, but he knew he should not be there. They were in a neighbour's garden. "Let's get out of here before someone sees us," he urged.

"We are just going to have some fun with old Mrs Wee," said Tom. "You chicken?"

"No," protested Greg, "but it is just not right to be mean to old folks."

"Oh, come on," coaxed Alan as he and Tom moved toward the porch steps. "What is the harm if we just ring the doorbell and then hide in these bushes and listen to Mrs Wee complain? She will never know who did it. Even if she sees us, she can't see well enough to tell who we are." Alan tiptoed up to the door with Tom close behind.

As Greg hesitated, Alan punched the bell. Then he and Tom headed for the bushes, but Greg bent down and picked up a newspaper from the sidewalk. He planted himself at the top of the steps and waited. A moment later, the door swung open, and there stood Mrs Wee.

"Excuse me, Mrs Wee," said Greg, holding out the paper. "You didn't pick up your newspaper this morning, so here it is." "Thank you!" said Mrs Wee. "So kind of you! Do I know you?"

"I am Greg Lim, the boy who lives down the road." He motioned to his friends, and they stepped hesitantly forward. "This is Tom Tan and Alan Arul," added Greg. "We all live on this street."

"Oh, yes. I know all of your parents," replied Mrs Wee, "and I am going to tell them what nice boys they have. Some children aren't nice to elderly people, you know."

"Yes, Mrs Wee," said Greg. "We know." As he turned to go, he flashed a triumphant grin at his friends

Thought: Do you treat elderly people with the respect God wants them to have?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today's lesson that I must be kind and gentle to old folks. They include my grandparents and others, and I know You love them a lot too. You have been very specific about the way You want them to be treated, so I pray I would be obedient to that. Help me to dare to be different from other kids who may be rude to old folks or parents. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DON'T JUST LISTEN, DO!

“Don’t forget to wash your face and comb your hair,” said Mother when Eric got up from the breakfast table. “There is jam on your cheek, and your hair looks like you just got out of bed. Go look in the mirror.”

“Okay,” agreed Eric, and he did. But by the time he got his books together, he had forgotten how he looked. Out the door he went – his face dirty and his hair uncombed.

When Eric arrived home after school that day, he found his sister talking to Mother in the kitchen. “You should have seen Eric at school this morning,” Claire told Mother. “He was a mess! His face was dirty, and I don’t think he even combed his hair. My friends called him ‘Sloppy E’ and laughed at him.” Claire finished with a giggle.

“Well, I went and washed my face at recess time,” Eric defended himself. “Combed my hair, too. So there!”

Mother frowned. “You should have cleaned up right away when you saw you needed it,” she said.

At family devotions that night, Dad read from the book of James (James 1:22). “How appropriate,” said Mother. “This reminds me of Eric’s experience after seeing himself in the mirror today.”

“Yeah,” agreed Eric. “I should have washed my face and combed my hair right away. Instead, I went to school looking like a mess.”

“That is a good example,” agreed Dad. “The Bible is like a mirror. It shows us our sins and shortcomings and gives us instructions for Christian living. But as we read, we must not only see what is needed in our lives; we must also do something to make the necessary changes.”

“And we should do them right away, so we don’t forget,” added Claire, grinning at her brother.

Thought: Do you look daily into God’s “mirror” (the Bible)?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide me in the way of the Christian life – to read and follow what is in the Bible. As I look, may I see things in my life that need changing. And may I take care of them at once so I don’t forget. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DO YOU THINK EVIL THOUGHTS?

Choon sat silently, his head pounding. If only he had listened to his parents and stayed away from the construction site. “How did you say this happened?” Dr Leong asked as he finished stitching Choon’s forehead.

“I was running home from school and tripped over a crack in the sidewalk,” Choon explained, hoping his face wouldn’t reveal the lie. He actually got hurt on some machinery at the construction site.

“Well, you should be okay,” said Dr Leong, “but I do want you to get an X-ray just to be on the safe side.”

Choon and his mother went to the hospital’s X-ray department. Choon’s head still throbbed. He wondered what it would be like to have an X-ray taken of his head. Suddenly Choon sat straight up. “Will this X-ray show my brain and all my thoughts?” he blurted out. As soon as he asked the question, he knew it was a foolish one.

“Relax, son,” said Mother, chuckling. “Are you afraid it might show thoughts that you don’t want anyone to see?” Choon didn’t answer. He put his head on his hands. He was glad the X-ray couldn’t show his thoughts. Then everyone would find out that he had lied.

By the time they were heading home, Choon was feeling better. “Your question back at the hospital reminds me of something,” observed Mother. “We should never forget that God sees all our thoughts just like you imagined the X-ray machine might have shown yours, Choon. There is nothing we can hide from Him.”

Choon nodded. “Yeah,” he said. He knew he should confess what had really happened. “I... I lied,” he admitted. “I hurt my head at the construction site along Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3. I’m sorry.” He was quite sure some punishment would be coming, but he felt better anyway.

Thought: Do you have thoughts that you would be ashamed for anyone else to know?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me that thinking evil thoughts or hiding secret sins in my mind is wrong. May You help me keep my thoughts honest and pure. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SOME STAIN IN YOUR LIFE?

“Look, Tracy! A bargain store!” exclaimed Barbara. “I am glad Mom said I could choose my own dress. Maybe I will find something here.”

“Maybe, but be careful,” warned her older sister. “Sometimes the stuff on these racks has something wrong with it. Like this rack here.” She pointed to some small lettering on a sign above the rack, and read it aloud. “Slightly stained. Greatly reduced in price. All sales final.” She looked at Barbara. “You had better look them over really well.”

“I will,” Barbara assured her. “Oh-h-h-h! This one is just what I want for the church anniversary.” She lifted a dress off the rack and looked it over. Sure enough – there was a small spot right on the front of the skirt. “I will wash that out,” declared Barbara. “No big deal.” Tracy wasn’t so sure, but Barbara tried the dress on and bought it.

After two washings and using spot remover, the stain remained. “Good thing I didn’t pay much for it,” said Barbara with a groan. Mother nodded. “It sure is,” she agreed. Then Mother frowned. “I saw Sandy at the store today,” she added. “She said you told her there wouldn’t be room in our car for her to ride to the church anniversary. Why did you tell her that? We will have plenty of room.”

“But Linda is coming with me, and we don’t really want Sandy to go with us,” mumbled Barbara. “It is no big deal.” Mother sighed. “Like the spot in your new dress?” she asked. “The value of the dress was greatly reduced by that small spot. Something like that can happen to a Christian’s testimony, too.” “What do you mean?” asked Barbara.

“Maybe what you told Sandy was ‘no big deal’ to you. You might consider it only a little lie – only a small stain,” said Mother. “But when Sandy finds out that you lied, the value of your Christian testimony will probably be greatly reduced. Do you think this will help her want to become a Christian?”

Barbara looked down. She knew Mom was right, but what could be done about it? She looked up as Mother spoke again. “It is not too late to do something about this,” she said. “Give Sandy a call and tell her that we do have room, and she can ride with us.” Barbara nodded and headed for the phone.

Thought: Is there some sin – some stain in your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to obey Your Holy Word. May You help me to be honest and truthful to others always. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HAVE YOU ACCEPTED JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOUR?

As Kim said goodnight one evening, her mother noticed that she seemed a little upset. "I want to ask you something, Mom," Kim said hesitantly. "After I gave my life to Jesus last month, I was really happy for a while. But I have sinned lots of times since then – like when I got angry at Jason tonight. I asked God to forgive me, but I am sure He isn't very happy with me. And what about the times I sin without realising it? And what if I forget to ask God to forgive me? Am I still saved?"

Mother sat down on the bed. "Jesus' death paid for all our sins," she said. "And when Jesus was talking about believers being in God's hand He said, 'No man is able to take them out of My Father's hand.' God won't disown you after you put your trust in Him." Kim didn't look quite convinced, and Mother pointed to a porcelain doll on Kim's shelf. "I see that you have cleaned up that doll," she said. "Tell me again where it came from."

Kim smiled. "You know, Mother," she replied. "When we were at Auntie Emma's house, she was cleaning her stuff and was going to throw it away. It was covered with dust, but I cleaned it and then dressed it in new clothes. It looks great now, don't you think?"

"Yes, it does." Mother nodded. "It is beautiful, so enjoy it while you can. Your room gets quite dusty at this time of the year, you know. Soon your doll will be covered with dust, and then I suppose you will throw it away."

"Throw it away?" asked Kim. "No, even if the doll does get dusty, it could never look any worse than when I got it. Anyway, I would never throw it away after all the work I did to get it cleaned up. I will just clean it whenever it needs it. I want this doll."

Mother smiled. "I thought you would say that," she said. "Baby, God loves you much more than you love that doll. So He is not going to just 'throw you away' – not after all He has done for you."

Thought: Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour from sin? Do you want to trust Him today?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me and forgiving all my sins. May I continue to always trust You and obey Your Holy Word. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GUILTY CONSCIENCE?

“Slow down, Dad,” warned Philip. He pointed to a cluster of bushes. “I see a policeman hiding back there.”

“I don’t need to slow down,” replied Dad. “I am not going faster than the speed limit.” “Yeah, but don’t you feel sort of uneasy when you see a policeman?” asked Philip.

Dad shook his head. “No,” he said as he stopped the car at a red light. “I have no reason to have a guilty conscience.”

“My Junior Worship teacher says your conscience is kind of like a traffic light that turns red when you are about to do something wrong, and turns green when you are doing right,” observed Philip. “Of course, nothing actually turns red or green in front of your eyes, but we knew what she meant.”

Dad nodded. “God has given each person a conscience,” he said, “and your conscience works according to your knowledge of right and wrong. That is why you need to train your conscience while you are young. Studying the Bible and listening to the advice of older Christians are good ways to do that.”

“Well, I know a kid who does wrong even though he knows better, but he says his conscience doesn’t bother him,” stated Philip. “My teacher says kids like that have run through the red light of their conscience so many times that they are becoming colour blind.”

The traffic light turned green, and Dad drove on. “When you run a red light – either with your car or by ignoring your conscience – you are apt to have a wreck,” he said. “And wrecking your life is much more serious than wrecking a car.”

Philip nodded. “Yeah,” he agreed, “but you know something, Dad? Sometimes I am not sure what colour my conscience is showing me.”

“When you are not sure what is right, observe the yellow caution light and slow down until you know what to do,” advised Dad. “Play it safe. Don’t go ahead unless you are sure it is okay.”

Thought: Have you ever had a tug at your heart or an uneasy feeling when you started to do wrong?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray to always have a clear conscience to do what is right in Your sight and according to Your will. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE A HELPER!

Jason, Tom, and the rest of the class listened as Brother Milton finished giving instructions for the day's hike. Soon they were on their way. They were having a great time as they hiked along, sometimes walking easily on the well-beaten trail; sometimes scrambling over fallen branches or making their way around them. "This is cool!" exclaimed Jason. "Beat you to the next bend in the trail, Tom!" But as Jason started off, he tripped on a tree root and down he went! "Ouch!" he cried, grabbing his ankle. Brother Milton hurried over as Jason stood up. "I think I can walk okay," said Jason, gingerly testing his ankle.

"All right, but no racing for a while," said Brother Milton.

"It will be easier for him if he doesn't have to carry the extra weight of his backpack," said Tom. "I will carry it for him." "Me, too," chimed in several other voices.

"Thank you, boys," said Brother Milton. So for the rest of the hike, the boys took turns carrying Jason's backpack.

At the end of the hike, the boys built a campfire, and after a meal of roasted hot dogs, Brother Milton led in a short time of devotions. "What you boys did today for Jason reminds me of what Jesus tells us to do," he said. "In life, we each carry our own 'backpack' of responsibilities and problems – our own 'burden' – but if any one of us has a load that is too heavy, the others ought to help carry it until that person is able to bear it alone again. You helped Jason physically, and Jesus wants us to help others spiritually as well. Think of a few ways kids like you get burdened down and what you could do to help."

After a moment, Jason raised his hand. "Some kids get into trouble by running around with kids who do bad things," he said. "Maybe we could include them in our groups."

"We could make friends with new kids at school," offered Tom, "and invite them to our activities!" "If somebody's skipping church and Sunday school a lot, we can try to get him to come back," said Pete. "We could pray for kids, too."

Brother Milton nodded. "All good suggestions," he said.

Thought: Do I help others? Willingly?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to willingly help others for this is how I can grow in my spiritual life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE NICE TO ALL!

Benjamin hurried eagerly into the store with his mother and older brother. They were going to pick out treats for him to take to his class the next day. He pulled on his mother's hand, and she followed him to the aisle that was filled with different kinds of candy and gum.

"How many kids are in your class?" asked his brother, Eric. Benjamin shrugged. "There are twenty-one people, counting Benjamin and his teacher," Mother told them. Benjamin picked up a package of candy. "Can I get this?" he asked. "Well, let's see," said Mom, looking at the package. "If we get this, we'll need two bags. There are only twenty pieces in one bag." "That's enough," said Benjamin. "Think again, Ben," Eric said. "Twenty treats won't be enough for twenty-one people."

"I'm not taking one for Steven." Benjamin took the package and headed for the check-out lanes. "He was mean to me and I do not like him."

Mom took hold of Benjamin's arm and pulled him back into the candy aisle. "Benjamin," she said, "you can't take treats unless you take them for everybody. You must share with Steven, too." Benjamin held the candy tightly in his hand. "I told you... I don't like Steven," he said stubbornly. "He can't have any of my candy."

Mother looked at him sternly. "That is not the right thing to do. As Christians, we are to be nice to all, even if some of them are not nice to us," she said. She pointed to the candy display. "So, either get some for Steven, or put all of it back." Slowly, Benjamin reached out and picked up another bag of candy. "Well, all right," he said. "Steven can have some, but I will look mad when I give it to him."

Eric helped his little brother carry the candy to the checkout counter. "That does not sound very loving to me," he said. "Besides, the Bible verse I learned in Sunday school last week says that if we are living for God, we must always be kind to everyone, not just people we like."

"Does that mean I have to smile when I give Steven his candy?" asked Benjamin. He made a face. "He probably won't even say thank you." "Maybe not," said Eric, "but I think you should smile real friendly-like when you give it to him." "I think so, too," agreed Mother. "And I'm sure God agrees!"

Thought: Is it hard to be kind to a person who is not nice to you?

Prayer: : Heavenly Father, teach me to be a nice and forgiving person. I know it is sometimes tough to be nice to nasty people, but Heavenly Father, please help me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

HIDE GOD'S WORD IN YOUR HEART!

"That was really scary!" exclaimed Brian. Chris nodded. A minor accident that afternoon was the main topic of conversation at the dining table. They had been in the car with Mother, and the brakes had failed when they came to the stop sign. The car had kept going slowly ahead, and they had bumped into the car that was ahead of them.

"Chris put down his napkin. "I am done... May I be excused?" "Me too?" asked Brian quickly.

"Not yet," said Dad as he reached for the Bible. "This accident reminds me of something. Just like car maintenance is very important and should not be put off, the maintenance of our spiritual lives should not be put off either. It is even more important. If we don't maintain a close walk with the Lord, our spiritual brakes might fail when we need to apply them."

"Our spiritual brakes?" Chris asked, puzzled.

Dad nodded. "Memorising God's Word is one of the best ways to keep our 'spiritual brakes' in working order," he said. "When we do that, we are likely to recall a verse that cautions us and stops us from giving in to temptation. We are more likely to apply our 'spiritual brakes' when they are needed.

Brian nudged Chris under the table with his foot. He was sure they were both remembering something that had happened that afternoon. They had gone over to play with Mark, the next door neighbour. When Mark had shown them a DVD and suggested they watch it, the boys glanced uneasily at one another. Judging from the title and the picture on the jacket, they knew there would probably be language and scenes that would not be pleasing to God. Both felt they shouldn't watch it. But when Mark slipped the disc into the DVD player, neither of the boys said anything. And although they winced now and then at the language they heard, they were soon engrossed in the story. The boys knew their "spiritual brakes" had failed that afternoon.

Brian spoke up and confessed that he and Chris had watched an unwholesome video. Dad solemnly prayed with the repentant boys and then opened his Bible. "Let's read and discuss a few verses from God's Word tonight, and let's memorise one too," he said.

Thought: Are your "spiritual brakes" in good working order?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to memorise Bible verses so that Your Word can continue to strengthen my faith. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

IS THE BIBLE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND?

This silly thing!" snapped Lauren as she threw the flower kit across the table. "None of the pieces will fit together right."

"Calm down," said Dad. "Getting angry and being out of control will not help." He picked up some of the pieces from the kit, then asked, "Aren't you missing something? Did this kit come with directions?"

"I already read them," answered Lauren, "but I couldn't understand them." She rummaged through the wastebasket and pulled out a paper. "Here they are," she said, handing the paper to her dad.

"Maybe you read too much at once," suggested Dad. "Let's just take one step at a time. Let's see, it says to bend the green pipe cleaners in half so they look like diagram A." He showed Lauren the diagram and then waited while she took the pipe cleaners and bent them. "Next it says to put them aside and wrap the yellow yarn around the small spiral wires and wrap red yarn around the larger spirals."

"Will you help me?" asked Lauren. So they spent the afternoon together, reading the directions and following them closely until the flowers were completed. Lauren held up the finished project and grinned at her father. "Is this the first time you spent an afternoon making flowers?" she said. "Thanks, Dad. It just wouldn't come together for me. Those directions were too hard to understand."

"But they are very important, and we needed them, didn't we?" asked Dad. "Yeah," agreed Lauren, "and I did read them, but I needed to follow them step by step. Thanks for helping, Dad." "You are welcome," replied Dad. After a moment, he said, "You know, dear, this reminds me that it is even more important to read and follow the directions God has given to help us in our daily life."

"You mean the Bible," said Lauren. "I do read it, but sometimes I can't understand it, either." "I know," said Dad, "but I hope you won't just toss it aside. Instead, ask God to show you what His Word means. With His help, follow it step by step." "And I will ask you, too, when I need help understanding His directions," said Lauren. "Okay, Dad?" Dad nodded. "Anytime!" he promised.

Thought: Do you ever feel that the Bible is too hard to understand? Don't quit reading.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to understand the Bible. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU GROWING IN GRACE?

“Jane sure drinks a lot of milk, doesn’t she?” observed Laura one day as she watched her baby sister. “That is all she drinks all day.” “That is true,” Mom answered. “Maybe she is getting tired of milk. Shall I feed her a sandwich and an apple?”

“No-o-o-o,” Laura laughed at Mom’s joke. “She can’t eat that. She isn’t big enough yet. She hasn’t got any teeth to chew with.” “You are absolutely right.” Mom smiled as she added, “But not before too long she will be able to have some soft cereal and some juice.”

“How soon can she have noodles?” asked Laura.

“Not for quite a while,” answered Mom. “She has got a lot of growing to do before she will be big enough for that.”

Dad held up his plate of sweet and sour pork. “Well, I am glad I am big enough to have this,” he said with a grin. “But you know what, Laura? Just like human babies slowly grow big enough to eat different things, baby Christians do, too.”

“Baby Christians?” asked Laura, looking puzzled. Dad nodded. “When a person first accepts Jesus as Saviour, he is called a ‘babe’ – an infant – in Christ. Older Christians help him understand the ‘milk’ of God’s Word – the easiest verses and stories. Then, as that person grows spiritually, we share the ‘meat’ of God’s Word – the deeper truths of Scripture that are harder to understand.”

Laura thought for a moment. Then she grinned. “I don’t think I will ask what stage you think I am at,” she decided. “I don’t think I am at the ‘milk’ stage anymore, but I am probably not quite ready to chew the ‘meat’ of the Bible either. You would probably say I am at the ‘mashed banana’ stage, and that sounds horrible.”

“As long as you are growing in Christ – a little every day – it is great, not horrible,” said Dad. “The only horrible thing would be if you stopped growing altogether.”

Thought: Are you growing in grace and knowledge of Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to grow strong spiritually by reading and obeying Your Holy Word. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

PRAYER IS POWERFUL!

“A-vee-air-ee,” read Paul, looking at the sign above the door of one of the buildings. “What does that mean?” He was visiting the zoo with his uncle.

“That is a building with all kinds of birds,” answered Uncle Kok Seng. “Let’s go see them.” They opened the door and heard a lot of chirping and squawking, and as they walked through the building, they saw many different kinds of birds. “Look over there,” said Uncle Kok Seng. He pointed toward a flamingo standing on one leg with its head on its back. “That one is asleep.”

“What a funny way to sleep,” said Paul. “How can that skinny leg hold up that big bird?” “God made it that way,” answered Uncle Kok Seng. “It’s amazing, isn’t it?” Paul nodded.

After leaving the aviary, Uncle Kok Seng bought them each a snack. As they sat on a bench and munched their chips, Paul was very quiet. “Thinking about your parents again?” asked Uncle Kok Seng.

“Yeah,” Paul answered. “I just know they are going to get a divorce.”

“Now you don’t know for sure, Paul,” responded Uncle Kok Seng. “The reason you are here with me this weekend is so they could go to that marriage seminar. I believe they will try to work things out.”

“Yeah, I know,” replied Paul. “But I wish I could do something to help them.” “You can pray,” answered his uncle. “Oh, I do that,” said Paul. “I pray all the time! But that is such a little thing.”

“That is just what you said about that flamingo’s leg,” Uncle Kok Seng reminded him. “But that little leg held that bird up, didn’t it? And your ‘little’ prayers can do great things, too. God made it that way.”

Thought: Do you have problems you can do nothing about? Nothing, that is, except pray? Don’t forget – Prayer is powerful!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for my parents. Please teach me to always seek Your grace through daily prayers. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DO YOU TRY TO COVER YOUR SINS?

Jonathan took out his dad's aftershave lotion and splashed it on his face before leaving the bathroom. When Mother stepped into his room a little later, she sniffed the air. "What do I smell?" she asked.

"Jonathan used Dad's aftershave," shouted Sophie from her room across the hall. "He didn't take a shower again."

Mother checked the bathroom. "His towel is damp," she said. "Well, when I took a shower, the soap wasn't even wet," tattled Sophie. "He is so disgusting! Lots of times he just wets his washcloth and towel and pretends to have showered."

"Is that true, Jonathan?" asked Mother. She stood in Jonathan's doorway holding a bar of soap in one hand and the aftershave in the other.

"I just don't like getting all wet," Jonathan said defensively. "You are so gross," sputtered Sophie.

"Shhhh." Mother held up a finger. "Jonathan, I am sure you know that using this..." she held up the lotion, "...doesn't take the place of using soap. When you splash on cologne or lotion instead of washing, you may smell nice, but the dirt remains."

"Yeah, Jonathan," taunted Sophie, coming to the doorway. "You cover up with lotion, but you are still dirty as a pig!"

"Well, Jonathan is going to take his shower," said Mother, looking sternly at her son, "because it is important to keep our bodies clean. However, it occurs to me that we should also think about something even more important. Just like your skin gets dirty, your life and heart and thoughts can get dirty – only this 'dirt' is sin. Such things as pride or an accusing, unloving attitude fall into that category, Sophie. And so does deceiving your mother, Jonathan."

Both Sophie and Jonathan squirmed with guilt as Mother continued. "We all sometimes try to cover up or hide the wrong things we do, but there is nothing we can hide from God. We need to confess our sin to Him. Then He will forgive us and wash us clean – as white as snow."

Thought: Do you try to cover up your sins?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me that You can see through any cover-up. I need to confess my sins and turn from them, and I do so now. I pray that You would "wash" my heart and life and make me clean in Your sight. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

COMMIT YOURSELF TO GOD

“Hold still, Mary,” instructed Mrs Ng. She was fitting Mary, who was going to take part in her cousin Sally’s wedding, for a junior bridesmaid dress.

“Sally showed me the wedding ring she got for Dan,” confided Mary. “I like jewellery.” “A wedding ring isn’t just jewellery,” said Mrs Ng. “Engagement and wedding rings have special meaning.”

Mary nodded. “Everyone knows an engagement ring means a guy and a girl are going to get married. I know one girl who got china instead of an engagement ring, though.” “Rings aren’t necessary,” agreed Mrs Ng, “but they are a nice part of tradition. Can you guess the special meaning of the wedding rings?”

“I have heard the circle stands for unending love, and that it means ‘married forever,’” replied Mary, “but I think it just means you are married because many people do not stay married forever.” Mrs Ng sighed. “I know,” she said, “and that is not good.”

“What church and Sunday school do you attend?” asked Mrs Ng. “Actually, I haven’t gone for a long time,” admitted Mary. “We sleep in on Sundays.”

“Oh, I am sorry to hear that,” replied Mrs Ng. She shook her head. “You know, Mary, we have been talking about wedding traditions such as wearing the symbolic rings. The rings are nice, but the couple also needs to be fully committed to working at the relationship to strengthen it. In a similar way, Christians must also be truly committed to working at their relationship with God, or they don’t become stronger spiritually.”

“And going to church and Sunday school is the way to work at that relationship?” asked Mary. “It is just one way,” said Mrs Ng. “When you accepted Jesus as Saviour, that was a ‘forever’ heart-commitment. That doesn’t change, but such things as prayer, reading and obeying God’s Word, and church attendance will help you grow closer to the Lord.”

Thought: Do you know the right words, like “saved” and “eternal life,” but forget the responsibilities of commitment to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a committed Christian. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

YOUR PARENTS LOVE YOU

“You are always scolding and punishing me,” complained Alicia to her mother as she sat on the “time out” chair. “You never get mad at Shaun.” “Oh, yeah?” The words came from Shaun. He had come into the room and overheard the remark. “I used to get punished a lot – and I still do sometimes. So quit pouting and learn your lesson, Sis.”

That afternoon, the whole family went to a festival in Sentosa. Alicia and Shaun especially enjoyed the elephant rides. They first rode the smaller elephant and then the bigger one. They held on tightly as a friendly trainer led them around the circle.

“Here are some pictures to help you remember this day,” said Dad when the ride was over. He held out several pictures he had just taken with his camera. They all gathered around to see them.

“Did you notice that the trainer sometimes used his stick with the smaller elephant?” asked Mother. “He just spoke to the bigger one.” Alicia nodded. “I thought at first that he was being mean,” she said, “but he only just tapped the elephant. He had to make it obey.”

“I am sure the older elephant gets disciplined from time to time,” said Dad. “But it probably learned from its earlier training.” Mother nodded. “I guess Dad and I are ‘trainers,’ too,” she said. “Sometimes we need to correct or discipline our children so they will learn.”

“Yeah,” said Shaun, “and I have already learned a lot from having had more years of training than you have had, Alicia.”

Mother nodded in agreement. “The Bible instructs parents to correct their children,” she said. “That is the purpose of the ‘time out’ chair.” Because your parents love you, they need to discipline you at times when you are naughty. This is to help you to grow up to be holy and obedient to God.

“Maybe you should hang these elephant ride pictures near the ‘time out’ chair at home,” suggested Shaun. “Yeah – and I hope I will never have to see them again,” said Alicia.

Thought: Your parents love you. That is why they need to discipline you at times.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be thankful for my parents’ guidance and love for me. May I continue to love and respect them. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

EVER HEARD YOURSELF TAPED?

“Ming, Millie, and I taped a radio script for our English project, and it has a Christian message,” said Ruth when she came in from school one day. “We wanted to make it a testimony to all the unsaved kids in our class. Want to hear it?”

Ruth played the tape while Mother finished preparing dinner. As the tape ended, Ruth glanced down the hall and saw her brother Pete go into her room. “What are you doing in my room?” she screamed. As Ruth raced toward her room, Mother frowned, and quickly flipped a different tape into the player, she set it to record. “You pig!” yelled Ruth. There was a thump as she hit her brother, then pounding footsteps as he chased her back into the kitchen. “You do look like a pig, and you act and smell like one, too,” continued Ruth. “Oink! Oink!”

“Oh, poor baby has to play name calling,” Pete sang out. He looked at Mother, wondering why she hadn’t stopped the fight as she usually did. “I can’t stand you!” cried Ruth in disgust. “You belong in the zoo!”

The arguing continued a few more minutes until Dad came in and firmly said, “Enough!” He sent them off to wash their hands before eating dinner. While they were gone, Mother rewound the tape. After they ate, Ruth helped clear the table. “For devotions, may I play my English project tape, Dad?” she asked. “It has a Christian message.”

“Good,” agreed Dad. “I would like to hear it.” Ruth got the player, pushed the “Play” button, and eagerly listened. “You pig! You look like a pig, and you act and smell...” Ruth’s face felt hot as she quickly pressed the “Stop” button. “My tape!” she gasped. “Your radio script is safe on another tape,” Mother assured her, “but let’s hear the rest of this.” “But, Mom,” whined Ruth. She could see that Mother was unyielding. “Dad?” she pleaded. At her parents’ insistence, she again turned on the cassette player. Soon she pressed “Stop” again, feeling very embarrassed. “I said that?” All eyes were on her. “I am sorry.”

“Your rehearsed tape had a good Christian message,” observed Mother, “but what if we could play back all your unrehearsed words and thoughts? How much of it would be a testimony that glorifies God?”

Thought: Would you be more careful if you had to hear yourself over again at the end of the day?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be more careful with my words. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD IS IMPORTANT

In the final lap of his practice run, Kenny pushed himself with all his might. If I can run this fast tomorrow, I will get the gold medal for sure, he thought. As he ran through the imaginary finish line, he slowed down and grasped his side to relieve the cramp.

"Hi, speedy," a voice called from beside the track. "Dad!" Kenny puffed, jogging off the track. "You have been here long?" "Not long," answered Dad. "I came to get you for dinner." "Not yet! I need to run just a little longer, okay?" begged Kenny.

"Kenny," said Dad, "we have already allowed you to miss dinner with us twice this week. Nourishment is just as necessary as running practice. And, it is not just dinner that I am concerned about. I am also concerned that your running has kept you away from too many other important activities. I am wondering if we have made a mistake in letting you join the track team. Along with missing dinner with the family, you have missed family devotions, and you have not had time for your regular church activities either. There is a youth service tonight, right?"

"Yeah," said Kenny, "but the track meet is tomorrow, and I just have to beat Tony. I can't beat him unless I put a lot of effort into it." "I know, but are you aware that you have another opponent?" Dad asked. "One who is trying to beat you just as hard as Tony is? You need to put more effort into defeating him."

"Who?" asked Kenny, glancing around the track.

"He is not on the field," Dad said. "He is not even interested in your track record. He is interested in your heart, your soul, and your mind." Kenny looked down. He knew now who Dad meant. "Satan doesn't care if you win or lose this meet," said Dad, "but he cares a great deal about having you neglect fellowship with God and with His people. You can't beat Tony without strengthening your body. How do you think you can beat the devil without strengthening your heart, mind, and soul?"

"I guess I can't," admitted Kenny.

Thought: Is there something in your life that takes you away from time spent with God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray that activities and studies in my life would not take priority over my Quiet Time with You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

JESUS OUR SHEPHERD

This month we will learn about Jesus, our Shepherd. It was common for Jews to be shepherds in the time of Jesus. A shepherd takes care of the sheep during the day and puts his sheep in a sheepfold at night. A sheepfold is a big enclosed area, without a roof. It has only one door, often guarded by the shepherd himself or the porter (read John 10:3). The shepherd or porter is armed to fight off robbers or wild animals, for sheep are defenceless creatures that cannot fight back.

Have you ever been frightened? Have you ever been scared of strange noises at night? Or imagine lights moving on their own? Dear child, do not be afraid. Jesus is your Shepherd.

A shepherd guarding sheep is qualified to protect the animals under his charge because he is armed and trained. But he could sometimes fail if there was a large group of attackers, or a large pack of wolves attacking the sheep. On his own, he will not be able to fend off all of them.

But our Shepherd is Jesus! He is the Almighty God, and there is nothing He cannot do!

Turn to a few other verses and see where else our Lord Jesus is referred to as shepherd:

1. "The LORD is _____ Shepherd" (Psalm 23:1)
2. "But he that entereth in by the door is _____ shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:2)
3. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that _____ shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant," (Hebrews 13:20)
4. "And when the _____ Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (I Peter 5:4)

Thought: What a wonderful and powerful Shepherd Jesus is!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be thankful for the joy and peace of being one of Your little sheep. I commit my cares and burdens into Your loving hands. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

JESUS KNOWS OUR NAME!

You could imagine that “Flopsy” could be the name of a cute puppy with big ears. Or maybe “Ginger” the name for a cat that gingerly (carefully) climbs up the ledge of a room. You probably have names for your pets or even toys, too.

Today’s verse tells us that if we are the sheep of Jesus, He will know us and call us by our name! How wonderful is that – for Jesus to know our names!

Do you think your school principal would know your name? Not likely, unless you are a prominent student or a very naughty child! Or would the Prime Minister of Singapore know your name? Not likely. He would be so busy taking care of major things he would not have the time or interest to know who we are, much less our names.

But the Lord Jesus knows us by our name. What does this teach us? Our Heavenly Father cares for us so much He wants to know us by our name!

And when He calls, you must respond! Jesus does not call us in the way mummy or daddy does – calling out loud so we may hear. He calls us by what He wrote in the Holy Bible. He calls us by the working of the Holy Spirit in us – that guides us in the right way, and that rebukes us when we do wrong.

Are you one of the sheep of the Shepherd? If you believe in Jesus, you will always know and hear His voice – which means you would continue to read the Bible and pray. This means you will want to obey Him and His commandments. We may fail at times, but we will always want to seek His forgiveness and try again.

Thought: It is so wonderful that Jesus knows us by name!

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, thank You so much that Jesus knows my name and loves me! Teach me O Lord to always obey You and Your Holy Word. Help me to be faithful in my Quiet Time and be diligent in studying the Bible. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HE GOETH BEFORE THEM

There are some outstanding documentaries on television and some of them focus on wildlife, or how people take care of farm animals. If you have seen documentaries on how a shepherd guides his sheep, you would know that the shepherd calls out to his sheep to gather them. There may be hundreds of sheep in his flock. But the sheep recognise only the shepherd's voice and will follow only him.

When shepherds find good grazing ground, they may meet other shepherds with other flocks. So this is the gathering of a few shepherds with their different flocks at a nice location. The sheep enjoy the pasture; the shepherds enjoy the time relaxing and chatting with each other.

When night approaches, it is time to leave the grazing area for the safety of the sheep, the shepherds will call out to their sheep. Do you think the sheep will get confused and follow the wrong shepherd? Amazingly, not! The sheep will recognise the distinct call of the different shepherds.

Then, they will see their shepherd leading them in front! What a soothing sight that must be – to see the one who will guard and guide them in front. Likewise, our Shepherd the Lord Jesus goes before us. That does not mean we can literally see Jesus walking in front of us. What that means is Jesus will lead us in how we should live our lives, in how we should react to difficult times.

What about you, dear reader? How well do you know Jesus, your Heavenly Shepherd? Do you let Him lead you?

Word Search –
words can be up, down, front,
back, diagonal, and across!

Find the words: BEFORE,
FOLLOW, GO, KNOW, LEADS,
OWN, PUT, SHEEP, VOICE

S	E	F	Z	O	W	N	Q
D	S	R	O	Y	X	T	K
A	Q	H	O	L	Q	U	N
E	Z	Y	E	F	L	P	O
L	G	O	X	E	E	O	W
E	C	I	O	V	P	B	W

Thought: I have Jesus as my leader and guide!

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, help me to know You and Your Holy Word. Please be my Shepherd and continue to lead and guide me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THIEVES AND ROBBERS!

Today's verses teach us that there would be thieves and robbers who may pose as shepherds but approach sheep with the purpose of harming them. Who can these be?

Let me give you a scenario. There is a real thief or robber who wants to harm you or your family. Would he approach you and tell you he is a thief or robber? Of course not! In fact, he would probably deny it, pretending to be the "good guy" instead.

There are many types of churches in the world today. But not all churches are the same. Some teach that it is good to believe in Jesus, that believing in Jesus will bring us to heaven. But some of these churches may also teach that believing in other religions will also lead one to heaven! But that is not what Jesus teaches us! In John 14:6, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Clearly Jesus is the ONLY way to God.

Read the Bible, verse Acts 4:12 to find out the missing alphabets:

"Neither is there salva__ion in any other:
for there is __one other na__e under heaven
given among men, whereby we must be sa__ed." (Acts 4:12).

SONG:

*One way, God said, to get to Heaven.
Jesus is the only way.
One way to reach those pearly mansions.
Jesus is the only way.
No other way, no other way, no other way to go.
One way, God said, to get to Heaven.
You must come the Jesus way.*

(Ruth E. Turnwall)

Thought: There is only one way to Heaven - Jesus is the Only Way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember the only way to Heaven is to believe in Jesus, and to accept Him as my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

I AM THE DOOR

Remember the reading for 1st February? We learnt then that there is only one door into the sheepfold. Shepherds and sheep use this door. But thieves and those who are not the real shepherds cannot use this door.

Jesus is the “door” for us. Not that Jesus is any physical door we see in our house or school, but Jesus is the only way through which we go to God the Father, Jesus is the only way through whom we can go to heaven. In faith, we must “enter” this door and accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

Have you “entered” that door? Have you committed your life to Jesus? Have you accepted Him as your Lord and Saviour?

Read the Bible verse John 10:1 to find out the missing letters:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you,
He that entereth not by the __oor into the sheepf__ld,
but climbeth up some __ther way,
the same is a thief and a __obber.”

The underlined alphabets form the word: __ __ __ __

SONG:

*One door and only one, And yet its sides are two,
Inside and outside, On which side are you?
One door and only one, And yet its sides are two,
I'm on the inside, On which side are you?*

(Randall Dennis & Karyn Henley)

Thought: Jesus is the only Door to Heaven.

Prayer 1:(If you want to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour)
Heavenly Father, I confess my sins and know that without Jesus, I'm destined for punishment in hell. Please forgive me of my sins, and I want to accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Prayer 2:(If you have already accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour)
Heavenly Father, thank you for salvation in Jesus. Please show me how to live a faithful Christian life, and to tell others about You, the only Door to enter if they want to have their sins forgiven. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS ABUNDANT LIFE?

If I were to ask your parents what kind of child you are, what would I hear?

Are you a happy child? Are you joyful, cheerful, or contented? Or are you one who sulks in a corner, thinks the world is unfair to you, and/or believes others are more blessed than you? Dear child, what are you more like? Do you wake up each day glad that you can be with parents, family and friends? Or do you shrink back from each day and hope it will end quickly? Maybe it is because of school, for the Singapore school system is very tough. Maybe it is because of nasty classmates or parents who are too demanding.

In today's Bible verse, we are promised by our gracious Jesus – that we would have abundant life. What is the meaning of “abundant”? It is to have a lot of something, to be rich, to have an oversupply. To have an oversupply of what? Well, Jesus says to have an oversupply of life!

That means as Christians, we are to have a life full of joy and purpose, for Jesus has a wonderful plan for you!

That does not mean life would be without difficulties. You would still face some unfriendly classmates who may be unkind, or lie about you. You may still fall sick and feel terrible when the bout of fever hits you. Your parents will still scold you if you misbehave. But through it all, you must know that Jesus is always there for you – so seek Him in prayer. Commit your troubles to Him. For He hears and answers prayers according to His will and time.

Jesus Christ came to earth and died on the cross, for you and for me. If He can give us His life, we can trust in Him to give us abundant life as He said He would according to His will.



Thought: In Jesus, I would always have a life that is abundant!

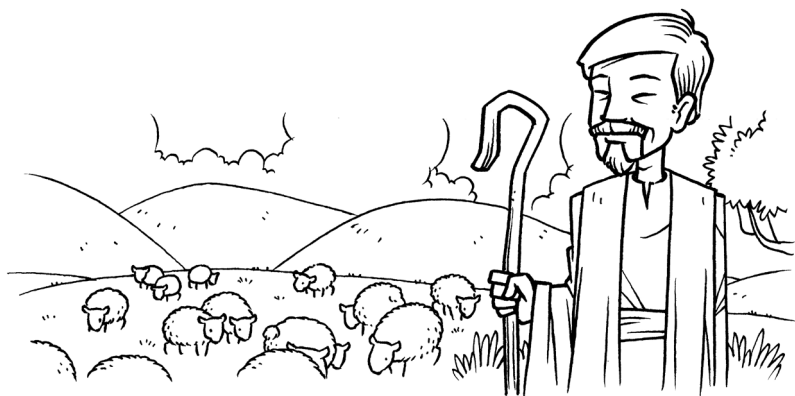
Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for this abundant life. Help me to be contented with what You have blessed me with. Help me to be diligent in my prayers. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

JESUS CHRIST IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus Christ is called the Good Shepherd because He is the One who sacrificed His life for us. He is good and He desires the best for us. He is waiting for us the whole day, from the moment you wake up to get ready for school until bedtime at night. At the same time, He is always there when trouble comes your way. So turn to Him! The problem is – many of us do not turn to Him.

Sheep are social animals that gather in flocks but sometimes they may wander off on their own and get lost. They may venture into rocky places, fall into a crevice where they are unable to come out. The shepherd keeps count of his sheep. When he realises that there are missing ones, he will go out to look for them. The lost sheep can be located because of their loud bleating. When the shepherd finds his lost sheep in a crevice, he will use the hooked end of his staff to pull them out of the crevice. A good shepherd will always care for his sheep. The Lord Jesus Christ who is our Good Shepherd cares for us and loves us. He gave His life to save us from our sins.

Colour the Good Shepherd...



Thought: Jesus is always a Good Shepherd!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am so thankful that I have a Good Shepherd like Jesus. It is so wonderful to be assured of that. I seek to follow Jesus every day of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS LOVE?

What is love? Love is sacrifice. If you love someone, you would be willing to sacrifice for that person.

Your parents love you, and are willing to sacrifice time and effort to take care of you. They sacrificed sleep to watch over you when you had fever as a baby, for any baby who has a high fever and needs care through the night.

To love someone is also to shower attention and gifts. Sometimes, your father may also do something special for your mother. However, these expressions of love are different from sacrificing one's life for a loved one. For example, if your house is on fire, and you're trapped inside, your father or mother may not think of their own safety but immediately enter the house to save you.

In today's Bible verses, we understand a little of what love can do. The good shepherd loves his sheep and cares for them. If they are too far from home, the shepherd will find a safe place, usually a cave, to stay for the night. He will lie across the (hole) entrance to protect his sheep from wild animals and robbers. If necessary, he will die to keep his sheep safe.

Never forget that Jesus died for you. Read the Bible diligently to know about Jesus and pray to the Heavenly Father. In this way, you'll know and love God better. Remember, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who says, "I lay down my life for the sheep".

Tick all the things that are true of a good shepherd.

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. He does not know how many sheep he has. | () |
| 2. He loves and cares for his sheep. | () |
| 3. He will run away to save himself if there are wild animals. | () |
| 4. His sheep do not know the shepherd. | () |
| 5. He will protect his sheep from the robbers. | () |
| 6. His sheep hear the shepherd's voice. | () |
| 7. He will die to keep his sheep safe. | () |
| 8. He talks to his sheep. | () |

Thought: Jesus gave His life for me, may I give my life to Him!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to live every day for You. I thank you so much that Jesus died on the Cross for my sins. Help me to be a good child of Yours. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

OTHER SHEEP I HAVE

Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd says to His Jewish followers in John 10:16, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Who are these "other sheep"? They are believers who are not Jews but are known as the Gentiles. They are from different parts of the world. One day, they will come to believe in Jesus, too. All who hear His voice will follow the One and Only way, which is through Jesus. They will all be together, as sheep of the Heavenly Shepherd.

In heaven, we will see just how many types of these "other sheep" there would be. It is so wonderful to know that our faith is not just for one race or one type of people. God loves all and wants all to come to Him.

Dear reader, are you among "the other sheep" which Jesus will bring into His fold?

Read the following Bible verses to find out the missing words:

1. "So we thy people and _____ of thy pasture
will give thee thanks for ever: we will shew forth
thy praise to all generations." (Psalm 79:13).
2. "For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture,
and the _____ of his hand.
To day if ye will hear his voice," (Psalm 95:7).
3. "All we like _____ have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way and
the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6).

ANSWER: _ _ _ _ _

Thought: Am I among the "other sheep"?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that I am one of these "other sheep". Help me to live as one of Your good followers, that others will see You in my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

LEARN TO SACRIFICE - 1

One day, a man went to visit a church. He arrived early, parked his car, and got out. Another car pulled up near him, and the driver told him, "I always park there. You took my place!"

The visitor went inside for Sunday School, found an empty seat, and sat down. A young lady from the church approached him and stated, "That's my seat! You took my place!"

The visitor was somewhat distressed by this rude welcome, but said nothing. After Sunday School, the visitor went into the church sanctuary and sat down. Another member walked up to him and said, "That's where I always sit. You took my place!"

How do you think the visitor would feel?

Today's Bible verse tells us that Jesus was willing to die for us. He willingly laid down His life for us! That is sacrifice! But what about the people in the story above, those church-goers who were rude to the visitor? Do you think they understand what sacrifice means?

Dear child, learn to sacrifice. It could be as simple as sharing the most yummy piece of chocolate cake instead of finishing it yourself. Or not wanting to buy that nice toy, knowing that it is too expensive for mummy and daddy. Learning to sacrifice is learning to share the things we have with others as well as being willing to give up what we desire.

You see, true Christianity is about knowing who Jesus is, obeying His Holy Word and putting into action what we learn from the Bible. It is about living a life that is pleasing to Jesus Christ.

Today's Bible verse reminds us that Jesus willingly gave his life for us. This is sacrifice. May we learn to do the same. Today, we learn a little about sacrifice. Tomorrow, let us take a deeper look at this same concept and see what else we may learn and put into practice.

Thought: As Jesus sacrificed, so should I.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for such a wonderful example in Jesus. May I learn to be a better Christian every day, and let it start with me learning how to sacrifice by sharing with others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

LEARN TO SACRIFICE - 2

There was a missionary to China named Hudson Taylor. When he first arrived in China, he tried to preach the gospel in many cities. However, the crowds gathered to see the strange foreigner in European clothes rather than to hear the gospel. Some of the people were also afraid to speak with a foreigner. After struggling for a while, he decided to cut and dye his hair to resemble the long black braid that Chinese men had at that time. He also started to wear Chinese clothes and shoes. He did this even though no other missionaries were doing this, and he knew that other Europeans would shun him.

By God's grace, after changing his appearance, he was able to move among the people more freely, and had more chances to share the gospel with them. Like Apostle Paul, Hudson Taylor was willing to be "made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22b). He was willing to sacrifice his personal comfort and reputation in order to bring the gospel to the people.

Yesterday we talked about "sacrifice" in sharing things we have. Today, the focus is not on physical things, but on areas such as our likes and dislikes.

Learn how to control yourself and not always insist on what you like. Perhaps it is time for your favourite TV show but Dad is watching his sports programme. What do you do? Insist on watching what you want, or learn to sacrifice a little for Dad? Or you know there is no child willing to stay back and help the teacher, who is unwell, stack the chairs after class because fun time awaits them in the playground. What do you do? Learn how to sacrifice – be the one to stay and help the teacher.

These are some of the many ways we can learn to "sacrifice", and these will help us to live more and more like Jesus. Remember, He gave His life for us. What is giving some time and devotion in these ways as a token of our love to Him?

Thought: As Jesus sacrificed, so should I.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a strong Christian by depending on You to do the things I know I should do. It is not easy, but with Your help, Heavenly Father, I am confident I can do it. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIP

“This commandment have I received of my Father” is found in John 10:18b. Do you find it strange that the second part of this verse is worded in this way when the earlier part of the verse states that Jesus laid down His life willingly? Was it a commandment He received from His Heavenly Father or was it His own choice? How can Jesus be so willing to do something so tough when He was commanded?

The answer to this question is: Jesus and His Heavenly Father were so close that both wanted the same thing! The Father-Son relationship was the most beautiful you can ever imagine – what The Father wanted, the Son chose.

We can learn from today’s Bible verse that we must be like Jesus – that we be happy to do what the Heavenly Father commands.

Another lesson, which we will focus on today, is to improve your relationship with your father and mother.

How is your relationship with them?

Do you treasure the time you spend with them? Do you honour and obey them?

Do you greet them as you should when you see them, and show your appreciation for all they have done?

Sometimes we may feel shy to show our feelings to our parents. Do not be. They have done so much for you; do something for them. Give them a nice big hug. Tell them you love them. Tell them you are praying for them.

I assure you when you do the above, they will be so happy!



Thought: Be grateful and nice to parents!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s reminder. Often I take for granted what mum and dad do. Help me appreciate what they have done, and to show my appreciation through things I can do. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DO YOU FOLLOW JESUS?

Thousands of young people love to follow singers and movie stars in many ways. To them, these singers and movie stars are so beautiful, stylish and elegant that whatever they wear looks good on them. To these people, the stars or singers have become their idols. So many follow their dressing; whatever their idols wear, they would want to follow. Some follow their hairstyles. Some follow them in the manner of speaking, such as using slang words.

Do you have any such idols? I hope not. Some of your classmates may have, though. As children of God's kingdom, we are told to follow someone who is godly as he or she follows Christ. That person is certainly not any movie star or singer! In fact, many of these celebrities live a life full of sin and sadness, for they drink alcohol, take drugs and do not have good family relationships. Surely, Jesus would not want us to live such lives!

Those who believe in Jesus are to follow Him. To follow means to hear and obey Him and His Word. That would be the proof that you are one of His sheep.

We must follow Jesus all the time. We cannot expect to follow Jesus once a week, when we go to Sunday School, or only when mummy or daddy are around. God wants us to follow Him all the time, to rely on Him always.

We must not follow Jesus based on our feelings, i.e. when we "feel like it", we follow and when we do not "feel like it", we stop following Jesus. That would be wrong – for we must remember that following Jesus is a great privilege that He extends only to those who trust in Him.

Can you guess the missing words?

Follow! Follow! I would _____ Jesus!

Anywhere, everywhere, I would _____ on!

Follow! Follow! I would _____ Jesus!

Everywhere He leads me I would _____ on!

Thought: Will you follow Jesus daily, to trust and obey Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to follow You every day so that I can be a better Christian. Please help me to be diligent in my prayers and reading of Your Holy Word. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

CHRISTIAN KINDNESS

What we read in today's Bible verse is the love that we see from God, and the same love that we can give to others. But how do we show love to others?

There are many ways to show love and we will focus on one today. We will focus on being kind. What is to be kind?

To be kind is not just to be nice and gentle. To be kind is to think for the other person. There may be some people who appear kind as they are outwardly nice and gentle. But these people may be doing it for selfish motives.

Christian kindness is to treat others the way Jesus would. That is impossible for us to do, if we rely on our own strength. That is why we must pray as we learn to be kind, for without Jesus' help, we would fail.

So Christian kindness is to think for the other person. To treat others the way you want to be treated. In what ways can we show kindness?

Check the following out:

1. do not get angry too easily, eg when pride is hurt
2. do not fret
3. do not harbour ill thoughts about others

But is being kind just not doing the above? No, it is doing some things as well:

1. Be more patient and willing to help
2. Be more forgiving
3. Be sensitive to the needs of others, not just your own needs

Thought: Be kind to others!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as You have been so kind to me, may I learn to be kind to others. This is impossible without Your help. Heavenly Father, please strengthen me as I learn to be a better Christian. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE 23RD PSALM

Have you heard of the “23rd Psalm”?

It is a most beautiful account of how the LORD is ever with us, guiding and guarding us. Written by King David who himself was a shepherd before he was king, there are many lessons we can learn, and so we will spend the next 6 days on Psalm 23, focusing on one verse a day.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). The first thing to note is that you must have God as your own shepherd. You cannot rely on others to have Jesus as Lord. You cannot think that perhaps since your parents are Christians, you may somehow be a Christian too. You must take that personal step to acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and Saviour! Have you?

If you have, Jesus will be your personal Shepherd. That means Jesus will look after you Himself. He wants to be your personal Guide. And once Jesus is personally interested in you, it will lead us to the next point...

We shall NEVER have any lack! What a wonderful and blessed relationship that is! Some of you may have classmates from wealthy families. They do not seem to lack anything. These families live in big houses, own big cars, and enjoy frequent expensive holidays to faraway destinations. They do not appear to have a lack of anything, but perhaps they do. They may crave to have more time with their parents. They may lack love and attention, especially if their parents have to work long hours in order to be able to afford their current lifestyle.

When God promises that we shall have no lack, He is not saying you would be wealthy and have all the material things you want. What He does promise is that you will be blessed with spiritual blessings. You would always be able to turn to Him anytime. You can pray to Him anywhere, from the corner of your bedroom or the front row of your classroom.

Thought: In Jesus, I shall not want (meaning I will not lack).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am so grateful that Jesus is my personal shepherd. I am so thankful that with Jesus in my life, I will not have a lack of anything! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PEACE AND SAFETY

What is the most peaceful picture that you have seen? Maybe it is that of a mother cradling a sleeping baby in her arms. Or a glorious sunset at the seaside?

If you were to ask a shepherd that same question - “What is the most peaceful picture that you have seen?” - it is likely he will give a description similar to that of today’s Bible verse, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters” (Psalm 23:2).

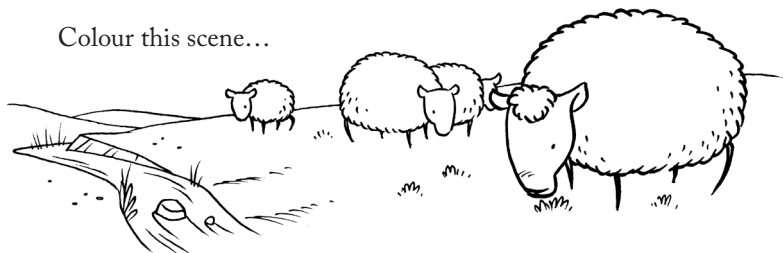
A shepherd knows that one of the greatest blessings is peace and safety in the grazing grounds; along beautiful green pastures where his sheep can nibble at leisure, and where a flowing stream may be nearby to provide the water the sheep need.

The idea is - peace and safety. Do you have them? One of the greatest concerns a student your age in Singapore must have would be the tough schooling system. The workload is heavy; the assignments plentiful; the examinations difficult. So, some children your age worry and sometimes cannot sleep well. If you are like them, commit your cares to the Lord.

Jesus promises in today’s Bible verse - that He will lead you along pastures that are green and flourishing, beside waters that are cool and calm. God is not saying He will do this in a physical sense. It is in a spiritual sense - that He will offer you peace and safety. But, there is one thing you must do. What is that? That is to go to Him! If you do not, there is no way for Jesus to lead and guide you!

Next time, if you have any fear or doubt - remember Psalm 23:2. It is a good idea to commit this verse to memory - so go ahead and try it!

Colour this scene...



Thought: If I trust in Jesus, peace and safety can be mine!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to memorise today’s Bible verse, and to be thankful for the peace and safety in my life, especially during tough times. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

John told his classmates excitedly that he found a good way to climb under the school gate if they wanted to leave school during recess time to buy ice cream at the kids' favourite store. They liked this store as the seller was friendly and had a wide variety of very affordable ice cream.

As they were talking excitedly, Su Ling came along. Overhearing the conversation, she said, "We must not do that. Our teachers and parents have told us that it is dangerous to leave school on our own during school hours. What if something happens to us?" The children laughed, and called Su Ling unkind names. Su Ling put up a brave smile, and then continued her way, praying to God to give her continued courage to speak the truth.

What was John doing? He was leading the other children along a path of wrongdoing. It is not right to leave school during recess time.

What Su Ling did was right. She was brave enough to stand up to John, and to try to convince the others not to follow John's suggestion. Although the children rejected her idea, she was not offended. Instead, she prayed to God for more courage and strength. She was also careful not to appear proud, or to be a "know-it-all".

That is what Jesus is – the Wonderful Saviour. "He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). Jesus will lead us to paths of righteousness. He does not physically lead us along a physical path, but He leads us through the Bible and the many lessons we learn from it.

Sometimes, Jesus uses people like Su Ling to lead us. Are there any Su Lings in your life? Or perhaps, do you dare to be a Su Ling? Do you stand up and dare to be different and encourage others along the paths of righteousness?

Righteousness is not following some monastic lifestyle, but it is about living our lives the way Jesus wants us to. It is to think and do the "right" things. It is to live as if Jesus is next to us, and He will be pleased to see how we live our lives.

Thought: How wonderful it is that Jesus leads me in paths of righteousness.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to dare to walk in the paths of righteousness and to encourage others to do so too! Even if others laugh at me, please give me courage to do the right thing. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHEN TROUBLES HIT ME...

Some children your age are stressed out and burdened with problems. Are you stressed out? Is schoolwork too heavy, or perhaps mummy and daddy are expecting a lot from you? Or perhaps, you are expecting too much of yourself? Or is there a school bully or classmates who pick on you? Perhaps you think mummy and daddy are too busy and not spending enough time with you?

All of us have difficulties. All of us have stress one time or another. So first of all, never think you are alone in having problems. Your neighbour, that top student in class, your Junior Worship teacher, they all have problems, too.

Today's Bible verse is one that tells us troubles will come our way. Look at it again – "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). Jesus knows we can be troubled even to the point of thinking that there is no way out. But look at the verse carefully – it is the shadow of death, not death itself.

There are times when problems seem much greater than we think we can ever cope or deal with. Especially in those times, turn to Jesus. Why? Because He promises that He will be with us during those times. Remember He is the Good Shepherd? Here we are reminded of His staff and rod will be there for us. The staff and the rod are instruments which a shepherd uses to lead and protect his sheep. The staff is a long and sturdy stick with a hook at one end. With the hooked end of the staff, the shepherd is able to lift a sheep that may have dropped into some crack between rocks. With the staff, he is also able to guide sheep which are in danger of wandering away. The rod is a short stick. The shepherd throws the rod at wild animals to scare them away. With the rod, the shepherd defends the sheep against wolves and other predators.

So, what is the lesson for me? That Jesus is always available for me, especially when troubles hit me.

Dear child, trust in the Lord. When troubles come your way, seek the Lord. He promises He will always be there, to protect and to guide!

Thought: The LORD is my Shepherd. I will not be afraid, even if troubles come.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant me the strength that only You can give as I face difficulties. Please help me to continue to trust in You, and to commit my problems to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THOU PREPAREST A TABLE

The table refers to a table with foods and drinks. In those days, there was a custom known as “a law of hospitality.” When a person enters a shepherd’s tent and the shepherd had set the table before him, this person’s enemies could not harm him, because he had found shelter, food and protection.

The Heavenly Shepherd provides more than enough for His sheep. “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over” (Psalm 23:5). He also protects them against their enemies. If you are one of His sheep, you can enjoy the table the Lord has prepared for you.

The table is not an actual table but blessings the Lord has given us. How can we remember the word “table”?

Thank you LORD for
Abundance of
Blessings,
Love and
Everlasting Life

Thought: God cares even for the little sparrows, He will care much more for me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your loving care. Teach me to share my blessings with others. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

ANOINTED WITH OIL & HAVING AN OVERFLOWING CUP

It may seem somewhat strange as you read today's Bible verse (Psalm 23:5) because it tells you that the LORD will anoint your head with oil. What does that mean?

The shepherd anoints the sheep's head with oil to protect the sheep. Flies often rest upon the sheep's head and lay eggs into their nostrils. These eggs hatch into larvae and cause the sheep to be sick. The oil which is applied on these areas will ward off flies. In that way, it protects the sheep from getting sick.

What does it mean when we read that the LORD would anoint our heads with oil?

In the same way that sheep belong to the shepherd, we belong to the LORD, our Great Shepherd. What this verse means to us is that, if we are persecuted or face trials and difficulties, the Lord will protect us.

This verse (Psalm 23:5) also tells us that our cup "runneth over". What does that mean? Have you ever poured water into a cup until too much water has been poured? You will notice that the water runs over. The phrase "my cup runneth over" refers to an overabundance of provision by the shepherd for the sheep. The shepherd will not provide sparingly but in great overflowing abundance to ensure the sheep's needs.

Similarly, the Good Shepherd will provide for His children's needs even in the face of trials and difficulties. They will never lack anything. They will always have ample supply to meet their physical and spiritual needs. This will enable His children's faith and trust to grow.

Thought: Thank God for His protection and provision!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your assurance that I will always be in Your care. Teach me never to doubt or to fear. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOODNESS AND MERCY ALL THE WAY!

This short Psalm has only six verses. However, these verses pack so much truth and wisdom for our daily lives. If we have Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we will have so many blessings! But remember – the first point is – you **MUST** first realise and admit that you are a sinner in need of God’s grace. Then, you need to accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. After that, you need to commit your life to Him and believe in His promises. If you have done so, then the blessings in Psalm 23 will be yours!

Today, we read the last Bible verse of Psalm 23 – “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” Does that mean we would have no problems or difficulties? Of course not. But what it does mean is that despite the difficulties, you will have Jesus with you.

Now let us understand a little more of what “goodness” and “mercy” mean. God alone will provide goodness to His children. Goodness means that nothing bad or evil can come upon them without the Shepherd’s permission. Anything that comes upon a child of God will ultimately result in his becoming more like Christ! It is this assured confidence that David, the author of this Psalm, has in God for everything in the future.

Mercy would be the punishment that we deserve, but withheld from us by God. For our sins, we deserve punishment and death. But the mercies of God allow us to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Thought: Goodness and mercy all my life!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the rich blessings I have received through today’s Bible verse. Thank You for the promise that Heaven is my eternal home. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER

Jesus Christ is a wonderful Shepherd! He gives His sheep everything that they need on earth. They have food and rest. When they stray away or lose their way, He leads them back. He guides them with His Holy Word. He comforts them with His presence. If they are in danger or in trouble He protects them. The Lord's blessings of love and care are wonderful promises for every believer for their life on earth. But there is a more glorious promise for all eternity.

"And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23:6b). "Dwell" means to live. Where is the house of the LORD? Yes, Heaven, and it will be forever. Jesus takes good care of His sheep while they are on earth. He also has a special plan for them in Heaven. Dear child, if you are not one of His sheep, please do not waste any more time. Pray to receive Jesus as your Saviour. Ask Him to forgive your sins and take charge of your life today.

Try to fill in the missing letters in the following verses
taken from Psalm 23 -

The LORD is my Shep erd.
He maketh me to lie down in gre n pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still w ters.
Yea, though I walk through the alley
of the shadow of d ath, I willl fear no evil.
Thou preparest a table before me
in the prese ce of mine enemies.

The underlined alphabets form the word:

Thought: My eternal Home is in Heaven.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the promise that one day, Heaven will be my eternal home. Until then, please help me to live each day pleasing You in all that I do. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE LOST SHEEP

This is a story about Roger and his sister and how they got lost one day.

When their family moved into the new house in the country, their father warned them not to play in the woods behind the barn. He said to Roger and his sister, "If you get lost in the woods, it will be impossible to follow a straight path out of the woods. You will keep on going round and round, unable to find your way out. The only thing for you to do is to stay within sight of the house."

A day or two later, Roger was picking flowers near the stream when he saw a glimmer of pink among the low bushes at the edge of the woods. "That looks like the apron mummy lost," he said to himself uneasily. "I shall have to go and bring it back for mummy!"

It was a long run across the field, but the little pink apron was still in sight when Roger came to the path that led into the woods. His younger sister Joy thought he was playing. This was a fun game to play, and away she ran, in another direction into the woods. When Roger realised Joy was running into the woods, he chased after the little girl. "Stop, Joy, please stop!" he called, but she would not or could not hear him, and they were soon out of sight from home. The path grew rough and ended in a tangle of undergrowth. Joy grew tired and finally stopped running and let Roger catch up with her.

When they decided it was potentially dangerous and wanted to go back home, they realised Joy's fleeing feet had deviated from the paths among the trees and stumps. Now, they can no longer trace the path or see their house! It was then that they heard a strange noise from the woods...

Have you ever been lost? Perhaps in a busy mall or crowded park? It must have been the most frightening. Your parents would surely have done all that they could to find you. Likewise, Jesus promises in today's Bible verse, He will surely find us. We may not be in any danger of being lost physically. But we are in the danger of being "spiritually lost" and bound for hell if we have not accepted the Lord Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. Remember that Jesus the Good Shepherd came to seek the lost. He desires for lost sinners to be saved.

Thought: Jesus will always find us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love and care for the unsaved and Your desire for them to be saved. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REJOICING!

Have you ever lost something you like very much? Perhaps it is one of your favourite toys. Surely you will search everywhere for it! How did you feel when you found it? You will likely shout loudly and happily, "Mum! Dad! Everyone! I have found it!" There is just so much joy in being able to find something we lost.

In today's Bible verses, we read that the shepherd was so happy he found his lost sheep. He ran home excitedly, yelling to his friends and neighbours, "I have found my lost sheep. Come and celebrate with me!"

Luke 15:7 tells us that if someone comes to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, even the angels in heaven would rejoice!

Do you care that your unsaved relatives and friends are not believers of Jesus? Will you tell them about Jesus? Will you invite them to church? Sometimes we read of fantastic stories of missionaries and how they sacrificed so much to go to the foreign lands to spread God's Word. These stories inspire us, don't they? But you know what? God has also placed you and me as missionaries at where we are so we can share the gospel with the people we know. It could be your neighbour, or the classmate who shares a desk with you in class. For a start, invite them to church. They may ask about what you do in church and you can share with them more including what Jesus did for you!

How can you lead others to Jesus Christ your Heavenly Shepherd?

Write in the brackets below, T for True or F for False:

- I must first make sure I've asked Jesus to be my Saviour. ()
- I must show by what I say and do that I am a child of God. ()
- It is all right not to let other people know that I am a Christian. ()
- I must tell others about Jesus who died for me. ()
- I can invite my friends & neighbours to attend Sunday School with me. ()

Thought: I must pray for my family and friends who are lost in sin.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember the lost and pray for them to know You, that they may be saved. Please help me to be a good example to them! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

LIKE SHEEP GONE ASTRAY

Sheep are communal animals. They like to stay close to one another. But sometimes, sheep do stray away and get lost. When they are lost, sheep are vulnerable to all sorts of dangers. They include getting hurt by falling into ravine or eating poisonous plants. They may also face danger of being attacked and killed by predators such as wolves and bears. The shepherd, when he realises that some of his sheep are missing, will go looking for his lost sheep. He cares for the lost sheep and wants to bring them back to safety.

Today's verse tells us that "all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;". What does this phrase in the verse mean?

This phrase means that all men are like lost sheep unless they become a Christian. Because of the sin of Adam, every person is a born sinner. As born sinners, they do not have a natural desire to seek after God. As such, unless God gives them the desire to seek after Him, they will remain as lost sinners. If they die in their sins, they will end up in hell.

But God loves lost sinners and desires to save them. He sent His Son the Lord Jesus Christ to this world to save sinners. The Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect life on this earth and died on the Cross for us. He was resurrected and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. Those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour will be saved.

Dear child, are you like sheep that have gone astray? If so, you need to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Saviour. Then, you will be saved from your sins and you will have a place in heaven.

Thought: Jesus died on the Cross to save us from our sins

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for your love for lost sinners. Thank You for sending the Lord Jesus to save us from our sins. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

HE TOOK THE INIQUITY OF US ALL

What happens when someone breaks a law in the country? He has to pay for it – might be a fine (pay money) or serve jail term, depending on the crime. When a wrong is done, it must be made right.

When you do something wrong at home, your parents will either scold you or punish you, don't they? This means any offence (wrongdoing) has to be punished.

Today's verse reminds us that Jesus took the iniquity of us all. What does it mean? It means that when we sinned against God, we should have been punished. For our sins, the punishment we deserve would be to spend eternity in hell! That would have been such a terrible price to pay if we were to take "our own iniquity upon ourselves". However, because Jesus died on the Cross for us, He paid the price for you and me. He "took the iniquity of us all" upon himself.

God is holy, without sin. Our sins separate us from God. God is righteous and must punish sins. But God loves us. He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ to come in human form, to die on the Cross, as the punishment (payment) for all the bad things we have done. Jesus is without sin but He bore (took on Himself) all our wickedness (iniquity).

Break the secret code below, and what do you get?

Code

A	E	I	O	U	D
F	J	M	N	R	S

EJDRD DRAAJUJS FOS SMJS ANU IJ

Thought: Jesus has suffered so much for me. What have I done for Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a good Christian. Thank You for sending the Lord Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for my sins. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

AS A LAMB TO THE SLAUGHTER

The sacrifice of lambs played a very important role in the Jewish religious life and sacrificial system. Today's Bible verse tells us that Jesus "is brought as a lamb to the slaughter". What does it mean?

Before we explain what that means, there is another Bible verse in the New Testament, John 1:29, which says, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This Bible verse talks about Jesus being the "Lamb". When John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," the Jews who heard him might have immediately thought of several other important sacrifices.

With the time of the Passover feast being very near, the first thought might be the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. The Passover feast was one of the main Jewish holidays and a celebration in remembrance of God's deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. In fact, the slaying of the Passover lamb and the applying of the blood to doorposts of the houses is a beautiful picture of Jesus Christ's atoning work on the cross. Those for whom He died are covered by His blood, protecting us from the angel of (spiritual) death.

Another important sacrifice involving lambs was the daily sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem. Every morning and evening, a lamb was sacrificed in the temple for the sins of the people. These daily sacrifices, like all others, were simply to point people towards the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.



Thought: Jesus suffered and died on the Cross because of my sins. I belong to Him and must obey Him today, and every day of my life!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to live my life for You, always doing what is pleasing to You. Help me to obey Your Holy Word and repent of any unconfessed sins. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS THE CROSS TO ME?



Today, the Cross is perhaps the world's most famous symbol. It can be seen on flags and badges, in churches, Christian schools, art galleries, T-shirts, earrings, necklaces and even on bumper stickers on the back of cars. To many people today, the Cross is a symbol of hope and comfort.

You must have heard of the "Red Cross Society". This

society is a non-religious group that helps people who are in need. These people could be in flood-affected areas or those hit by earthquakes. Back in September 2010, there was terrible flooding in Pakistan and many thousands died. Many more were left homeless and destitute so the Red Cross Society of Singapore stepped in to help.

But the Cross of Jesus is not the cross that many in the world today know.

It is not a glamorous or happy Cross. It is a Cross that many will reject and many will have problems with. The Cross of Jesus demands that those who believe in Him must believe that He is the Only Way to God, the Only Way of salvation and the Only Way to Heaven.

It is not easy for the world to believe that Jesus is the Only Way. Of course, it is easier if Jesus said that He was one of many ways. But He did not. That is why the Cross of Jesus is not an easy Cross.

What is the Cross of Jesus to you?

Is it just a beautiful ornament that you see some people wear on necklaces? Or that wooden table-top decoration in some homes?

Thought: What is the Cross to me?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember the sacrifices Jesus bore on the Cross for my sins. Help me to lead a faithful and holy life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A LETTER OF ENCOURAGEMENT

“You’ve got mail!” Alicia jumped up and dashed to the mail box every time she heard the postman. Being lonely and homesick in Australia, students like her yearned for letters from family and friends. Telephone fees for calling overseas were expensive in the 1970s and 1980s. Of course, it is very different today. We can freely keep in contact through online messaging applications on computers or mobile phones.

In Apostle Paul’s time, people who were apart could only communicate through letters. While imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote this epistle or letter, (now known as the Book of Philippians) to the church in Philippi. He founded this church on his second missionary journey as we read in the book of Acts. His first convert was Lydia whose home became the meeting place for the Christians. Other converts included a former young sorceress and a prison jailor.

Paul wrote to encourage the Philippians who were facing persecutions because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. He assured them that he was constantly praying for them. He thanked God that they shared his ministry of spreading the gospel and for sending Epaphroditus to minister to him. Paul set a good example by rejoicing in the Lord even though he was in prison. He encouraged the Philippians to stand firm in Christ even as their faith would encourage him to endure all his sufferings.

Will you also do your part to encourage fellow Christians by your words and by praying for them?

Draw an arrow to show the route of the letter to Philippi reaching Philippi.



Thought: I can encourage others by sharing what I learn from God’s Word.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Paul’s example of encouragement and please help me to encourage others too.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

Suppose someone asked you this question: "Are you sure you will go to heaven when you die?" What will your answer be?

For Apostle Paul, his answer would have been a resounding "Yes!" Not only was he confident of his own salvation but also that of his fellow believers. Why do you think Paul was so confident? Whom was Paul confident in?

Apostle Paul trusted in Jesus and His every word. In John 6:29, Jesus says it is God who does the salvation work in man. That means no man can work his own way or pay his way to heaven. In John 10:29, Jesus says that no man can ever pluck anyone out of his Father's hand. That means that once Jesus has saved a man, this man will never lose his salvation. Hence, once we are saved, we will always be saved. Apostle Paul reminded the Philippians church of this truth, in order to encourage them to persevere in their faith.

You may ask, "What if I fall into sin again? What if I disobey God deliberately or hurt somebody? Will God still consider me His child?" Yes. Jesus has said so - No man can pluck you out of God's hands. Once God has begun His work of salvation in us, He will never give up on us, whatever happens. He will continue to mould us to be more and more like Christ until Christ returns. He may chastise or discipline us when we sin but He will never discontinue the salvation work in us. Do you have confidence in God?

Strike out the one and only false teaching:

1. We are saved by the grace of God through faith.
2. If Christians sin against God, they will lose their salvation.
3. It is God who has begun and will complete His salvation plan.
4. God's Word is true and unchangeable.
5. God's salvation plan includes moulding a man to be Christ-like.

Thought: My confidence is in God because He never changes.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that You have saved me and will save me to the end. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PRAYING FOR CHRISTIANS

Apostle Paul was a person full of drive and determination. In his own words, he was a top Pharisee who was very committed to doing what he believed to be right. The Book of Acts told us how he used to pursue and kill Christians because he thought it was the right thing to do! But when the Lord Jesus appeared to him and changed him, he became a tender-hearted man and sensitive to the needs of others. He was still full of drive and determination but his energy was then channeled to do what Christ wants him to do.

He had a very warm and affectionate relationship with the members of the Philippian church and held them dearly in his heart. He cared for God's beloved and he told them so. They were always on his mind and he desired to visit and minister to them. Most important of all, he constantly prayed for them.

Are you touched by Paul's Christ-like love for his fellow Christians? We can be like him too. Let us not be slow to express love and care towards others. In church, let us greet each other with a smile to show we care because God cares for us. When we care for others, we will surely pray for them. Praying for others is the best way to show your love because God can do far greater things than we can ever do to help them. We must call upon the Lord for help all the time.

Let us write a list of names of people we know in church and pray for them daily: We can start with 3 names.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Thought: Love is showing care and praying for others.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, remind me to show my love by caring and thinking of others. May I start now, and persevere in praying for them. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“Mummy! Mummy! My caterpillar has grown into a butterfly!” Can you imagine little Daniel’s joy when he saw the transformation of an ugly worm into a beautiful multi-coloured butterfly? As the years go on, not only will Daniel notice the increase in his own height, he will also notice the increase in his knowledge. Wherever there is life there is growth. Growth means increase.

As Christians, our faith must grow because Christ is living. This is called spiritual growth. How do you tell if your faith is growing? For us to grow physically, we must feed on physical food.

For our spiritual growth, we must feed on spiritual food. This spiritual food is none other than the Word of God. As we grow in our knowledge of God’s goodness, our love for God and others should also grow. We will also turn from our sinful ways to do righteous things. This change will reflect our growth in love for God, His word and work.

Apostle Paul had been praying for spiritual growth for the Philippians who were his first converts in Europe. When Apostle Paul learnt of the growing affection and love between the believers in Philippi and how firmly they stood in their faith in Christ, he was overjoyed. They were experiencing strong spiritual growth. Is your love for God growing? Are you feeding on the living Word?

Unscramble the following groups of letters to find out the areas Christians must grow or increase in:

ARCEG

LEDKWGNEO

IDMOSW

OVEL

ATHFI

(Hint: 2 Peter 3:18, Luke 2:52 & 1 Peter 2:2 would help in finding the answers)

Thought: We ought to pray to be more and more like Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to grow spiritually so that I will love thee more each day. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

GOD MOVES IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS

The Philippians loved Apostle Paul dearly. When they knew of his imprisonment in Rome, they were full of pity for him. They sent him things he needed and Epaphroditus to look after him. However, Apostle Paul looked at his own imprisonment differently. He took the opportunity to share with them an interesting lesson. It is about how God worked in his life.

Roman imprisonment was meted out in at least two different ways. One way would be that the prisoner was chained to a Roman soldier round the clock. Each shift for the Roman soldier would last six hours which means the prisoner could be chained to four different Roman soldiers every day. Another would be in the form of house arrest. That would mean the prisoner would be confined to his home under the surveillance of Roman soldiers. It was not stated which form was Apostle Paul subjected to. But either way, he would certainly have opportunities to witness to the Romans. Wasn't this an amazing arrangement for spreading the gospel?

With the curb on his missionary travels and preaching, God inspired him to write a few epistles to the churches while in prison. The book of Philippians was one of these epistles. God has a purpose for everything that happens to Christians. God moves in mysterious ways.

Romans 8:28 tells us that God has a good purpose for everything that happens. Open your Bible and copy down Romans 8:28 in the lines below.

What do the seas and storms of life refer to?

Unscramble MLEPORBS: _____

Thought: When something goes wrong, remember Romans 8:28!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to know that whatever happens to me happens for a good purpose. Help me to trust in You and press on, even if things around me do not seem right. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Apostle Paul wrote in his letter: “For to me to live is Christ:” By that, Paul had simply declared that Christ is his everything. Christ is the reason and purpose of life. He was determined to live for Christ and to live like Christ.

Let us take a look at Paul’s Christian life. Being filled with the Spirit of Christ; he put his soul, heart and mind into preaching Christ to sinners. He knew how much Christ loves them. His first priority was to magnify Christ. To magnify Christ meant to do things that would put Jesus first, and give Jesus the glory. For that, he suffered persecutions, shipwrecks and beatings as he travelled to preach the gospel of Christ and to establish churches at cities near the Mediterranean Sea. Despite his sufferings, he served the Lord God with great joy.

Why did Paul have to suffer? He had given up his accolades, ambitions and possessions to serve God. Shouldn’t God make things easy and comfortable for him? Not so. It is because Christ had called him into a ministry where he had to suffer for Christ’s sake. Like Christ, Paul was an obedient and faithful servant of God.

For Paul, life is all about knowing Christ and making Christ known to sinners. Do you have the same desire in your heart as Paul did? Every Christian ought to.

Color these words of Philippians 1:21

For to me
to live
is Christ

Thought: Christ is everything to me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to put You first in my life. Even as I study and play and do other things, putting You first would mean being faithful in reading the Bible and being a good child. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

TO DIE IS GAIN

The picture of death is always one of gloom and doom. Some elderly folks tried to lift the gloom of death by decorating coffins. Do you think that would work? There would usually also be mourning over the loss of life. So, why did Apostle Paul look at death as “gain” to him? Why should it be considered as gain to a Christian when he dies?

The answer lies in John 14:1-3. To Christians, death is not the end. It is just going home to be with the Lord Jesus who has prepared a place for us.

What does verse 1 say that we should not be?

How can we avoid this negative feeling?

What do we have waiting for us in heaven?

How can we go to heaven?

Who is waiting to receive us in heaven?

Christians have an inheritance which is not defiled, nor temporal, nor corruptible. The present heaven and earth will pass away; we will live in the new heaven and earth where there is no sin nor suffering nor sorrow. Jesus will return and bring us to this glorious place. Therefore, to die is surely gain.

Share the good news of God’s promise of a place in heaven for Christians with your grandparents, cousins and friends.

Thought: When you live for Christ, death is not your enemy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to share the good news of Jesus with others, especially with my unsaved loved ones and friends. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

CHRISTIAN UNITY

“United we stand!” This is a common saying. Whenever there is a common goal, people would naturally unite to achieve it. What about unity in a Christian church? Is there a common goal? Paul was concerned with the disunity in the church of Philippi. He must have heard of some bickering, criticism and emotional tension in the church. He knew that divisions in the church would hinder the work of God.

Saddened by the lack of unity, he appealed to the Philippians to unite in the Spirit of Christ. Christian fellowship must be built on the foundation of the love of Christ. Otherwise, it would be meaningless. Christians must be of the same mind as they gather to worship and serve the one true and living God. This is the common goal.

You may not see the arguments among adults in your church. But surely from time to time, you must have witnessed quarrels between parents, sisters and brothers or friends and classmates at school. It can be upsetting, right? Sometimes, the tension can be unbearable too. Similarly, within the church family, there will be occasions of disagreement and arguments. But, as in a family, there must also be the spirit of forgiveness and understanding.

Are you doing your part to keep the harmony in your church?

Are you a helpful person or are you someone who sulks and complains?

Fill in the blanks to find out how we can help:

We must

1. en _ _ _ _ _ ge each other in l _ _ _ _ ;
2. be k _ _ _ _ and ten _ _ _ _ -he _ _ _ _ ed
towards one another;
3. be for _ _ _ _ _ g, pa _ _ _ _ _ t and gen _ _ _ _ ;
4. be full of c _ _ _ pa _ _ _ ion
5. est _ _ _ m others better than ourselves.

Thought: When you are born of God, you are born to love.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to love and care for others so that our church can be in unity. In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

HUMILITY VERSUS PRIDE

The centre of the word 'PRIDE' is the letter 'P'. Pride means exactly that. 'I am the purpose and centre of my life and whatever I do is for my own pleasure and for my glory.' Does Jesus want us to be like that? On the contrary, Jesus is the perfect example of humility. He hid his heavenly glory, took the humble form of a poor carpenter to live in this sinful world so as to sacrifice his life to save mankind.

Can you find anyone more humble than Jesus? Jesus is God and yet He lowered himself to become man, to live a life of righteousness to fulfil the law and to die for sinners. He did not yield to the Devil's temptation to show off His heavenly power but instead showed us how to obey our Heavenly Father. He cared for others and acquired no earthly treasures or pleasures. He glorified our Heavenly Father in all things.

We must be more like Jesus. If you have the gifts of singing, organising, teaching or leading, use them to glorify God. Remember that every perfect gift comes from above. We have nothing to boast of as everything we have is given by God. Hence, there need not be any competition or strife to outdo each other in our service to God. On the other hand, we must not succumb to false modesty by not using our talents. Very often, pride causes us to compare ourselves with others. When we feel inferior, we tend to shy away and bury our talents.

Children, the work of every church member counts. So let us humbly do our part.

Cross out what Christians should not do:

- ☐ Show care and concern for others' well being.
- ☐ Compare and criticise others behind their backs.
- ☐ Feel sorry for ourselves and hide our talents.
- ☐ Pray that we can do better than other Christians.
- ☐ Hint to others what good I have done.
- ☐ Boast of how humble I have been.

Thought: Embrace humility, reject pride.

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

THE MIND OF CHRIST

Have you heard this hymn before?

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour, Live in me from day to day;
By His love and power controlling, All I do and say.*

What does it mean to have the mind of Christ in us? Does it not mean we should have the same thoughts, desires and feelings that Christ Jesus has? Yes, we must be Christ-like.

Jesus came down from heaven. While he could be ministered to by millions of angels, he became a servant without a murmur. Persecuted, he suffered in silence. Wronged by many, he readily forgave. Full of compassion, he prayed and wept for the lost. He was the helper of the helpless and needy. He loved the unlovable.

“Oh, but I am not powerful like Jesus was. How can I do what Jesus did?” Well, we are not expected to do all that Jesus did. We are expected to have the mind of Christ. That means that we are to humbly follow Jesus in his obedience and trust in our Heavenly Father. We are simply to do God’s will.

Many heroes of faith had the mind of Christ. Circle their names.

MOSES TIMOTHY
JUDAS ISCARIOT CAIN
ACHAN PONTIUS PILATE
PHARAOH JOHN the BAPTIST
ABRAHAM SAMUEL
JOSHUA

Thought: To have the mind of Christ is to be humble and obedient to God.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, mould me that I may have the mind of Christ. This is going to be very tough but with Your help, I would be able to slowly become more and more like Him. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

WHAT A SAVIOUR!

Imagine this - the Son of God became a mere mortal like you and me! Born of a virgin, Jesus came as a baby and went through all the stages of growth from a baby to a teenager and then to an adult. All his bodily functions and emotional make-up are as those of any human being. What kinds of pain do you fear most? Jesus felt it too. He felt pain, hunger, thirst, sorrow and joy. He also faced temptations in this world, just like we do.

Jesus is both God and a man without sin. Though he faced the same circumstances as we do, he did not sin. Though He suffered ill treatment and rejection from His own people, He persevered. He bore all the persecutions in silence and was ever ready to forgive when they would repent.

He came to save sinners like you and me. Only He could live a perfectly righteous life to fulfil God's law on our behalf. In obedience, Jesus came to die on the cross bearing all our sins. No other person could ever pay the debt of our sin except Jesus. What a Saviour!

Do you believe that God sent Jesus to die for your sins? Have you confessed that you are a sinner and you need Jesus to be your Saviour? Have you invited Jesus into your heart to be your Lord? If not, you are only a Christian in name. God will not hear any of your prayers until you have confessed your sin and asked Jesus to be your saviour. God will only hear prayers said in Jesus' name which is above all names!

A VERY URGENT MATTER: Quietly search your own heart to see if you have ever said the sinner's prayer:

"Heavenly Father, I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus came into the world to die for the sinners of the world and he had died for me. Please forgive me my sins. I want Jesus to come into my heart to be my Lord and Saviour. I want to trust and obey Thee. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen."

If you admit that you have sinned and believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave, and you are prepared to commit your life to trust and obey Jesus Christ, then you have salvation. Trusting and obeying Christ means you will daily read God's Word and pray always.

Thought: Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, thank You for our Lord Jesus Christ who died to save us from our sins. What a Saviour! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD

Yesterday, we saw Jesus as the humble servant and suffering Saviour. Today we will look at the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Jesus has finished his work of salvation at the cross. He was crucified, died and was buried. Jesus rose the third day and is now gloriously seated at the right hand of God the Heavenly Father. No longer must we think of our Saviour as the lowly and suffering man of sorrows.

Jesus is living today. Yet many people are still rejecting Him. The time will come when every creature in heaven, on earth and under the earth must bow in worship of Jesus whose name is above all names. Jesus shall return as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. The whole world will proclaim that Jesus is Lord!

Children, be prepared. For the signs of Jesus' return are already showing up. This time, Jesus will no longer come as a servant but will come as the Judge. Each of us will have to give Him an account of our life. What have we done for the Lord?

Study the lyrics of this hymn and be reminded of the urgency to serve God:

1. I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree?
To think of His great sacrifice at Calvary!
I know my Lord expects the best from me.
2. The hours that I have wasted are so many,
The hours I've spent for Christ so few;
Because of all my lack of love for Jesus,
I wonder if His heart is breaking too.

Chorus:

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: Jesus has done so much for me what can I do for Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may Thou be the Lord of my life always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION

Nowhere in the scriptures are we asked to work for our salvation and Paul should know the scriptures very well. So, Paul cannot be asking Christians to work for their salvation. Salvation is given to us by the grace of God. No one can ever work for or pay for salvation.

So, what does 'working out our salvation' mean? You must have heard of a workout at the gym, or working out a mathematical solution. Both would involve some exercise, don't they? It would either be exercising the muscles or the brain. Similarly, when we become Christians we must also exercise our Christian faith. We must act out our faith.

Our attitudes and actions must show that Christ is living in us. If we continue to live ungodly lives, our salvation is questionable. Paul is urging Christians to show love, do acts of kindness and live godly lives so that others may see Christ in us. Faith comes through hearing the truth. So, telling others about Christ is absolutely necessary. But, remember that 'actions speak louder than words'. For others to believe in our words, our actions must match what we say. Practise what we preach.

Jesus did countless good works to assure us of His love. Let us follow His example in doing good works so that others may come to believe that Christ loves them and has died for their sins.

How do you know that Christ is living in you?
Read, write and memorise Galatians 2:20.

Thought: My actions must show others that Christ is living in me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for saving me. Please help me to live like Christ lived. Teach me to control myself so that I will learn NOT to always want things my way, NOT to be selfish, and NOT to be demanding of others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

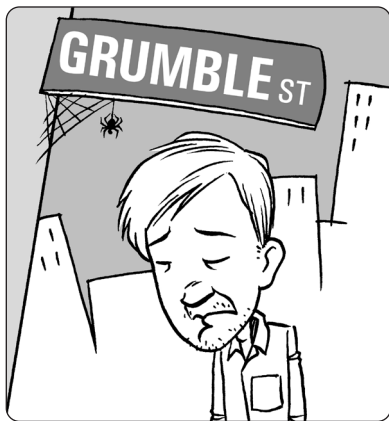
DO NOT GRUMBLE

Murmuring, complaining, blaming and grumbling has the same meaning. Time and again, Apostle Paul warned Christians against this sin. He also reminded them of the destruction of the Israelites in the wilderness because of their murmurings.

Why do people grumble? It is because of discontentment. When people are not satisfied with the circumstances they are in, they grumble. The weather is too hot. There is too much work. The food is lousy. The maid is so slow. Why can't I be as beautiful? The bus ride is so jerky... The list goes on. When people do not receive what they think they deserve, they complain.

Jesus said that it is out of the heart that the issues of life come (Matthew 15:16-20). Grumbling reflects an ungrateful heart. Therefore, it is a grave sin for Christians to murmur and complain. Christians ought to be thankful and content because we have already received the best gift from God, which is eternal life. What else do we need to crave for?

Children, if you wish to shine for Christ, do not grumble. Do all things cheerfully to please God. What should you do instead of grumbling? Be CONTENTED!



Thought: Grumbling dishonours God; contentment honours God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to honour You by not being a grumbler. Instead, teach me to be content with what You have so graciously given to me. And teach me to do my duties without grumbling too! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PAUL'S CO-LABOURERS

In any big project, nobody can work alone. It would require a team of workers. What more for the Gospel work? Paul had many co-labourers and he wrote about two outstanding ones in this particular letter - Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Young Timothy was like a son to Paul, co-labouring with him in evangelism. It was Paul's intention to pass the baton to him – meaning that Timothy would succeed Paul as a spiritual leader when he matures. Timothy was commended for having the mind of Christ like Paul did. He loved and cared for the people of God and was every inch a pastor at heart. Most of all, he was faithful. Unlike some who were distracted by worldly interests, Timothy stayed loyal to Christ. He was worthy of being groomed to be a church pastor.

Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippian church to take care of Paul so that Paul could continue to pray and to teach and counsel the churches in writing. He braved the treacherous journey of thousands of kilometres to be with Paul in prison to minister to his needs. Later, Epaphroditus fell seriously sick and nearly died. He felt sad that the church and Paul had to worry about his health. To set everyone's mind at ease, Paul sent him home. Paul told the church to welcome him with gladness because he had accomplished his mission. Paul regarded him as a worthy brother in Christ, a co-labourer in the Lord and fellow soldier in spiritual battle.

Follow the qualities of godly men as shown below, BUT strike out the wrong qualities:

Timothy and Epaphroditus were:

Christian	/	Christians in name
Quitters	/	Faithful servants of God
Considerate	/	Uncaring
Selfish	/	Sacrificial
Cowards	/	courageous men

Thought: We can learn much from godly men.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, thank You for the godly church fore-fathers who are such good Christian examples. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

EXPOSE DANGER!

Parents often warn their children to keep away from strangers. They were told of the danger of kidnapping, molesting and cheating. Likewise, Paul thought it crucial to warn the saints in Philippi of the dangers of admitting people of ungodly influence into the church. He was referring to teachers of false doctrines and proponents of ungodly rituals.

Who could these dangerous people be? They could be those who were not born again, and enemies of the Christian faith. They are evil workers who would cast doubt on the Word of God and challenge Biblical truths like the resurrection of Christ. They would often resort to friendly persuasion to achieve their ends.

Paul called them dogs. In historical context, dogs were the most despised animals as they were scavengers, roaming the streets for food. (What a difference from today's dogs which are highly prized and pampered pets!) Paul warned against Jews who insisted on including circumcision as a means of salvation. They were mutilators of the flesh and corruptors of the Gospel.

Dear children, beware of people who use unbiblical arguments to criticise the teachings of your Pastor, Elders or Sunday School teachers. If you have any doubts, tell your parents or Sunday School teachers about these people. Ask them for guidance lest you fall prey to workers of evil who are all out to destroy the witness of your church.

May the Lord also protect you from friends who may be of bad influence to you. There are many out there who do not believe in Jesus, and may tell you that smart people or kids with brains do not have to follow teachings of the Bible. That is a lie full of pride and rebellion. You must stay away from such people for they will try to drag you away from Jesus.

Thought: May the Lord protect us from wrong teachings

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, I pray that You will protect my church and me from the danger of evil workers and false teachings. Help us to stand firm on Your Word which is true and perfect. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU A TRUE CHRISTIAN?

Children, today, we are going to learn about true Christianity. True Christianity is different from many of the other religions. Many religions of today have the concept of heaven and hell. Their followers believe they can go to heaven by doing good works and observing religious rituals. These religions are founded by men trying to reach God. They would therefore draw up a list of rules and rituals for their believers to follow and practise. The rituals could be processions of statutes or idols, kissing of the religious leader's feet, shaving of hair, fasting or even meditations. The believers of these religions are encouraged to give alms to the poor or to do charitable works. All these rituals and good works are done in the hope that it will earn them a place in heaven.

In contrast, true Christianity is not man's invention; it is from God. True Christianity is about God's grace in sending the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to live a perfect life and to die on the cross for sinners. It is God's way of reconciling sinful man to Himself. True Christianity is not about doing works or performing rituals to earn a place in heaven. A person is saved and will have a place in heaven if he or she by faith accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Lord and Saviour. In other words, salvation is by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Before Paul became a Christian, he was very religious. He practised Judaism and rituals like circumcision. Though he was an expert on the Old Testament and all the Jewish laws, he was spiritually dead. The Holy Spirit was not in him because he did not believe in Jesus then. He thought that performing rituals and doing good works will save him. But thankfully, by God's grace he was saved later on when he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. Today, some people may regularly attend church service, prayer meetings, and Bible studies without believing in Jesus Christ. They are only professing Christians who think that they are saved by doing these things. They can only be saved if they have accepted the Lord Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Only then can they become true Christians.

Are you a true Christian or are you just putting on a show?

Thought: I am a Christian because Christ found me and now lives in me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a Christian in my heart and in deeds. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

KNOWING CHRIST IS GAIN

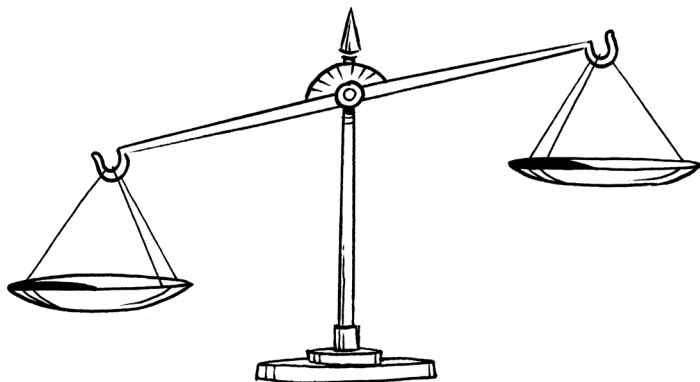
Paul, previously named Saul of Tarsus, was a Pharisee and came from the tribe of Benjamin. He had many human achievements and earned many titles to his name. In the eyes of man, he was accomplished. In fact, he was self-righteous. Zealously practising his religion, he persecuted Christians. But in the eyes of God, he was depraved. He was without Christ then.

By God's grace, Jesus came and spoke to Paul. Then, he began to know Jesus. He did not just begin to know about Jesus. He now had a relationship with Jesus. Jesus is his personal Saviour. There was communication between Jesus and him. Paul could tell Jesus about his thoughts, feelings and problems like a friend. In turn, he came to understand why Christ died on the Cross to save sinners from their sins. Do you know Christ the way Paul knew Christ?

Paul considered knowing Christ and his suffering as great gain! He had received the righteousness of Christ and the gift of everlasting life. In contrast, he considered his worldly achievements as "dung" or excrement or waste. Efforts spent on his worldly achievements were losses to Christ. Do you value Christ the same way that Paul did?

Write what you should value more in the lower pan:

Jesus God's praises Man's admiration Top marks in school



Thought: Jesus is worth more than everything in the world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for sending Jesus to be my Saviour. It is such a privilege to know Him as my personal Lord and Saviour! This I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

RUNNING THE CHRISTIAN RACE

Apostle Paul likened Christian living to an athlete's race. As an athlete presses towards the finish line, Christians are running for 'the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus'. Some of you may have watched events in the Youth Olympics held in Singapore previously— and you would know that in a competitive race, it is not easy.

If an athlete wishes to win a race, he must not look back. Not only would he lose speed, he could stumble and fall. He could run off track and be disqualified from the race. He needs to look ahead. Paul intended to forget the past and not allow it to hinder his Christian race. Remember how Paul was in hot pursuit of Christians? In his depravity, he thought he was doing God's will. If he allowed guilt to weigh him down, he would not have been able to continue his race. He could not afford to look behind him.

Like an athlete, Christians cannot afford to be distracted. He needs to stay on course and be focused on the race. If he begins to look left or right for an easier course, he might be tempted to quit.

Once in the race, Christians must not have any doubts. James 1:8 says that "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." He must have the same mind as fellow Christians who encourage each other in the race of faith.

Paul was determined to finish the Christian race. He had given us some tips on how to finish the race and to receive our rewards from the Lord.

Name some Bible characters that had completed the race of faith.

Thought: Doubts, guilt and distractions are hindrances to my spiritual growth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to be single-minded in following Christ and to persevere till I see Him face to face. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

OF THE SAME SPIRITUAL MIND

When Christians worship God, we worship in spirit because we have already received the Spirit of God. He has given us a spiritual mind and we are to strive to have the mind of Christ. It is for us to understand the spiritual things that God has freely given us.

What are spiritual things? These are unseen things from heaven. Faith, peace, love and joy are spiritual gifts from God. What does the Bible say about these things?

Faith: – The apostles asked Jesus to increase their faith (Luke 17:5).

Peace: – Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (John 14:27).

Love: – “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:5).

Joy: – Jesus said, “These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

What do you wish for in life? What is your mind preoccupied with? How to get better grades at school, what to eat, what to wear, where to buy the latest version of some electronic gadgets – these are not evil intentions at all. But, being obsessed with them is sin.

Earthly things are temporal and will pass away whereas spiritual things are of eternal value. Therefore, Paul appealed to all Christians to follow his example of occupying their minds with spiritual things. His life shows what it means to have the mind of Christ.

Try to arrange these words to form a sentence. Read Colossians 3:2.

affection things earth. on the not Set above, things on your on

Thought: A spiritual Christian looks at earthly things from heaven's view.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be spiritual and not materialistic. Teach me not to value the things of this world too much but to treasure the things that You taught us to love. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHO ARE THE ENEMIES OF THE CROSS?

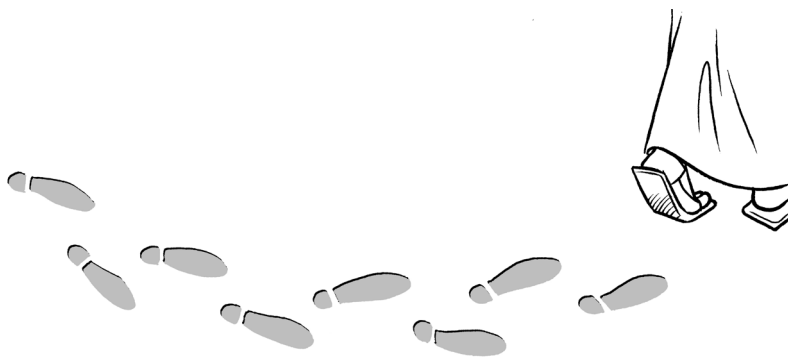
In any warfare, it is crucial to know who is a friend and who is an enemy. As Christians, we are soldiers of the Cross. What does the Cross represent?

The Cross signifies the love of God for sinners. God loved the people of the world even though we are all sinners. He loves us so much that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus to die on the Cross that whosoever believes in Jesus will be saved from condemnation to hell.

Dying on the cross is the most painful form of physical death. Suppose Jesus did not die on the cross. What would happen to sinners like us? We will not be able to escape the condemnation to eternal hell fire. We are born in sin and deserve the punishment which is eternal death. But, Jesus has conquered death on the cross.

The enemies of the cross are those who do not believe, haters of God and the Devil's friends who want God's salvation plan to fail! How can we identify them? First they live godless lives which would end in destruction. Next, they are under the control of sin and live to fulfil their fleshly lusts. They are also famous for their immorality. Finally, what fill their minds constantly are earthly pleasures and things.

Christians! Beware! **Don't ever be buddies with the enemies of the Cross** lest you follow them in their corrupt ways! Follow only Jesus!



Thought: I must not be an enemy of the Cross.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive all my sins. I believe Jesus died on the Cross for my sins and I am going to heaven. In Jesus' name I pray with thanksgiving. Amen.

LOOK FORWARD TO HEAVEN

Why do we look forward to being in Heaven? The answer is found in this song:

*Heaven is a wonderful place, Filled with glory and grace
I want to see my Saviour's face, Heaven is a wonderful place*

There is no sin or suffering in Heaven and it is where we will meet our Lord Jesus. As promised by Jesus, all Christians have obtained citizenship in Heaven.

For a foreigner to become a citizen of a certain country, he must fulfill certain requirements. He must either have the skills or be of a profession that the country needs or make a big investment. What qualifies one to be in Heaven? As soon as we accept Jesus as our Saviour, and as soon as we become a child of God, our citizenship in Heaven is assured!

We can be in Heaven after God has no more work for us to do in this world. Heaven is a wonderful place of glory and grace. Since our earthly bodies are not fit for Heaven, Jesus will give us a glorified body.

Can you tell what is wrong with the following illustration that a lady gave to a pastor about what a person needs to do to get to Heaven:

"Getting to heaven is like rowing a boat. One oar is faith while the other is works. If you use both, you will get there. If you use only one oar, you will go round in circles." Scratching his head, the pastor commented, "Nobody can get to heaven by rowing a boat!"

Answer:

The illustration is incorrect because Salvation is by

_____ through _____ and not of _____
(Read Ephesians 2:8-9)

Thought: Heaven is a wonderful place!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me and giving me a place in heaven. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHEN THERE IS TROUBLE

There is a saying, “Don’t trouble trouble till trouble troubles you”. Trouble did trouble the church of Philippi. Two women named Euodias and Syntyche were in dispute over some matters. Paul did not pretend nothing had happened. He dealt with the quarrelling parties because their dispute was upsetting the whole church.

Paul counselled them to have the same mind in the Lord and settle their dispute out of love for the Lord. Peace and harmony must be restored so that the church can move on with God’s work. Whenever there is a dispute, people tend to take sides and that could lead to divisions.

Restoring peace would prevent the Devil from having a chance to attack God’s work. Remember that he is like a roaring lion walking around to see whom he can devour. He is capable of stirring up anger. Beware! ANGER is only a letter away from DANGER. Breaking up of friendships, marriage and church fellowship is often caused by anger.

How can you do your part to keep peace in the home, school and church? You may wish to think about what the Bible teaches:

1. Live peacefully with all men if it is within your control.
(Romans 12:18)
2. Beware of the Devil’s tricks. (2 Corinthians 2:11)
3. Be humble, meek, patient and forgiving for the sake of unity in the Spirit. (Ephesians 4:2-3)
4. Pray without ceasing. Tell God of the situation and ask for guidance.
(1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Share an experience of being a peacemaker...

Thought: A united church is a fruitful church.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may there be peace and unity in our church so that Your work can prosper. Help us not to fall into the Devil’s traps. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS

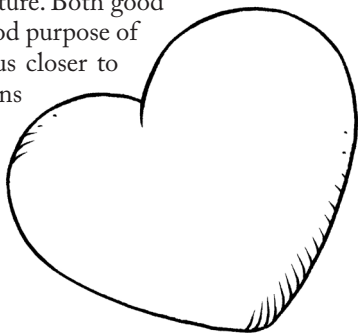
Rejoice always! We do not expect these words to come from someone suffering the cold and stench of a prison, do we? It is easy to rejoice and celebrate under comfortable and happy circumstances but quite hard to joke and make merry over sickness, starvation, poverty or death. Yet, Paul said to rejoice!

Of course, Paul said to rejoice in the Lord. Therefore, without the Lord, there is no way we can rejoice. It is only when we know the Lord that we can and should rejoice always. Does “rejoicing always” mean going around grinning at everybody all the time? Don’t do that because people may think something is wrong with you, and will not take you seriously! Instead, to rejoice is to have this inward strength that because Jesus is with you, nothing will be able to trouble you permanently. Sure we will still be concerned about things – but we need not be worried for we can cast our burdens to Jesus.

To rejoice always does not mean there would be no sorrowing. There are times when we need to weep with those who weep. There are times when we are grieved by the death of a loved one. Jesus wept for those who did not believe in Him because he knew they would end up in hell.

Christians rejoice from the heart. We have the joy of salvation and hence, citizenship in heaven. We have a friend in Jesus who will never leave or forsake us. He will always help us with our problems. God has perfect control over all things. He holds our future. Both good and bad things happen to us for the good purpose of strengthening our faith and drawing us closer to Him. Are these not good enough reasons for Christians to rejoice always?

Write inside the heart what will
make you rejoice always:



Thought: Rejoice always because of the joy of the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be joyful in all circumstances of life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DON'T BE ANXIOUS

Anxiety exhausts us. When it strikes us, our world falls apart. We cannot think properly and we feel very nervous. It robs us of our sleep and we have no peace. So what can we do to keep anxiety at bay?

The modern world offers various forms of anti-stress treatment for anxiety. They range from spas to sports, entertainment to exercise, music to meditation and building blocks to bashing things up. Some work but some don't. Some may cause even more anxiety because you have to dig deep into your pockets to pay for them! Anyway, at best, they provide temporary relief.

Children, what makes you anxious? Exams, meeting your parent's expectations, pressure from your peers, quarrelsome parents or siblings, and pimples on the face can all make you anxious. You are bound to face some of these difficulties some time. So, how can our hearts not be afraid or troubled?

Paul offered a perfect and permanent solution to anxiety. He said to bring all our worries to our Heavenly Father and ask Him to take care of them for us. That is what "casting all your cares upon Him" means. Try this remedy and you will have peace in your heart. God cares for you.

In which position will you rather be?



Thought: God cares, so I can stop being anxious and start praying.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thank You for listening to all my problems and taking my anxiety away. Thank you for your promise of peace. Although I may have problems in my life, I rest in the peace that comes from You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE PEACE OF GOD

Jesus said, "...my peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth." The peace that Jesus spoke of is the peace of God. As Jesus has said, it cannot be found in this world. When Apostle Paul wished his fellow Christians peace, he was also referring to the peace of God.

The human mind cannot understand the peace of God. It is of God and from God. God puts it into our heart because Jesus also said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Therefore, we can experience this peace in our hearts.

When do we experience the peace of God? Jesus said that if we believe in God, our hearts need not be troubled. The Psalmist said that if our minds are fixed on God, we will have perfect peace. Apostle Paul said that we will receive this peace when we pray, giving thanks to God and telling Him our problems. When we believe in His Word and do His will, God's peace will be with us.

Children, we need to remember 3 verbs that begin with the letter "C".
Commit. Concentrate. Confide.

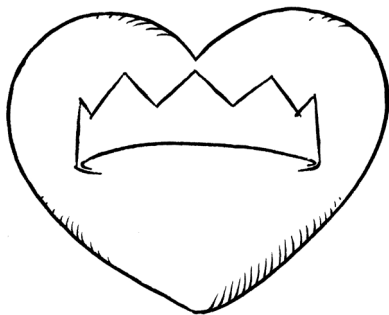
Commit your life to God who loves and cares for you.

Concentrate on who God is.

Confide in God all your problems.

Do all three, and peace will rule in your heart for Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

Write either "PEACE OF GOD" or "FEAR OF MAN" under the crown. Read Colossians 3:15 for the right answer.



Thought: When peace of God rules, anxiety flees.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your peace that You have placed in my heart. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THINK OF THE RIGHT THINGS

Your thoughts govern your actions. It means that your behaviour will reflect the nature of your thoughts. Even if you deliberately hide your thoughts to deceive others, they will eventually be found out. There is a saying: You can bluff some people some of the time; or some people all the time; or all the people some of the time; but you can never bluff all the people all the time.

God has given man the ability to choose. Therefore, Paul urges us to choose righteous thoughts. Only righteous thoughts can result in acts that please God. Conversely, evil acts always begin with evil thoughts. Therefore, it is important to fill our minds with thoughts that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, good, praiseworthy and virtuous. Then, we would be thinking of good, not evil things.

There is a popular saying about computer usage: Garbage in, garbage out. Keying in inaccurate data would churn out wrong and useless information. Our mind works in a similar way! Thus, if we do not guard our mind against evil thoughts, the outcome will be evil acts! When we sin, we cannot enjoy the peace of God. It is wise to listen to Paul's teaching. The only way to keep us from sin is to keep God's word in our heart.

What should a Christian mind focus on?

Answer: Things that are

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Thought: How much time do you spend in your daily quiet time? How much time do you spend in front of the TV daily?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to study the Bible regularly to fill my mind with righteous thoughts. Help me to spend more time on reading Your Word and the Junior RPG so I may learn more and more. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DOING THE RIGHT DEEDS

What are the right deeds Christians ought to do? First, they must be right in the eyes of God. He is the perfect judge. His standard is absolute. In other words, the deeds must please God.

Left to the judgement of man, there will be many opinions on what is right. Every man would consider his own actions as right.

Apostle Paul told Christians to do all those deeds that they had learned, received, heard and seen in him. This is on the basis that he had done all those deeds according to God's will. Just like the prophets of old, Apostle Paul is only a messenger of God. (2 Peter 1:20 & 21) He did not do deeds that are right only in his own eyes.

For us to be able to do the right deeds, our heart must be right with God. God's direction for us are all written in the Bible, which is truly the instruction manual for Christians.

Do you know why Paul was so concerned that we should think and act rightly? Link each word to form a path and show the direction with an arrow head:

ETERNITY

CHARACTER

HABIT

ACTION

THOUGHT

(Clue: Sow a thought, reap an action)

Thought: Let the word of God dwell richly in us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me read the Bible daily and do righteous deeds like Jesus. It may be tough in the beginning but the more I do, the easier it will become. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

LEARN TO BE CONTENTED

To feel content is to feel that your desire is satisfied to its limit. To be contented is to desire what you have. A doctor once told this writer that Singaporeans are never content. They are always complaining about one thing or another. As far as we know, Apostle Paul never once complained about anything. Not about food, nor about bad treatment, nor the shipwrecks, nor his prison conditions. He was convinced that all things happened for the best. God is always in control.

Paul was filled with joy in all circumstances. He had learnt to be content with everything that happened to him, regardless of whether they were good or bad. To Paul, everything was good because God has a purpose for everything that happened to him.

Paul was convinced that he could do all things because Christ gave him strength. To live and suffer for Christ, he must live depending on Christ's strength. He faced admiration and humiliation, fullness and hunger, abundance and poverty with the same sense of dependence on Christ

The Bible says that "godliness with contentment is great gain". Don't you wish to experience great gain? Think and do like Paul did.

- a. Write down a list of things or people you used to complain about:
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
- b. Now pray and ask God for forgiveness and for help to stop complaining and to begin thanking God for them.
- c. After you have prayed, use a pen to strike them off your list. Rejoice over the clean slate!

Thought: Godliness with contentment is great gain (1Timothy 6:6)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be content and grateful for all You have given to me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BE GRATEFUL

The church of Philippi had been taking care of Paul since his stay in Macedonia. Gifts were also sent to Thessalonica to meet his physical needs. Now in Rome, they had continued to send gifts and even sent Epaphroditus to look after him in prison.

Paul was gladdened not only by the church's act of giving but by all their righteous deeds. They were sharing his burden in the gospel ministry and in empathizing with his afflictions and sufferings. Paul was grateful for their gifts and their preaching of Christ and he expressed his gratitude in words. He commended them on their generosity. In encouragement, he told them that their gifts are "an odour of a sweet smell and their sacrifice was acceptable and pleasing to God."

Paul was not encouraging the church so that they might continue sending him more gifts in future. He was encouraging them to continue bearing fruit for the ministry. It was his greatest desire to see spiritual growth in his spiritual children. He was yearning for such blessings from God.

Children, when you receive a gift or help, do you remember to say Thank You? It would be an encouragement to the giver. Do you also remember to thank God for all His grace and mercy every day? God will be delighted with your gratitude.

Think of some of the things you have forgotten to thank God for.
Write them down and give thanks:

Thought: A grateful heart pleases God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be grateful and thankful for all that Thou has provided for me. This is my prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

GOD SHALL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEEDS

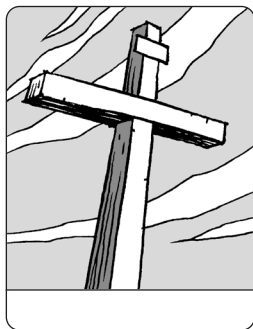
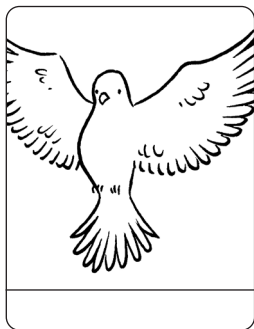
God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Wow! Children, if only we understand the full meaning of this promise. When we do, there will be no reason for us not to be contented.

What are your needs? Perhaps they are for friends, food, clothes or a computer? Or perhaps, tuition for better grades and better health? As you grow older, your list will also grow longer. Incidentally, God “shall supply all your needs” does not mean He will pander to our every whim and fancy. We cannot demand things from God. Revere God because He is Lord!

What is God’s view of our needs? He knows of our material needs and our desires because He is our Creator. He sustains us with the air we breathe, the rain and all the materials of the earth. God also cares for our feelings. However, in addition, He has provided for our spiritual needs. Our soul needs a Saviour, His peace and an eternal home.

If you are a born again Christian, you have already been given an eternal home in heaven. It is a glorious place. Do you believe? If not, pray that God increases your faith. Seeing how God has given us His only begotten Son, will He also not freely give us all things? Will He not supply all your needs?

Write down what gift each picture represents:



Thought: God is faithful. All that we need, God’s hand has provided.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for providing for all my needs. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

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To: *The RPG Ministry*

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.sg

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