
WHO IS JOSHUA? WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

Joshua is a well-known figure in the history of Israel. The story of how he conquered the Promised Land is recorded in the book of Joshua in the Old Testament. The Promised Land is Canaan, a land of “milk and honey”, which means that it was a land with plenty of food. God appointed Joshua to succeed Moses as commander over His people. His mission was to lead the people of Israel to battle against the Canaanites. In the many battles fought, God led and guided them to victory. The power of the God of Israel sent fear throughout Canaan.

They had victory after victory. As long as they obeyed God, He guaranteed them victory. These battles took years but God was with them all the way. God was faithful in His promise of the land for the nation of Israel to settle in.

Joshua means “Yahweh saves” or “Yahweh is salvation”. Yahweh refers to “The LORD.” Also, in the Greek language, Joshua means “Jesus”. As a young servant, Joshua was Moses’ right-hand man. Joshua and Caleb were two out of the twelve spies, sent to check out Canaan, forty years ago. Unlike the other ten spies, both of them believed God and reported faithfully what they saw. They reported that it was safe for the people to enter the Promised Land. But the people doubted God’s Word, and ended up travelling in circles in the wilderness for forty long years. Why forty years? For each day the spies took to survey the land, a year was to be spent in the wilderness. And as the spies took forty days, the people had to wander for forty years! By then, every person who was above twenty years in age had perished in the wilderness. Only Caleb and Joshua lived to enter the Promised Land. They were the two faithful servants of God.

Joshua was a faithful man who trusted in God’s Word. And he lived up to the meaning of his name – The LORD saves!

How about us? Although we have different names, there is something in common among all of us, for we are all called Christians. As Christians, we are to trust God and remain faithful to Him. Do we?

Thought: May we be Christians not just in name!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a true Christian. Help me to serve You by studying diligently and by helping in any housework in the way You want me to. Help me to obey You, just like Joshua. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

TRUST AND OBEY

Moses had died. God did not allow Moses to enter the Promised Land because of one disobedient act. Because of the many miracles that God had done through Moses, he became proud for a moment. He struck the rock for water, instead of just speaking to it, as God had said to do. This disobedience was a great sin, especially when Moses was so highly respected amongst the people. He had to set a good example of obedience.

Joshua was then officially appointed as the new leader and commander of the children of Israel. He was serving God under Moses but the Lord now instructed Joshua directly. God wanted Joshua to be “strong and very courageous.” As long as Joshua would trust and obey God, God promised to always be with him. “To trust” is to believe in God and His Word. “To obey” means to follow God’s plan, without doubt or complaint.

As they made preparations to cross the River Jordan into the Promised Land, the people of Israel pledged to do whatever Joshua commanded them to do. As their leader, Joshua was personally responsible for guiding them to trust and obey God. Do you think Joshua succeeded in the mission God entrusted him with? Can you say that you are a good example of obedience in your own personal life?

Read the Bible verse to find out the missing letters and word:

_____ nly be thou strong and very courageous, ... (Joshua 1:7)

_____ e strong and of a good courage... (Joshua 1:6)

_____ very place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, (Joshua 1:3)

_____ our wives, your little ones, and your cattle, ... (Joshua 1:14)

CHORUS:

*Trust and obey, For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey.*

Thought: God has given me parents and teachers to guide me to trust and obey God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to trust and obey You always and not to depend merely on my own feelings. I know it is easy to not depend on You, so please help me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS

Success is sweet. Everybody loves to be successful. When a sprinter runs a race, he wants to be a champion. When a businessman invests his money, he wants his business to prosper him. When a student studies diligently, it is to do well in his subjects. Success is like hitting a set-out target.

Do you know that God has already set a target for Christians? It is to please Him and to glorify Him. How can we achieve that? The secret is in this verse – Joshua 1:8. Let us study this verse to see how we can be blessed with success and prosperity.

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth;” In Joshua’s time, the Law of Moses was the only written words of God. The people must speak of God’s words always. Today, Christians must tell others about Jesus, according to the Bible. The Bible is God’s Word.

“but thou shall meditate therein day and night,” Meditate means to think, understand and memorise God’s Word. We can praise God only if we know Him and His Word.

“that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein;” It means to obey and to do all the commandments of God as written in the Bible.

Joshua pleased and glorified God, and was blessed with victories. Children, let us follow his example. Let us study and obey God’s Word.

Let us memorise Joshua 1:8. Fill in the key words to help us:

“This book of the _____ shall not depart out of thy _____ ; but thou shall _____ therein day and night, that thou mayest _____ to _____ according to all that is _____ therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good _____ .”

(Joshua 1:8)

Thought: If I hide God’s Word in my heart, I will not sin against Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to love and obey Your Word so that I can live a life pleasing before You and glorify Your name. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

GOD IS THE LORD OF ALL

Under the direction of God, Joshua and the people of Israel set off to conquer the land of Canaan. The first obstacle was the important city of Jericho. This fortress was the door to the Promised Land. It was about seven or eight miles from the River Jordan. The general-in-command was Joshua and he sent two spies into Jericho.

The two spies hid in the house of Rahab. Rahab had heard of the Lord of the children of Israel, and the miracles like the parting of the Red Sea and their victory in the battles against the Amorite kings. She believed their Lord is God of heaven and earth. Although she had lived a past life of sin, she had decided to change and believe in God! With this belief, she had the courage to hide the spies at the rooftop where their pursuers could not find them. In return, she asked for protection for herself and her family when the people of Israel were to invade Jericho. The spies agreed to spare her and her family while she promised not to expose their plot to attack Jericho.

God granted Joshua's army victory in their first campaign. God honoured their faithfulness.

The men under Joshua's command saw the red thread at the window of Rahab's house and spared their lives. God honoured Rahab's faith too. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35). God is the Lord and He is the Lord of all.



How do we know that God is the Lord of all? The Bible tells us so.

Genesis 2:4 says that: He is the _____ of heaven and earth.
(God created all things from nothing)

Acts 10:34 says that: He is no _____ of persons.
(God is the God of all nations and every person.)

Thought: I must worship God because He is my Creator.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Thou art the only true and living God and Creator of all. May I worship You in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

EARLY IN THE MORNING

Joshua had a good habit. He “rose early in the morning.” The Bible mentions that he rose early on three other occasions. On each occasion, God had very important business for him to attend to.

On this particular day, he would be leading the people across the River Jordan. The waters were at the highest at this time and there were neither boats nor ships to ferry the hundreds of thousands of people over! It would be an enormous task. However, God already had a plan for them.

What do you think was the first thing that Joshua did early that morning? Yes, he would first praise God for whom He is. Then he would ask God for directions on what to do on that day. He believed that God would already have the best plan. He had the desire to do things according to God’s instructions. Crossing the River Jordan on foot is impossible for any man but God has His way. All the people had to do was to faithfully follow God’s instructions.

Similarly, we ought to wake up early every morning to spend time with God, to praise and pray to God. God will be pleased for He is interested in our problems, no matter how small they may seem.

There were 3 other occasions when Joshua “rose early in the morning”. These are recorded in Joshua 6:12, 7:16 and 8:10. Fill in the blanks to find out the tasks that Joshua had to do:

1. The important task was to prepare the people to attack the city of _____ . (Joshua 6:2)
2. The important task was to find out who in their camp had sinned against God by taking valuables from that city. The culprit was _____ . Joshua 7:19-20:
3. The important task was to number the people in preparation to attack the city of _____ . (Joshua 8:1)

Thought: Do I think of God the moment I wake up in the morning?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to begin each day in prayer and in the study of Thy Word. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

A TEST OF FAITH

In order to reach the Promised Land, the people of Israel had to cross the River Jordan. At this time of the year, the River Jordan was overflowing its banks. Melting snow from the nearby mountains was continuously filling it. Imagine how full and fast-flowing the river was! It must have been a scary sight with the roaring and angry torrents sweeping by! Yet, God purposely chose this very time for them to cross the River Jordan.

God promised to be with His people as long as they trusted and obeyed Him. Here was a test of their faith. God commanded that the priests carry the Ark of the Covenant, step into River Jordan, walk to the centre and stand still. As for the rest of the people, they must start to move as soon as they spot the Ark and the priests and follow at a distance of about 1 km. They had to keep their eyes on the Ark at all times, otherwise, they would lose their way. As soon as the Levite priests stepped into the waters, the upstream waters stopped flowing, thus forming a wall of water! The people, with their cattle and baggage, crossed on dry ground and went past the priests. How can that be done? Not by man's ability, but by God's power!

Isn't our God wonderful? He takes care of everything. He told them exactly what to do and all they had to do was to simply trust and obey. Can you imagine what could have happened to them if they had doubted God?

Fill in the blanks and find out what pleases God:

1. "For we walk by _____, not by sight." (2 Corinthians 5:7)
2. "Thy _____ hath made thee whole." (Matthew 9:22)
3. "But without _____ it is impossible to please Him."
(Hebrews 11:6)

Thought: Faith means to believe God's Word without question.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me faith that I may ever love and obey You. Remove every doubt from me. I know it is not easy to simply follow, for I tend to want to stray. So please have mercy on me! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REMEMBER GOD

In the middle of the River Jordan where the priests had stood with the ark, Joshua set up twelve stones. Separately, the Bible says another set of 12 stones were placed in a pile at Gilgal where they were camping that night.

“Gilgal” can mean a circle (of stones) or rolling away. God wanted the children of Israel to remember that He has “rolled away” or put an end to their slavery in Egypt (Joshua 5:9).

God knows how forgetful man can be. That is why he commanded that the memorial of stones be set up to remind the children of Israel and their descendants of the miracle at Jordan. Similarly, when Christians think of the cross, we will remember how our sins were rolled away by Jesus who died for us.

Word Search:

1. Find the words: BY, DRY, EVERY, GILGAL, ISRAEL, JORDAN, JOSHUA, MIDST, and STONES.
They may be across, down or diagonal.

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

Thought: Remember God through the day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember how great Thou art. You have done such great and mighty things for me even before I know how to call you Heavenly Father. Thank You for doing so much for me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE REAL COMMANDER OVER THE PEOPLE

It is critical to know the condition of the enemy's city before you attack it. So, Joshua sent two spies into Jericho. They were the ones Rahab hid from their pursuers. They dutifully reported all they saw and heard. That would include the agreement they had made with Rahab. Now Joshua had to plan a strategy to attack Jericho because he was the commander of the army of Israel.

How did Joshua begin to plan? We know that Joshua always prayed and God spoke to him. This time was the same for Joshua. While waiting for God's orders, a man with a sword in his hand appeared before him. Naturally, Joshua asked the normal question as any soldier in the battlefield would ask: friend or foe?

The "man" revealed that He is the "captain of the host of the Lord" In other words, He is the Commander of the Lord's army. Joshua realised at once that it was the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus who had appeared before him to instruct him how to conquer the city of Jericho.

Children, do you know that Jesus, the only begotten Son of God is both fully man and fully God? The Lord Jesus existed even before He came down to earth as a baby in a manger and is now at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Are you surprised that He made pre-incarnate appearances in the Old Testament times? Don't be. God is omnipresent. Jesus can be anywhere anytime. And more than that, He is in command over everyone!

Read Joshua 5:14,

"And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?"

Unscramble the underlined letters to read:

Thought: Is Jesus the Commander of my life?

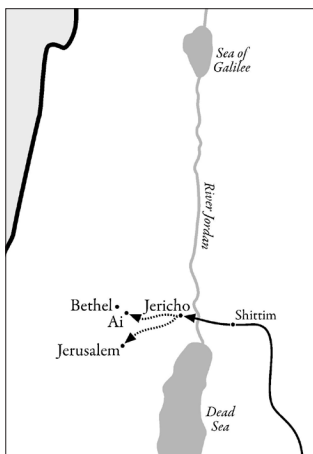
Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to learn from Joshua. As Jesus was his Commander, may the Lord Jesus be mine too! Let me always pray and find out every morning what You want me to do for the day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BELIEVE AND CONQUER

Jericho was situated at the entrances of two passes through the mountains. One leads to Jerusalem and the other to the cities of Ai and Bethel. It was the door into the Promised Land. Therefore, it was the very first city that the people of Israel had to conquer.

The walls of Jericho were high and wide. To bring them down, man would need weapons like canons and dynamite. However, the “captain of the host of the Lord” simply instructed Joshua to form a procession with seven priests blowing the trumpets behind the Ark. The people were to march round the city quietly once daily for six days. On the seventh day, they were to march round seven times. At the seventh time, when the priests blew the trumpets, the people would all shout with a great shout.

God’s plan of attack seemed ridiculous, especially in the eyes of seasoned warriors. But the Israelites simply trusted God to lead them to victory in His way and so observed to do all He told them to. For six days, the army of Jericho must have scoffed at the attackers. However, when the walls came tumbling down, they were silenced forever. The people of Israel had conquered Jericho by faith!



Read Joshua 6:4-5 again to fill in the missing letters of the alphabet.

1. Seven priests shall ___ear sev__n trumpets
2. The seventh day ye sha__l compass the c__ty
3. The pri__sts shall blow with the trumpets
4. The people shall ascend up e__ery man straight b__fore him.

The missing letters form the word: _ _ _ _ _

Thought: God’s way is the only way to success.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, increase my faith in You and Your Word, that I may be victorious for Christ each day. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

THE REWARD FOR FAITH

Jericho was the first conquest. Thus all the gold, silver, brass and iron were consecrated to the Lord and were to be put into the treasury house of the Lord. For all others, except for Rahab and her family, God commanded that all the people and their possessions be destroyed by fire.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8). Rahab believed in the living God of Israel. She showed her faith by saving the two spies of Israel at the risk of her own life. God honoured her faith by sparing her life and those of all her loved ones.

God was not only merciful to Rahab but very gracious to her. When Rahab stayed on with the people of Israel, she also worshipped the living and true God. She later married Salmon and became an ancestress of King David and thus of the Lord Jesus! It is a great honour to have her name in the family line of royalty. It is not just royalty on earth, but also of heaven where Jesus reigns forever. Her faith pleased God. Her faith earned her an excellent reward from God! Even the book of Hebrews in the Bible bears a record of her faith.

Children, if you believe in Jesus, your name will be recorded in the Book of Life. There is already a reward in heaven waiting for you to claim. This is a promise of God.

Do you remember this chorus? Fill in the blanks with the correct words:

CHORUS:

_____ is the victory,

_____ is the victory

O glorious victory,

That _____ the world
(John H. Yates)



Thought: Faith can overcome all my fears in this world.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to do everything in faith so that Your Name will be glorified. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SIN IS CONTAGIOUS

God commanded Joshua and His people to utterly destroy Jericho. He even put a curse on whoever would rebuild Jericho. Do you know how drastic it was? Buildings and structures were razed to the ground. Every human being, young and old had to be killed, including all their animals.

Doesn't that make God look cruel and His people seem heartless? It is not so. God was being wise and protective of His own people of Israel. God knows the hearts of men. He knows how wicked and sinful the people of Jericho were. These wicked people worshipped idols. They killed and offered their own children as sacrifices to the idols. Can you imagine the pain and agony the children suffered?

Sin is contagious. It spreads easily. Like a virus, it would spread and affect people everywhere if unchecked. The people from Jericho were sinful and even the children grew up familiar with sinful practices. So, if they were allowed to live, God's people would be influenced by them to rebel against God. God wants His chosen people of Israel to be separated from sinful men. God is holy and His people must be holy.

Remember the Lord's Prayer.

In Matthew 6:12-13, Jesus taught us to pray against falling into sin:

1. "And _____ (rofigve) us our _____ (betds),
as we forgive our debtors."
2. "And lead us not into _____ - (emiontpatt),
but _____ (edivrel) us from _____ (ilev):
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen."

Thought: There is never a sin too small for me to confess. It will grow if I do not repent of it quickly.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, forgive all my sins, even the little ones I commit and often neglect to confess to You. Help me to fight the good fight of faith so that I can prevent more sin in my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

God hates sin because He is Holy. That was why He commanded His chosen nation to be holy and separate from the wicked and idolatrous nations. He destroyed Jericho so that His chosen nation would not be destroyed by sin. Today, we will learn about what would happen when the children of God sin.

God promised to be with Joshua in battle all the way. So, it was puzzling to find that the army of Israel faced defeat at the city of Ai. Ai was much weaker than Jericho. Joshua mournfully sought God for an answer. God disclosed the reason - there was sin in the camp.

Someone had disobeyed God’s command and had taken the “accursed” thing from Jericho. Unless the “accursed thing” is removed, God will not help Joshua. Joshua sprang into action. The culprit, named Achan, was exposed and duly punished. After the cleansing of sin, Joshua and his men enjoyed victory all the way. The defeat at Ai was the one and only defeat they suffered.

When we sin against God, He will not listen to our prayers. Remember that our sins could hurt others too. For God to listen to our prayers again, we need to first confess our sins before Him. We may also need to confess our faults to others. Sin separates us from God, and the consequence of sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Jesus’ precious blood was shed to cleanse us from our sins.
 Draw a cross to bridge the gap between God and sinners in this picture:

GOD

SINNERS



Thought: Sin separates me from God, but He will forgive me if I confess my sins.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guard my heart this day, I pray, that I may not sin against You. Help me to take sin seriously, otherwise, I will fall into the trap of allowing it into my life bit by bit. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

God is omniscient – that means He knows all there is to know and all that happens in the world. Nothing can escape His knowledge – not your thoughts, your desires or your unspoken words. Even when there was only one disobedient person in Joshua’s camp, He knew.

The Lord had declared the city of Jericho “devoted” to the Lord. Jericho was considered the “first fruit”, being the first conquered city. He commanded that the silver, gold and vessels made of brass and iron be brought into His treasury. Other than that, every life and thing must be destroyed. Of course, the promise to spare Rahab was kept.

The children of Israel were told not to take anything from the city, but Achan did. He coveted, and thus stole a Babylonian garment, two hundred shekels of silver and fifty shekels of gold and hid them among his own stuff. When God told Joshua about the curse of sin on the people of Israel, he combed the camp to find the culprit and Achan’s sin was found out. He and his family were punished by being stoned to death and burnt.

Achan broke the law of God. He disobeyed God’s command not to take what was devoted to God. He stole from God. He hid the stolen things and pretended to be innocent. When his sin was discovered, he received the death penalty. He thought he could fool everyone. However, no one can fool God. Nobody can ever hide anything from God.

TRUE or FALSE (T/F)?

1. Achan broke only one of the Ten Commandments. T / F
2. Achan brought a curse on the people of Israel because he brought the “accursed” thing out of Jericho. T / F
3. God knows our every secret. T / F
4. God closes His eyes on the small sins we commit. T / F
5. Achan’s sin hurt only himself. T / F

Thought: You cannot hide your sin from God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to guard myself from sinning. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

WORSHIP GOD

Do you worship the living and true God? How do we worship God? Currently, we hold worship services in church every Lord's Day. Christians will congregate to worship. In worship, we read God's Word and sing praises to God. We pray and give thanks to God for His Providence. We also bring our tithes and offerings. We do all things in an orderly manner because we must give God the highest respect.

The worship of God began since time began, although the ceremonial practices have changed. The way of worshipping God was outwardly different from the time of Adam, Moses, and even to our time today.

Joshua built an altar at Mount Ebal to worship God according to Moses' instructions. The altar must be made of unhewn stones plastered together. That means stones must not be cut but be in their natural form and there must not be any tools used. Offering of sacrifices were made on the altar. Joshua wrote the Law of Moses or the Ten Commandments on the stones before the people of Israel.

Man ought to worship the one and only living and true Creator God with clean hands and pure hearts and in spirit and in truth.

Read Exodus 20:3-5 to learn the First and Second Commandments:

1. "Thou shalt have no other _____ before Me."
2. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven _____ or bow down thyself to them, nor serve them."

Read Matthew 22:37 to find out how Jesus rephrased the Commandments

"Thou shalt _____ the Lord thy God with all thy _____,
and with all thy _____, and with all thy _____."

Thought: Do I worship God my Creator because I love Him?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to worship You, the one true living God, in spirit and in truth. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE MOUNTAINS OF BLESSINGS AND CURSES

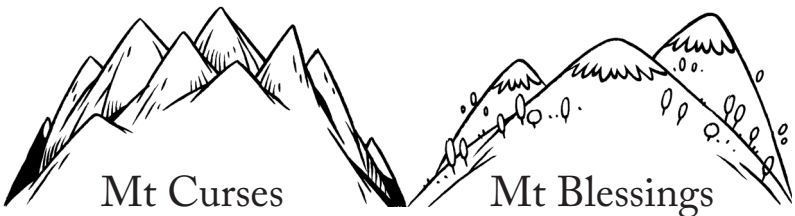
To the people of Israel, Moses was God's spokesman. He had told the people to hold a reading session between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim once they crossed Jordan. These mountains faced each other and in between lay Jacob's well.

The tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin would stand on Mt Gerizim to the south to bless the people. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali would stand on Mount Ebal in the north to curse the people. At the same time, the Levite priests would carry the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh. They would also read out all the curses that will fall on those who disobey God's commandments and all the blessings on those who obey. All the people would say Amen to every curse and blessing read.

It was a solemn ceremony. It was meant to exhort the whole nation of Israel and the godly people among them of the importance of obedience to the Lord.

Put the number of the action below on the correct mountain:

1. Read my Bible and pray every day.
2. Slam the door to work out your anger.
3. Volunteer to wash dishes for Mum.
4. Greet Grandma and Grandpa when you see them.
5. Share my toys or books with my friends.
6. Gossip about a classmate or swear along with my 'cool' friends.



Thought: When I examine my week that just passed, have I been more obedient or disobedient to the Lord?

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

TRICKED!

The Canaanite city of Gibeon was “greater than Ai” – meaning it was a more powerful city (Joshua 10:2). But when its people heard of what happened to Jericho and Ai, they were afraid of the God of Israel. Gibeon was part of Canaan and within the territory of the Promised Land. The Hivites of Gibeon did not want to fight any battle with Israel. They sought to make a peace treaty with Israel.

A peace treaty meant that both parties must protect and help each other. However, God did not want the nation of Israel to mix with the heathen nations and had forbidden Israel to make any treaty with any of the Canaanites. Even the Hivites knew about God’s orders to the people of Israel. So how did the people of Gibeon make the children of Israel agree to a treaty of peace?

The Hivites decided to use deceit and tricked the people of Israel into believing that they were ambassadors from a faraway land outside Canaan. To keep up their pretences, they put on old clothes and worn out shoes. They carried old sacks with dry and mouldy bread and old wine bottles.

The people of Israel believed what they saw with their own eyes. They went ahead with the peace treaty without seeking God’s guidance. They depended on their own intelligence and not on God’s wisdom and were fooled by their enemies in the close neighbourhood.

Many today are tricked by Satan in so many ways. Many believe selfishness and pride are good. Others believe they should be unkind, otherwise, they would be taken advantage of. Students are tricked by Satan, that to be accepted by classmates, they have to act “cool” and do things or use words or phrases deemed “cool”.

Dear child, are you tricked by Satan?

Thought: May I not be tricked by Satan.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me know what is true and what is not, by closely depending on Your guidance, and not on my own or man’s intelligence. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

PRAY BEFORE YOU ACT

Have you heard of the saying: “Look before you leap”? It is a warning against acting rashly. You may say that the people of Israel did look but they were still tricked. It is because they depended on their own intelligence and did not seek the “counsel of Yahweh” or the wisdom of God.

God knows the future. He knows that His people would fall into sin easily under the influence of idol worshippers. That was the reason for Israel to wipe out the Canaanites and not make any treaty with them. God loves and cares for His people. Alas, the people of Israel did not care to consult God on this matter.

It does not mean that we do not need to use our intelligence to plan or make decisions. But someone has rightly said, “Planning without God, is planning to fail”. God cares for us and is far more intelligent than us. He is omniscient. So, why do we not ask God for wisdom before we act?

Answer “Yes” or “No” to the following:

1. Do I pray when I wake up in the morning? _____
2. Do I pray when I am not sure what to do? _____
3. Do I pray when I am afraid? _____
4. Do I thank God for answering my prayer? _____
5. Do I thank God at meal times? _____
6. Do I ask God which secondary school I should choose? _____
7. Do I pray that my friends will become Christians? _____
8. Do I thank God for my parents? _____

(Note: If you have answered No to any of the questions, don't be sad. Just pray!)

Thought: If I pray before I do anything, I will surely stay out of trouble!

Prayer: Teach me to pray, Heavenly Father. Teach me to pray always, before I act on something. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DECEIT DOES NOT PAY!

Israel had to honour the treaty of peace with Gibeon even though Israel was deceived into it. They had sworn by the God of Israel. But Gibeon had to keep their end of the bargain too. They had promised to submit themselves as servants to the people of Israel! When Israel discovered that they were actually close neighbours, they went to collect their dues.

Deceit landed the people of Gibeon under the curse of slavery. That meant they would lose all their cities and possessions to their masters. Hard labour would be their lot in life. Their chores would include cutting of wood and drawing of water. Status-wise, they would be of the lowest rank. Work would be endless for them. Day and night, they would have to toil and serve their masters.

We learnt that deceit does not pay. In fact, you may even lose what you have. Have you ever played a trick on someone? If it was not harmless fun, do not do it again. God will not be pleased if you do.

What about lying? Is that deceit? Of course! Lying is just another form of deceit. Other forms of deceit include copying the work of classmates and copying during tests or examinations.

Dear child, remember you are a child of God. Do not practice deceit for it makes our Heavenly Father very sad.

Thought: I must not do anything deceitful, for God will not be pleased.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be honest. Help me to be a truthful child, friend and student, so that others will want to know my Jesus too. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

FIVE AGAINST ONE?

In ancient times, the weaker nations were forced to pay tributes of money and goods to the more powerful nations. The weaker would have to submit because the more powerful would have more soldiers and more weapons. They were always bigger in numbers and would normally win if there was a battle.

We would expect it to happen that way when the five Amorite kings joined forces to fight against Gibeon. It all began when the king of Jerusalem knew about the treaty made between Gibeon and Israel. The nations had heard of the power of the God of Israel and the conquest of Ai. Gibeon was already “a royal city” with other cities under her and had an army of good fighters. Afraid of Gibeon’s growing strength, the king of Jerusalem gathered the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon of the south to form an alliance to fight Gibeon. Gibeon sought the help of Joshua who led an army to protect her. Israel had to honour their peace treaty and go to the rescue of Gibeon.

Though outnumbered, God gave assurance of victory for Israel and her ally. The majority did not win. The minority won because the Lord God was fighting for them. No matter how powerful your enemy is, victory is surely yours if the Lord is on your side!

Fill in the blanks:

1. The ___ ___ ___ is on my side; I will not fear:
what can man do unto me? (Psalm 118:6)
2. What shall we then say to these things?
If ___ ___ ___ be for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)
3. So that we may boldly say, The ___ ___ ___ is my helper,
and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. (Hebrews 13:6)

Thought: When we take a stand for God, we do not have to be afraid even if we are outnumbered!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to be overwhelmed by the unrighteous majority in the world today, but to have the assurance of spiritual victory by your power. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

THE SUN STOOD!

Even before the children of Israel met their Amorite enemies, the Lord had already promised victory to Joshua. Suppose a trustworthy piano teacher tells you that as long as you practise hard and follow his instructions, you will pass the music examination. Do you need to worry any more? No, for you can trust that piano teacher. In an even more spectacular way, the army of Israel trusted God and confidently marched from Gilgal to Gibeon to attack the enemies at night. God is most trustworthy!

When the enemies fled, the Lord sent hailstones from heaven hitting and killing a majority of them. Many died, but there were still a great number of them left fighting. To have more time to fight, Joshua asked the Lord for the impossible. Do you know what he asked for? He asked for the sun and the moon to stand still! What an audacious request! But the beauty of it all – God answered his request and they did stand still! Well, we know the sun does not move. So what does it mean when the Bible states the sun did not move? That is just another way of saying the sun did not seem like it moved – and in reality, the earth did not move. With God, nothing is impossible.

Though Israel went to protect Gibeon, the battle eventually enabled Israel to conquer the entire southern part of Canaan. Later, when the five Amorite kings were cornered, they were killed and their dead bodies were hung on trees for display. It was to show and remind the people of how powerful the God of Israel is. Is there anything too hard for God? God is the creator of all things bright and beautiful and all things big and small.

Thought: God is great!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to remember You are not just my own personal Saviour, but also the Great Creator. Nothing is ever too hard for You. Help me to trust You in all things. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU ON THE LORD'S SIDE?

The news of Joshua's overwhelming victories in the South spread to the North. The king of Hazor was then the most powerful and influential king in the North. He called for a meeting among all the other kings of the North, and they met at the waters of Merom to propose a grand plan to destroy Israel. But they had yet to see for themselves what the God of Israel could do!

The kings came with soldiers, horses and chariots in numbers as great as "the sand that is upon the sea shore". This was to be the most powerful force against Joshua and the children of Israel. How could they fight against such a formidable force? Nobody could but God.

The outcome of the war against Israel was opposite to the result desired by the combined armies under the king of Hazor. Instead of chasing the invaders out, they were utterly destroyed by the invaders. In fact, this war at Merom increased Israel's occupied land by a lot more. Man can propose many grand plans, but God can make these grand plans work for His purpose instead, as He wanted Israel to occupy the whole land that He had promised them.

If God be for us, who can be against us? Israel's strength and power to conquer came from God. Children, may you be on the Lord's side. Are you already in God's army? Are you ready to tell others about Jesus and His love?

Song:

*I may never march in the infantry,
Ride in the cavalry,
Shoot the artillery,
I may never fly o'er the enemy,
But I'm in the Lord's army. (Yes sir!)
I'm in the Lord's army. (Yes sir!)
I'm in the Lord's army. (Yes sir!)*

(Randall Dennis & Karyn Henley)

Are you a good soldier in the Lord's Army? _____ (YES / NO)

Thought: A good soldier in the Lord's army must love and obey God's Word.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to love Your Word and be a good Christian soldier. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SAFETY IS OF THE LORD

The Lord brought tremendous comfort to Joshua who was facing a huge army of enemies. God simply told him not to be afraid of the great number of fighting men, horses and chariots. The Lord had promised to keep Joshua and His people safe. No matter how fierce the enemies and how many weapons they have, they can never beat Israel because God had promised to protect His children.

Children, we live in a dangerous world. Singaporean boys, when they grow up, will be enlisted for National Service. Then, you may learn about the dangerous weapons used for mass destruction like nuclear weapons and chemicals. Even in our daily life, we hear so much about suicide bombers, terrorists, accidents, diseases, conmen and gang fights. We are exposed to danger everyday. Though we can take precautions, there is no guarantee of safety in this world.

Like Joshua, we will face some kind of danger in the world. Therefore, as Joshua looked to the Lord God for safety, we should too. Firstly, is Jesus your personal Saviour? Secondly, do you trust Jesus to protect you everyday? If so, pray for safety. Safety is of the Lord.

Read the Bible verse to find out the missing words:

1. "Some trust in _____, and some in _____: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:7)
2. "An _____ is a vain thing for _____: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength." (Psalm 33:17)
3. "The _____ is prepared against the day of battle: but _____ is of the LORD." (Proverbs 21:31)

Thought: Only God can keep me safe from all harm and evil.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, only You, and You alone, can keep me safe from danger, day and night. Please continue to protect me, for in You I trust. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

CAUGHT BY SURPRISE

Have you ever watched the television programme called “Gotcha”? It is a reality show about surprising someone with some ridiculous stunt and filming their reactions. From the reactions, you can tell many were caught unawares.

It was exactly what the army of Israel did to the combined armed forces of Hazor, Madon, Shimron, Achshaph and the other kingdoms. Israel sprang a surprise attack on them, which sent their fighting men fleeing. What happened to all their impressive horses and chariots? After all, Israel only had soldiers on foot. This is a significant point as Israel’s foot soldiers stood little chance against the chariots and horses of the enemies. Use this example – a section of 8 soldiers today trying to fight against a huge armoured battle tank. Which side is expected to win? Clearly, the tank has overwhelming advantages. But God was on Israel’s side.

The fact was that Israel’s enemies did not expect Joshua and his men to launch an attack so soon after they arrived. They were caught unawares.

All that happened was according to God’s plan. Despite the chariots and horses, Israel’s enemies were not combat ready. Maybe they were still strangers to each other, or maybe they were just overconfident. No matter what the reason for their confusion was, they panicked and fled. On the other hand, Joshua’s army was ready for war at the word, “Go!” They were confident that God never fails.

Do you prepare for your daily spiritual battles? We need to be ever ready to combat sin, otherwise, we will fall like Israel’s unprepared enemies. Read God’s Word, seek Him in prayer and always be ready to fight sin. God’s Word never fails.

Read 1 Peter 5:8 and fill in the blanks:

“Be _____, be _____; because your adversary the _____, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Thought: If I do not prepare against Satan’s wiles, I am preparing to fall!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to be lazy or overconfident towards my spiritual battles, but to be ready to fight against sin each day. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DEPEND ON GOD

God ordered Joshua to “hough their horses and burn their chariots”. He wanted Joshua and the people of Israel to make lame all the well-trained horses by cutting their hamstrings, and to burn the powerful-looking chariots that the enemies left behind. What a waste! These must have cost lots of money to train and build. Surely Joshua could use some of them in his army. So, why did God command His people to destroy them?

God is supremely wise. He knows that if Joshua and the people have horses and chariots, they would grow to depend on them for strength. Very soon, they would not depend on God to fight for them and would not keep His commandments. That would be disastrous because they would fall into sin and would not have victories like they had at the battles of Jericho, Ai and Gibeon.

God knows how weak His people can be. So, in mercy He kept them from temptation by destroying the chariots and horses. Horses and chariots may be powerful but they can never beat the artillery from heaven. Hailstones killed more Amorites than the peoples’ swords did. God loves His people and He did not want them to put their trust in the wrong things and fail. He wants them to depend on Him because He is all powerful. Only God can give them success.

Likewise, for our own good, we must always be humble and depend on God like how Joshua did. Every success is given by God.

Do you sometimes wish you could do better in school? Do you secretly hope that, even without studying, you will be able to score well? Of course! So why does God not allow that in your life? Well, if He does, you may depend on your ability rather than on Him.

Read Isaiah 31:1 for answers:

1. Israel was told not to trust in _____ and in _____ ,
but to look unto the Lord.
2. Where do you put your trust? _____

Thought: I must trust in God only and not in my own ability.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, have mercy on me. Remove all temptations from me so that I will learn to depend on You only and nothing else. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

THE LAW OF OBEDIENCE

God is holy and He loves us. He does not want us to sin because the result of sin is death. He gave us commandments on what to do and what not to do. He demands our obedience to His commandments because He knows what is good for us. Those who obeyed God received blessings and those who disobeyed were punished, according to God's Law. God has full authority over us because He has created us.

In his time, Moses received commands directly from the Lord. The Lord gave Moses the authority to speak His commands to His people. Moses handed down God's instructions to Joshua, who became the new leader. Joshua faithfully obeyed all of the instructions of Moses:

- Joshua 1:13 - Joshua reminded the people to obey Moses' commands.
- Joshua 8:30-31 - He built an altar to the LORD.
- Joshua 8:35 - He read the Law of Moses to the people.
- Joshua 11:12 - Joshua killed the kings and destroyed their cities, as Moses had commanded.

As children of God, you must obey God and the authorities He has set over you. These are your parents in the family, your pastor and elders in church, your teachers in school and the government of your country. If we disobey them, they have the right to discipline us. This is the law of obedience.

Do you obey your parents or elders? Do you abide by rules in school and class? And even if your answer were "Yes" to these 2 questions, do you obey willingly?

Dear child, the road to total obedience is a long one. It will take time and a lot of effort. And there will be times when you fall and give in to your old self and disobey. Never give up! Press on and pray that the Lord will grant strength to obey, and obey happily!

Thought: God has placed certain people in my life to help me grow in faith.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to heed Your commandments to obey my parents and those whom You have given authority over me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

CITIES OF REFUGE

God is the supreme judge and His law is just. The blessings and punishments that He sends are always right. Those who disobey His Commandments receive a fair punishment. In the Old Testament, there is the rule of an eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth. If a man kills another, he would receive the death penalty. This is the rule of a life for a life. But what if it was a pure accident?

Suppose a man was cutting wood and his axe head flew off its handle, hitting and killing another man. Although the killer did not kill on purpose, the relatives of the dead would still hunt him down to avenge the dead. It seems so unfair. Well, our God may be strict about rules because He is holy. But He is also boundless in mercy and will provide a way of escape for the unwitting killer. He instructed Joshua to appoint some cities to be Cities of Refuge.

“Refuge” means asylum or a place of safety. These cities of refuge were set up to protect the killer from his avengers. The six cities of refuge, located on hills spread throughout the land were Kedesh, Shechem, Hebron, Bezer, Ramoth-Gilead, and Golan. After the killer arrives at a city of refuge, the congregation would judge to find if he acted unintentionally. If he did, he would remain in the city of refuge and live there safely until the death of the high priest who was in office at the time of the trial, at which point he could return to his property. If the attacker left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, however, the avenger would have the right to kill him (Numbers 35:24-28).

Did you know that similarly, God is our refuge and strength? We can always turn to Him when we face trials and difficulties.

Read the Bible verses to find out the missing words:

1. “God is our refuge and strength,
a very present _____ in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)
2. “The eternal God is thy _____...” (Deuteronomy 33:27)

Thought: God is my Refuge. He will keep me safe.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your mercy and for Your promise to help me when I am in trouble. I know I can trust You always. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LOVE THE LORD

Joshua was a great army general. He lived up to what God asked him to be – strong and courageous. He was also a humble servant of God. He obediently led God’s people into numerous battles over a few years. In the last days of his life, he gave the best advice to the people of Israel who had pledged to obey Joshua as he obeyed God. He urged them to love the Lord God.

His advice on how to love God was:

1. Know God’s commandments.
2. Keep His commandments.
3. Keep very close to God.
4. Keep serving God with all your heart and with all your soul.

We can test ourselves to see if we really love God with a few questions:

Am I eager to find out more about God by reading the Bible?

Do I please Him by believing in the Bible?

Do I pray and ask God for things in Jesus’ name?

Do I obey Jesus in putting others before me?

Do I put God before everything and everybody?

Joshua’s answers to all these questions were ‘yes’.

So, let us learn to be like Joshua. God gave him great success.

Jesus taught us how we can love Him. Read and write down John 14:15:

May you remember this important order:

1. **JESUS** first and 2. **OTHERS** before 3. **YOU**

Thought: I must love God by reading and obeying the Bible, and praying to Him and trusting Him always.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to always think of You first before I do anything. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

YOU CAN CHOOSE

Joshua said, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua had chosen to serve God. It was not just him alone, but his whole household would serve God. As the head of the household, he had made the decision on behalf of his family, his children and servants. Being a ruler and a judge in Israel, Joshua would have a large household. There were many under his care and guidance. They were taught to love and obey God.

You may be too young to do many things but no one is too young to choose to serve God. You can do your part as a child and as a student. Most important of all is the decision in your heart. If you love Jesus, you can serve Him. As a child of God, you can obey God by reading the Bible and praying. As a child in the family, you can be an obedient son or daughter. In school, your role is to be a good student. You can shine for Jesus by being diligent. Even in church, you can be helpful to your Sunday school teachers by being attentive to them and caring for your fellow students.

Are you willing to choose to serve God? As long as you are, God will show you what to do.

I am willing to serve God now:

1. I will _____

2. I will _____

3. I will _____

Remember this song:

*Jesus wants me for a sunbeam, To shine for Him each day;
In ev'ry way try to please Him, At home, at school, at play.*

(Nellie Talbot)

Thought: As long as I am willing, God can use me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I choose to be useful for You. I know that, even in my own little corner, You can make me shine for You. Hence, give me a willing heart to do anything You want me to do and help me to start today. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

“THE SERVANT OF THE LORD”

People of the world today do not like to be called servants. It is such a lowly title. You must have heard of titles like Doctors, PhD, CEO, MD, Brigadier-General and so on. These titles are earned through years of hard work in various fields. If we consider what Joshua did, he should be called Commander or General. But instead, he was given the title, “the servant of the Lord”.

But do you know how rare and honourable that title is? It is very rare because it was given to only two persons in the Old Testament. It was first given to Moses, and then to Joshua. What made them so special to deserve such an honourable title?

A good servant obeys his master faithfully. Both Moses and Joshua obeyed all the commands of God. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and His laws. Before he died, he instructed Joshua on all of God’s commandments. In turn, Joshua did all that the Lord had commanded Moses (Joshua 11:15). He faithfully obeyed every command and was careful not to leave out anything.

To be a servant is not just to be called a “servant”. It is to have the heart of a servant. It is to be humble and not think of self. It is to place God and others before yourself. It is to serve in whatever way God wants you to. These areas of service need not be in some public way, but in private quiet ways God wants you and I, to help out.

Do you also wish to be known as a servant of God? Will your friends know you are a good servant of Christ from your behaviour?

1. What was Joshua known as in Judges 2:8?

2. What do I want people to know me as most of all?

Thought: Do I behave like a Christian at home and in school?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me be obedient to You. I pray that my friends will notice my godly behavior and want You to be their Heavenly Father too. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE SUBMISSIVE LIKE JOSHUA

Subordinates submit to their bosses. Students submit to the school authorities. Otherwise, they face some penalty. But Joshua submitted to the commands of Moses because he loved God. To submit is to humble oneself and give in to the other party.

When God called Joshua to be the next leader after Moses died, he was willing. He believed in God's love and in His promises of protection and victory. God's plans for His children are always the best. So, when we need to choose a way, say "yes" to Jesus' ways and "no" to our selfish, greedy and proud ways.

To be leader of Israel was not easy. Joshua had to teach and encourage the people to keep God's law and not serve any other gods. If they were idolatrous or rebellious, there can be no victory for them. In battle, Joshua never argued or doubted God's timing or fighting method. On the word, "Go", he would move the people into battles at once. As he faithfully obeyed God's commands, he had great success.

The people of Israel followed Joshua's excellent example of humility, faith and obedience. They were also submissive to God. We too can learn to be submissive.

How to be submissive?

1. Always say " _ _ _ " to what Jesus wants you to do and "no" to sin.
2. _ _ _ _ God's Word for disobedience is sin.
3. _ _ _ _ _ God, for He deserves to be praised.
4. _ _ _ _ _ God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

Thought: Be submissive to the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be humble and always do things according to Your commandments. Help me to be submissive to You, like Joshua. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

SURRENDER and SUCCEED

Let us picture a man in a pitch dark dungeon. He hears a knock at the door and a gentle voice saying, "Here is light. Open the door if you want to see." The man has a choice to open or not to open the door. If he believes the voice, he will open the door.

In the same way, the gospel message is given. The voice is Jesus' voice and the man is a sinner. That person could be you, or me. Have you opened the door to Jesus? Have you surrendered your heart to Him?

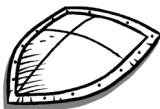
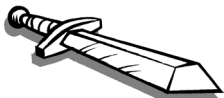
All the promises of our Heavenly Father are yours when you surrender your heart to Jesus. Eternal life is the first precious promise from God. As you grow as a Christian, there will be many spiritual battles you have to fight. But God will protect you and keep you safe till you reach heaven.

God's enemy will still try very hard to win you to his side. He will tempt you with attractive things. It could be a movie, a video clip or a book of dirty jokes that pollutes your mind; or your friend's good grades or new iPad that makes you envious; or your prefect badge and sports trophies that make you proud. Sometimes, it could be something unpleasant like being badly bullied and your reaction of anger and retaliation.

To fight pride, laziness, envy, hate and filthy thoughts, we need to know God's commandments. God's Word is like a sword that defends us. If we obey God's Word like Joshua obeyed every command of God, we will also be able to lead a holy life. It is clear that Israel's victories did not depend on Joshua's capable leadership or their own strength. Their faith in the true and living God was the invincible power that brought them great success. Let God use your time, intelligence, talents, hands and feet for His Glory. Your faith pleases God.

Write these words in the right places of the equation:

Word of God Shield of Faith Success



Thought: _____ + _____ = _____

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to obey Your Word and live by it always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

YOU HAVE TO DECIDE!

“I am glad Jeff raised his hand and stayed after class to talk to Brother Mike about being saved,” said Jennifer as she and her friend Sandi walked to the hall after Sunday school.

“Me, too,” Sandi agreed. “Maybe he’ll be nicer now - he has always been so wild! And I have heard his brothers are, too.” She shook her head. “I am glad my family is not like that,” added Sandi. “It must be embarrassing to have to go and get saved. I’m glad I was born a Christian.”

“But everybody has to be saved,” objected Jennifer.

“Oh, Jennifer! Not everybody,” Sandi argued. “I come from a great family. We have one of the nicest houses in town - and my father is a rich businessman!”

When a circus came to town a few days later, Sandi invited Jennifer to go with her to a late afternoon performance. The girls were excited and eager to see the animals, acrobats and clowns. “Oh, no!” Sandi groaned as she searched her pockets when they arrived. “I must have left the tickets on my desk!” She approached the man at the gate. “Can you please let us go in now if we promise to come back and bring the tickets later?” she asked. “Please?” The gatekeeper shook his head. Sandi frowned, and then she looked him straight in the eye. “Do you know who I am and who my father is?” she asked haughtily.

“Well, Mr. Rich Man’s Daughter,” said the gatekeeper, “when you show me your ticket you can get in. Not before!” Defeated, the girls turned away.

After walking in silence for a few minutes, Jennifer glanced at Sandi.

“It did not make any difference who you are, did it?” asked Jennifer timidly. She paused, then added, “If the gatekeeper would not let you into the circus even though you come from a wealthy family - and even if you’re the Prime Minister’s daughter-what makes you think God will let you into heaven for those same reasons? The Bible says everyone has to be saved. You need a ticket to get into the circus, and you need Jesus to get into heaven!”

Thought: Do you think you’ll go to heaven because you have a good home and family? Whether you are from the best home in town, or the worst, you are a sinner. You have to decide on your own.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to commit my life to You. Thank You for the reminder that I have got to decide on my own, and accept Jesus to come into my life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SMELLING GOOD FOR JESUS?

“What is that nasty smell, Mom?” Karen asked. She and her mother were volunteering at an old folks’ home one Saturday morning and were preparing food bags to be distributed. “I don’t think I’ve ever smelled anything so horrible!” complained Karen. “What is it?”

“I am not sure,” said Mom, but eventually, they found the culprit. It was a large rotten potato at the bottom of the 20-pound sack they were emptying.

“Let us get rid of that thing!” Karen exclaimed. “I will do it.” She held her nose with one hand and used a gloved hand to throw the rotten potato. But when Karen came back, she noticed the smell was still there. “Are there more rotten potatoes?” she wondered aloud as she and her mother continued to work. A little later she added, “I think more of these potatoes smell kind of funny, but we haven’t found any more rotten ones.”

“That rotten one was next to the others, and some of its bad smell rubbed off on them,” Mom explained. She went over to a shelf and picked up a can of air freshener. “The smell is in the air, too. We will see if we can replace it with this.”

“Rotten potatoes smell disgusting,” said Karen. “Yes,” agreed Mom, “and you know, honey, we can be just like that rotten potato if we aren’t careful. Sometimes we let ugly things get into our lives—like a bad attitude, or lying. If we allow those kinds of things to remain in our lives, we will soon be disgusting. People won’t like being with us.”

“I would not want people to be around me if I smelled like that rotten potato!” Karen said as they started sorting their next sack of potatoes. She sighed. “But it is awfully easy to whine and complain about the things I don’t like.”

“That is true,” agreed Mom. “The best way to get bad stuff out of our lives is to replace them with good things. When we fill our hearts with things like prayer, Bible reading, we’ll be spreading the fragrance of Jesus to those around us.” “Okay,” said Karen, “so let us sing while we work.” She started to sing a chorus she had learned, and with a smile, Mom joined in. Replace those things with the fruit of the Spirit. You will find it listed in today’s Bible reading. The things you find there will be like a sweet fragrance for others, and they are a good testimony for Jesus.

Thought: Is there anything you need to clean out of your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a good witness for You. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LOVE OF GOD

Beng Teck groaned as the bowling ball hooked slowly toward the left and rolled into the gutter. "I wished I had not come with you to bowl today," he said, slumping beside his grandfather. "I did not even hit any pins."

Grandpa smiled and put his arm around Beng Teck's shoulders. "Some days are like that. I am not doing so well myself," he said. "Let us not worry about it."

"You are doing better than me," said Beng Teck. "I am sure bowling awfully today. I dislike it when I can't do anything right." He sighed. "I probably jinxed you, too," he added as Grandpa's bowling ball missed the headpin.

"Oh, no, you did not," said Grandpa. "I managed to miss the pins without any help from you."

As they changed shoes a little later, Grandpa asked, "How would you like to stop for a plate of char kway teow?" "Sounds good to me," replied Beng Teck. They started across the parking lot. "Neither of us bowled a great game today, but I really enjoyed it anyway," Grandpa said. "Do you know why?" Beng Teck looked at him and shook his head. "It's because I am with you!" Grandpa told him. "I do wish you could have bowled a good game-that would have been more fun for you. But what's important to me is just being with you... because I love you." He smiled at Beng Teck as they climbed into the car and fastened their seat belts. "There may be times when you get discouraged if you aren't the best student," continued Grandpa, "or the fastest runner or the most popular person or..." "Or can't bowl a decent game," suggested Beng Teck.

Grandpa chuckled. "That, too," he said, "but always remember that I love you and God does, too. God and I are alike in that we both love you for who you are, and not for what you can do." Grandpa started the engine. "Now," he said, "let's go get that yummy plate of char kway teow, okay?"

Beng Teck nodded. "Thank you for taking me bowling today, Grandpa," he said.

Thought: Do you ever feel like you can not get anything right and you are not worth loving?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me despite the mistakes I make. Help me though to be a better person, a better Christian. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DIFFERENT GIFTS

Kathy's mom smiled as she heard the first notes of a Bach piano concerto drifting in from the living room. Kathy would often continue playing long after her piano lesson is over.

When Kathy had stopped playing, she came into the kitchen for a cookie. "By the way, honey," said Mom, "Mrs. Lim called today. She would like you to play for the Junior Choir practice next week. I said I would ask you, but that I was pretty sure you would do it."

"Oh, Mom!" exclaimed Kathy in dismay. "I don't really want to. I will call and tell her tonight." Mom sighed. In spite of Kathy's ability and her love of music, she did not like to play in public. "I will do it when I am older," she often said. Now Kathy quickly changed the subject. "Lisa asked some of us over to play games tonight," she said. "May I go?" "Sure." Mom nodded.

When Kathy returned home from Lisa's that evening, she was quiet and seemed unhappy. "Did you have a good time?" asked Mom.

"I guess so," mumbled Kathy, "but do you know what? I saw the necklace I gave Lisa for her birthday in her room. It was still in the box high up on the closet shelf! When I gave it to her, she said it was pretty and that she liked it. If she really liked it, why would she put it away and not use it? I used two weeks of my allowance money to get it for her, and she doesn't even appreciate it!"

"I'm sorry. Maybe she will wear it later," Mom sympathized. She hesitated, then added, "Kathy, are you sure you are not treating God's gift the same way Lisa is treating your gift?"

"What do you mean?" asked Kathy.

"God has given you a gift in music, but... it is kind of like you have put it on a shelf," explained Mom. "You play the piano well, and you enjoy playing it at home, but like Lisa, you seem unwilling to take your gift off the shelf and use it anywhere else."

Kathy was silent for a while. "Wow! You're right," she admitted. "I will tell Mrs. Lim that I'll play for the Junior Choir whenever she needs me."

Thought: What gift has God given you? Do you use it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I think about the gifts You have given me. Then may I use them to bring a blessing to others and give glory to You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD IS LOVE

“Grandma, I love you, but I miss Mom so much,” said Judi as she entered the kitchen where Grandma was taking towels from the washing machine. “I wish she could have come home from the hospital today.”

“I know, honey, but she will be here tomorrow,” encouraged Grandma, “and just think – she will be bringing your baby brother home.” Grandma gave Judi a hug before she began to fold the towels.

“Yes, but...” Judi hesitated, then added, “Grandma, I’m worried about something.” She looked down at her feet. “I guess it’s nice to have a little brother, but I... I wonder if Mom will still love me. I mean – as much as she did before the baby came.”

“Why, of course she does, honey,” Grandma said promptly. “Why do you think she might not?” Judi frowned. “Oh, I don’t know. I just keep wondering about it.”

“Well, Judi, let me ask you something,” said Grandma. “You’ve been wanting to take a trip to Bedok where you used to live, right?”

Judi nodded. “Dad says we’ll go when the baby is a little older.” “Well, why do you want to go back there?” asked Grandma.

“Oh, Grandma, Su Ling lives there, and she is my very best friend!” said Judi. “You know that!”

“But you moved from there three months ago,” replied Grandma, “and you have new friends now.”

“But, Grandma, I did not forget Su Ling when I got new friends,” Judi protested. “Don’t you understand?”

“You mean you still love her?” asked Grandma. Judi nodded, and Grandma smiled. “Then why do you think your mom will stop loving you?” asked Grandma. “She has enough love for both you and your baby brother – just like you have plenty of love for both Su Ling and your new friends.”

Judi smiled, too. Then she gave Grandma a big hug. “I get it now,” she said. “I can’t wait to see my little brother.”

Thought: Do you sometimes wonder if your parents would love you more if you had no brothers or sisters? God gives parents plenty of love to go around to every family member. Best of all, God deeply loves each of His children!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to be jealous of any siblings I may have, but to love them. And thanks for the reminder that above all human love, Your love for me is the greatest! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

POWER ONLY FROM GOD!

“Can I skip Junior Worship this Sunday?” asked Ryan as he got up to help clear the dining table. “I did not have time to do my assignment this week, and I know Sister Leng really does not like it when that happens.”

“Well,” said Mother, “I am glad Sister Leng expects you to study on your own, but you should go to the class even if your assignment isn’t done.”

“I don’t know, Mom,” said Ryan doubtfully. “I have been thinking about quitting. I don’t have time to do all those assignments.”

Mother frowned as she turned on the radio. “This radio isn’t working,” she said after a moment. She turned the dial, then clicked the on/off button. “I wanted to listen to music while I clean up the kitchen.”

Ryan looked at the radio, too – clicking the switch and turning the dial. Then he noticed the cord lying loosely across the counter. “That’s the problem, Mom,” he said with a laugh. “The radio isn’t plugged in. You need power to run this thing, you know. No power, no music.”

“Oops!” Mother laughed, too, as she set the dial. “This radio reminds me of you,” she said as she began to run water into the sink.

“What do you mean?” asked Ryan.

“Well,” replied Mother, “like the radio, Christians need to be ‘plugged in’ to their power source so that they can live for God and witness for Him. They plug in by spending time studying the Bible and living in obedience to God. Worship, prayer, and fellowship with other Christians help, too. Yesterday you mentioned that it’s tough trying to be a witness to your friends at school, and that you feel like you’re the only Christian in your science class. I think the Bible study group can help you stay ‘plugged in’ so that you can be a real witness there.”

Ryan sighed, but he knew his mother was right. “Okay,” he said, “I will go.” As he left to get ready for the Bible study group, he looked at his mother suspiciously. “Mom, did you know all along that the radio was unplugged?” he asked.

Thought: Are you doing things that help keep you “plugged in” to your power source?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s reminder that certain things help keep me connected to You: reading the Bible, attending church and Sunday school, and being encouraged by other Christians and by prayer. May I learn to put You first in my life so I will have power to live a good Christian life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DON'T FORGET HIS WORD

“Please come to school next Friday! Please! Please!” begged Aaron, wildly waving a printed reminder of the special Family Day at kindergarten. “Of course I will come,” answered Mother, giving three-year-old Aaron a hug. “Janna can come, too. She does not have school next Friday.”

“Yippee!” hollered Aaron as he went off to play with his toys.

Janna smiled. “It will be nice to see Mrs. Tan again,” she said. “I still remember being in kindergarten. I had so much fun there.”

When Mother and Janna visited the kindergarten, they watched as Aaron and his classmates coloured a picture, listened to the story of “The Little Engine That Could”, and found things in the room that were blue.

After enjoying cookies and drinks, Mrs. Tan clapped her hands for attention. “It is time to line up to go to the playground,” she announced. She took two long ropes out of the closet. The boys lined up on one rope, and the girls on the other. Each child held tightly to the rope. Mrs. Tan took a rope in each hand and led the way out. “Be sure to watch for cars,” she reminded the children as they started across the parking lot. The three and four-year-olds made their way past several parked cars and a big yellow school bus.

“I remember that rope,” Janna told her mother as they followed the children. “I held on to it for dear life.” Then she laughed and added, “The playground seemed much farther away then, and walking past all the cars scared me.”

Mother smiled. “We may be older, but we still need to hang on to a rope,” she replied. Janna looked puzzled, and Mother laughed. “Not a literal rope,” she said, “but in a way, God’s Word is like a rope. We do not have to hold on to it to keep our salvation – the Bible says we are ‘kept by the power of God.’ But the Bible also tells us to hold fast to what is good. We do this by reading, memorizing, and obeying what God says in His Word.”

Thought: Forget not His Word!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know no one can plant the words in the Bible into my heart, except myself. No one can make me memorise it. No one can force me to think about what God says in His Word and apply it to my heart and life. I must make the choice to do it. It takes time and effort, but I will be rewarded. Teach me to dare to do it, for it will not be easy. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

PROUD OF POSSESSIONS?

Timothy picked up a shoe from the display table. “This is the pair I want, Mom,” he said. Mother looked doubtful. “They are the best,” insisted Timothy. “All the guys are buying this brand. The TV ad says this special sole reduces the pounding you get from the gym floor.” Timothy shut his eyes, imagining what his friends would say if he arrived at practice wearing these shoes. He looked hopefully at his mother, but she was moving away. “How about this one?” asked Mother, showing him a shoe almost like the one Timothy held.

“Yuck,” protested Timothy. “Nobody buys that brand.”

Mother spoke quietly. “I want to buy a pair of shoes you like, but you know I won’t pay a lot of extra money for a brand name.”

“But I do not want any other shoe,” wailed Timothy, thinking of his friends. He began to complain loudly.

Mother looked unhappy. “Then you can just continue wearing your old ones,” she said firmly, and she hurried him out of the store.

At dinner that night, Dad asked, “Who was at the door a while ago?” “It was John – that old show-off,” answered Timothy with a scowl.

“He just came to brag about his new skateboard. He got a new one only a few months ago, and now he bought another one just to impress the guys. It is disgusting.”

Mother looked surprised. “But weren’t you begging for a certain brand of shoe because you wanted to impress your friends?” she asked. Timothy stared at her. “Just think about it,” continued Mother gently. “Do you really need that particular brand of shoe, or are you – like John – trying to use possessions to build yourself up in the eyes of your friends?”

Timothy chewed his food slowly. It was true. He had wanted his friends to notice his shoes. He knew he was acting like some men he had learned about in Sunday school – his teacher had shown the class how the Pharisees had tried to impress others, too. “I guess John and I have a lot to learn,” he admitted.

Thought: Do you nag your parents for clothing with popular brand names?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to nag my parents for clothing with popular brand names. Or plead for certain things just because “everybody else” has them. Teach me to examine my heart. Teach me never to be proud of possessions but to be contented with a simple life. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE!

Debbie was unhappy that night. After a quiet dinner, she plopped down in the nearest chair. “Oh, I just dislike my class, Mom,” she said. “I don’t think there’s a single girl in my class who goes to church and tries to live right, except me. The other girls use bad language, and they talk about going places where I would never go. I sure need a Christian friend at school.”

Mother nodded. And she motioned Debbie to follow her as she opened the door to the storeroom which was unlit. She had a torch in her hand. “Come here and hold the torch for me,” she said. Debbie took it and turned it on as they entered the small storeroom. “If you can win some of those girls in your class to Jesus, you’ll have some Christian friends at school,” said Mother thoughtfully. “Do they know you’re a Christian?”

“Well... I have not said anything,” admitted Debbie. “I just know they would make fun of me.” She sighed. “It is so much easier to be a Christian in church.” She turned the torch toward the light fixture that had a blown-up bulb. Mom quickly screwed out the old bulb and replaced it with a new one. “Dear,” said Mom as they returned to the hall, “where was that torch needed – in the kitchen or in the storeroom?”

“In the storeroom, of course,” answered Debbie. “That is where it was dark.”

“That is right,” agreed Mother. “I was just thinking about what Jesus said – that we are to let our lights shine for Him – and our light is needed most in dark places, perhaps like the class you are in now.”

“I suppose you are right, Mom,” said Debbie with a sigh.

Mom gave her a hug. “Why don’t you give one of the girls a call and invite her to come to Sunday school and church with you?” she suggested. “Maybe she could come for tea, too, and you could spend the afternoon together. How does that sound?”

“Sounds pretty good,” decided Debbie. “I will try Karen first.”

Thought: Is it hard for you to speak up and live for Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please grant me the courage to “shine” for You every day. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BRAKES!

“That was really scary!” exclaimed Brian, and Chris nodded. A minor accident that afternoon was the main topic of conversation at the dining table. They had been in the car with mum, 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.

“I meant to have those brakes checked,” said Dad regretfully, “but I put it off. That was a mistake. I am just thankful so little damage was done.”

“Yeah,” agreed Chris. “It could have been a lot worse, couldn’t it? I’m finished... 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 shouldn’t be put off, the maintenance of our spiritual lives shouldn’t be put off, either. It’s 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, their neighbour. When Mark had shown them a video 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 should not watch it but when Mark slipped the tape into the DVD player, neither of them said anything. 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.

Thought: Are your “spiritual brakes” in good working order?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to pay close attention to the Bible, whether in Junior Worship or family and personal devotions. Please help me to obey Your Word, and memorise it too! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

DO YOUR BEST!

“Hi there, Jon. How was school today?” asked Mom cheerfully.

“Okay,” said Jon. He hesitated, then reluctantly handed her his report card.

“Oh, report card day,” said Mom. She looked it over. “Hmmm,” she murmured. “Most of these are not bad grades. In fact, if they are your best, they’re fine, but they have dropped since last time.” She looked at Jon. “Are you doing your best?” she asked. “This ‘D’ you got in Science, for example... that isn’t your best, is it? You’ve gotten ‘A’s’ and ‘B’s’ in that subject before.”

Jon knew he had not done his best. “It is boring,” he grumbled.

When Mom called Jon for dinner that evening, he shuffled slowly into the dining room. He was not eager to hear Dad’s opinion of his report card. “It’s too dark here,” complained Jon as he pulled out his chair. The light over the table was very dim. “I can not even see what we’re going to eat. Can’t we have brighter lights?” Dad grinned. “For some mysterious reason, women like to eat with the lights dimmed, son,” he said, “but we guys like to see what we’re eating, don’t we? We prefer the lights on at full power.” Mom laughed and reached for the light dimmer. The room brightened at once.

“That’s better!” declared Jon. “Dinner looks yummy!” After a nice meal, Jon grinned at his mother. “Okay. Now you can hit the dimmer switch again,” he teased.

Dad picked up Jon’s report card. “From looking at your grades, Jon,” he said, “I get the impression that the only thing you like to have working at full power is the dining room light.”

Mother nodded. “For some mysterious reason, kids sometimes seem to use little brain power when it comes to school work,” she observed. “Neither parents nor God are pleased if kids use the dimmer switch when using their brain power.”

“Right!” agreed Dad. “If the dining room lights wouldn’t go on very bright, that would be okay – we could enjoy our food anyway. And if these grades are the best you can do, that’s fine, too. On the other hand, if you’re able to do better, it’s time you buckle down and study harder.”

Thought: Are some subjects in school boring? Are some very hard?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder to try my best in school. Sometimes it is boring, sometimes it is hard. But Heavenly Father, teach me to always try my best in whatever I do, so I can do it for Your glory! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

REFRAIN FROM ANGER

Liz walked into the living room with her arms crossed and her jaw clenched. Mom looked at her and frowned. “Don’t tell me you’re still angry over what happened with Elsa,” she said.

“Yes, I am!” replied Liz. “Elsa shouldn’t have taken my seat in the school bus. She knows I always sit with Beth.”

“Maybe she does, but you shouldn’t be mulling over it for so long,” said Mom as she knelt down to scrub the carpet.

Liz stared at the stain her mother was vigorously trying to get rid of. She saw that the stain made by spilled grape juice was becoming wider by the second. “That stain is getting worse instead of better,” warned Liz. “Do you think it will ever come out?”

“I hope so,” said Mom. “Of course, it would have come out a lot more easily if I had cleaned it right after the juice was spilled.” Mom wiped the sweat from her brow and glanced up at Liz. “You should deal with your anger the way I should have dealt with this stain,” she added.

Liz frowned. “What do you mean?” she asked.

Mom continued to rub the purple blotch. “Time has allowed this stain to penetrate into the carpet fibres,” she explained. “Anger does something like that to your heart. If it’s permitted to stay and saturate there, it becomes increasingly difficult to remove. Over time, it often turns into bitterness and rage.”

Liz looked at the stain on the carpet and sighed. “Okay,” she agreed. “I don’t really see how I can help being angry with Elsa, but I’ll try to get over it.”

Mom smiled. “Right choice! Never let your anger turn into a fixed stain inside you,” she said. “Start by talking to God about it. Pray for Elsa, too. It’s hard to be angry with someone you’re praying for. With God’s help, you can learn forgiveness, and then you will let your anger go.”

Thought: Are you angry over something that happened a day ago, a week ago, or even a month or more ago?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that anger must not spread into other areas of my life. And that I must not get angry for the wrong reasons. And Heavenly Father, please teach me the beauty of forgiveness because I know You do not want anger to become a fixed stain on my heart. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY...

Sam got out his remote control jeep. Red lights flashed as he made the jeep pop a slope and race into the living room where his brother, Pete, was sitting on the couch. The jeep ran over Pete's foot. "Whoops!" said Sam as the jeep crashed, causing a piece of the motor to fall off. Sam tried to fix it - but it was no use. "Pete, can you fix my jeep?" he asked.

"Not again!" exclaimed Pete. "You are always breaking things!" But he held out his hand. "All right, give it here." In no time at all, it was good as new.

"Thanks," said Sam. "I sure wish I could fix things."

Sam put the jeep back on the floor and raced it into his bedroom. He plopped down on his bed. "I can not fix anything," he thought. Last week when the chain flew off my bike, Julie had to fix it. When my birdfeeder fell apart, Dad fixed it. I wish there was something I could fix.

Sam's Sunday school paper was on his night stand. It had a picture of Jesus healing a blind man. "Jesus fixed people, too," thought Sam. "He fixed the blind and the lame... and best of all, He "fixed" me so I can go to heaven." Sam sat up straight. "Jesus can help me learn to fix things!" So Sam prayed, asking God to help him fix something.

Sam went to the kitchen where Mom was making dinner. Instead of smiling as she usually did, she looked sad. He heard her sigh, and Sam wondered what was wrong. "What's the matter, Mom?" he asked.

"Oh, Sam," said Mom, "it is nothing for you to worry about. I've just had a difficult day, that's all."

Sam wrapped his arms around his mother and gave her a big hug. "Don't be sad, Mom," he said. "I love you. You're the best mom a kid could ever have!"

Mom wiped away the tears from her eyes and began to smile. "Thank you, honey," she said. "You have just made me the happiest mom in the whole world."

Sam smiled, too. God had answered his prayer and helped him fix something—Mom's sad heart.

Thought: What do you "fix" with your words? Try to "fix" broken people with kind words and deeds.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I use my words wisely to encourage and build others up, and not to say discouraging or unhelpful things. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ETERNAL LIFE !

Brian was sprawled on his bed with a book when his elder brother came into the room. "Guess what, Brian? Beng Seng just accepted the Lord as his Saviour today," said Sean. "Isn't that great?"

"I guess so," Brian answered halfheartedly. He frowned. "But what happens if he sins again? Or even you-what if you sin again?" he asked. "I mean... right now you're a good Christian, but what if you start doing things like lying or stealing? Would you still belong to God then?"

"You mean you think I don't sin?" Sean asked with a smile. "Wow! Go on thinking that!" Then he became very serious. "I am God's child forever," he said. "When I do something wrong, I am not in good fellowship with God until I confess and repent of my sin, but that doesn't mean I'm not saved any longer."

Brian still was not so sure. "I am going to wait till I am sure I can live right before I accept the Lord," he said, and none of Sean's arguments could change his mind.

One day, Brian's family learned that a boy from their block of flats had got into a fight in school and received public caning from the principal. "His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lim, are so upset," Mom told the boys. "They're hoping and praying the best for Bobby. I told them we would pray for him, too."

Sean nodded. Then he turned to his brother. "Hey, Brian, too bad Bobby's not a Lim anymore, isn't it?" he asked.

"What are you talking about?" asked Brian. "Didn't you hear what Mom said?" asked Sean. "Bobby did something terrible – he may not be a Lim anymore because of that."

"Sure fighting is bad, but he's still their son," said Brian. "They still love him, and they want him to come home."

Sean grinned. "I am just teasing you," he admitted, "but I am doing it to point out something. I want you to see that a Christian who falls into sins will always belong to God's family just as Bobby, he still always belong to the Lim family despite his offence at school. He can't enjoy the privileges of being God's child until he makes things right with God. God may have to discipline him, but he still is God's child."

Slowly, Brian nodded his head. He was beginning to understand...

Thought: Are you fearful that you may lose your salvation?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for assuring me of my salvation. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

REJOICE OR MOURN...

Ern Lee walked into the house and plopped down on the couch next to his dad. “Why so gloomy?” asked Dad as he put the newspaper down. “I tried to be friendly to Paul - the new boy in my class,” said Ern Lee,

“but he hardly talked to me. I asked if he wanted to sit with me for recess. He said, ‘No!’”

“Any idea why he acted that way?” asked Dad.

“Mike says Paul had to change schools because his dad is in jail and his mom had to sell their house” Ern Lee sighed. “I tried to be kind, like the Bible says, but it didn’t work.

“So Paul has a lot of things on his mind,” said Dad. “I know, but doesn’t he need a friend?” asked Ern Lee.

Dad folded the newspaper. “Remember the day you broke your leg?” he asked. “Your friends came over with some books and games to cheer you up, right?” Ern Lee nodded. “As I recall,” said Dad, “you weren’t much interested in them that day. Your medicine made you sleepy, but if you didn’t take it, your leg hurt so much! You didn’t feel good enough to do anything, so Mom asked the kids to come back when you were feeling better. Remember?”

Ern Lee nodded. “Yeah, that was a bad day,” he said.

“You just wanted to be left alone for a while,” said Dad, “and perhaps Paul may feel like that, too. With all the difficult things that have happened in his life recently, he must be hurting. Maybe he doesn’t have the energy to put towards making friends right now.”

“Maybe not,” agreed Ern Lee. As he went to his room and got ready to study, he had an idea. He took a piece of paper and wrote this note: “To Paul-I’m sorry if I bugged you today. I won’t do that anymore. How about if I be your silent friend? If you want to play with me, just let me know, okay? Ern Lee.”

The next morning, Ern Lee saw Paul standing alone on the school playground. Ern Lee walked over and handed him the note. “What is that?” asked Paul.

Ern Lee decided to remain a silent friend, so he just smiled. As he left, he glanced back over his shoulder. Paul was reading the note, and Ern Lee thought he saw a small grin appear on Paul’s face.

Thought: Are you glad when other kids do well - and sorry if they’re hurting?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to encourage others and to share in their joy as well as sorrow. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

JESUS WILL COME BACK FOR YOU!

“It seems like Mom and Dad have been away forever!” said David one day. “Why are they gone so long?”

Hannah smiled at her little brother. “Dad’s firm is opening an office in Bangkok, and we’re all going to move there. You know that, David,” she said. “Dad has to go ahead to attend some business meetings, and Mom went along to check things out.”

“They should not be gone too much longer now that they have found a house,” said Grandma, who was staying with the children while their parents were away.

“You know what David said today?” asked Hannah. “He said Dad and Mom left us for good and that they’re never coming back for us.” “You did not believe a word of that, did you?” asked Grandma.

Hannah shook her head. “Nope. They said they would return. They promised!” “That’s right,” said Grandma, “and when they get here, we need to be ready for them. Since you will be moving soon, there’s a lot that needs to be done.”

“Let us have everything in tip-top shape when they get back,” said Hannah, and everyone got busy. “Can you think of anyone else who’s getting a place ready for us?” asked Grandma. “Ah... who?” asked David. “I cannot think of anybody, either,” said Hannah.

“Jesus is doing that,” said Grandma, “and we don’t know when He’s coming, either, but we know He will come because He said He would.” She smiled. “We’re working hard to be ready when your parents return, and we should be working hard to be ready for the Lord’s return, too. We should be doing our best to live the way He wants us to live—loving and serving Him, getting along with one another, and telling friends about Jesus.”

“I wonder who will come first—Mom and Dad or Jesus,” said Hannah. She looked anxiously at Grandma. “I kind of hope Mom and Dad do,” she added, “and that we’ll all be together when Jesus comes!”

Thought: Are you aware that Jesus is coming back? He went to prepare a place in Heaven for His children, and when the time is right, He will come back for them.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I learn to be ready for the return of Jesus. Teach me to do the things that please Him, and to seek Him daily! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE A HAPPY CHILD!

“Maybe my stomach will feel better if I lie in a different way,” thought Sara as she very carefully rolled onto her side.

“Do you think you could handle a little chicken soup?” her father asked. Sara shook her head. She closed her eyes and tried again to get comfortable on the couch. “I’m sorry you have to miss Nicole’s party,” said Dad. “It’s alright,” murmured Sara, “I could invite Nicole to come over here next weekend. We could have a late birthday celebration—just the two of us.” Sara rolled over onto her back. “Dad, could you get me another blanket?” she asked. “I’m cold.”

“Sure, honey,” replied Dad. “Got one right here.”

Sara smiled as her dad covered her up all the way to her chin. “It is kind of nice having you to take care of me while Mom is gone to her meeting. When I feel better, can we play a game?”

“That is a good idea.” Dad sat on the end of the couch and rubbed Sara’s feet gently. “Know what, honey? I appreciate the fact that you’re not fussing about missing Nicole’s party. Her mom always fixes a big feast for you kids, and you always enjoy it.”

“Yeah,” said Sara, “but it sure doesn’t sound good today.”

“Well, you and I are having a feast right here at home,” said Dad.

Sara opened her eyes in surprise. “Not me,” she said, “and all you had was soup. That’s no feast.”

“When we have a cheerful heart, Sara, we have a continual feast,” responded Dad. “Did you make that up just because you think it will make me feel better?” asked Sara.

Dad shook his head. “That is from God’s Word,” he said. “I said that because you have a good attitude about getting sick and missing the party.”

“And that is a feast?” asked Sara. “A feast for our spirits,” said Dad. He covered Sara’s toes and turned out the light. “Now rest. Before you know it, you will be able to give your stomach a feast, too.”

Thought: Do you trust God even in times of disappointment?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to be quick to complain and fuss when things do not go as I plan, but to remain happy and trusting in You, come what may! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

ARE YOU CHANGED?

Ellen was pouting when she and her mother returned home from shopping one day. “What’s the matter, sourface?” asked her brother Jet.

“Oh, shut up!” Ellen growled. “Mom gets you everything you want, but she wouldn’t buy a thing for me. All I wanted was a ‘smile’ shirt.”

Jet howled with laughter. “A smile shirt on you?” he asked. “That would be a joke! Besides, who wears those things? But then, you never know what’s ‘in’ and what’s not!” he yelled when his sister hit him. He promptly hit her back.

Dad stepped in. “Break it up,” he said. “The place where I would like to see a smile is on your faces for a change.”

The next Sunday, Jet and Ellen got ready to go to Sunday school. They attended church regularly, and both had accepted Jesus as Saviour, but their parents were not Christians. “Why don’t you come to church with us today?” suggested Jet hopefully.

“Count me out!” exclaimed Dad. “You two fight constantly. If that is all the good your religion does to you, I want nothing to do with it.” Jet and Ellen did not know what to say.

“We have got to quit fighting,” Ellen told Jet later. “If we do not, Mom and Dad will never listen when we try to tell them how to be saved.”

Jet nodded. “Let us try really hard,” he said.

They did try hard, and they asked Jesus to help them. It was not long before their parents noticed the difference. A vase was broken one day, and instead of blaming each other, both Ellen and Jet admitted that they were at fault. Dad was amazed! “I never thought I would see the day!” he exclaimed.

The next Sunday, Dad surprised them all. “I do not suppose your mother and I are too old for church and Sunday school, aren’t we?” he asked.

“You mean... you will go?” Jet asked.

“If your mother would like to,” Dad replied, and Mom nodded. Jet and Ellen cheered. “Look!” Dad laughed. “That brought smiles to their faces!”

Thought: Do your actions and attitude show that you’re a Christian?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

FOE OR FRIEND OF JESUS?

Derek frowned as he listened to his Sunday school teacher. “Each person makes his own choice as to where he’ll go—to heaven or to hell,” said Brother Jack.

Derek was not so sure. “Who would ever choose to go to hell?” he asked. “If you fail to accept Jesus, who is the way to heaven, you are choosing your own way, which is the way to hell,” explained Brother Jack. Derek just shrugged off what his teacher said.

A few days later, Derek and his friend Eliot went to the Museum. While they were looking at the exhibits, the fire alarm rang. Immediately a security guard yelled, “Fire! Come this way—follow me!” He headed for a nearby door.

The people hurried after the guard, but Derek saw another door that was closer. “Let’s go this way. We can get out faster!” he said.

“No!” replied Eliot. “The guard knows the way to the fire escape. Come on!”

Derek hesitated. There may not even be a fire at all, he thought. Just then, another museum employee came along, making sure everyone was moving in the right direction to leave the building.

The next Sunday, Derek and Eliot told their teacher all about the excitement they had experienced. Brother Jack nodded. “Suppose you had not believed the guard and chosen to try a different way out, what would have happened?”

“We would have been in trouble... big trouble!” said Derek. “In fact, I almost did not follow the guard.”

“If you had failed to follow the guard to safety, you would have chosen to remain in the burning building, right?” asked Brother Jack. “Right,” agreed Derek. “It’s a good thing I followed him.”

“That’s an example of how failure to believe Jesus and follow Him to heaven is choosing to follow Satan to hell,” said Brother Jack. Derek was startled. As he thought about it, he had to admit that Brother Jack was right and he decided to have further discussion with him on following Jesus.

Thought: Which way are you heading—to heaven or to hell? The choice is yours.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I want to be sure I am a Christian. Help me to trust in You, and to always choose the right instead of wrong. And the best way to guarantee that is to obey the Bible! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE CAREFUL OF WHAT YOU SAY!

With his books scattered all around, Austin hunched over the library table. “May I sit here?” asked his sister Siew Lian. Austin nodded and kept reading. “Isn’t this rain yucky?” Siew Lian whispered, looking out the window. Austin jumped as a clap of thunder startled him. “Uh huh,” he muttered.

“Now leave me alone.”

“This rain will ruin our family night out,” Siew Lian complained. “Will you shut up?” Austin demanded loudly. The librarian gave him a stern look. “Can’t you see I’m working?” continued Austin, speaking softer, but with a threatening glare.

At the dinner table that evening, Siew Lian continued to complain.. She listed all the problems the rain had caused her. “I wish it never rained!” she declared.

“Places where it never rains are called deserts, dumb-dumb,” Austin told her. “That is what my report is about. Deserts are so dry that hardly any plant can grow there. The mesquite tree sometimes sends its roots hundreds of feet into the ground to search for water. When it does rain, the barrel cactus swells with water and then shrinks again as it uses the water. And the...”

“Austin told me to shut up at the library,” tattled Siew Lian, interrupting her brother. Austin kicked her under the table.

“Austin! You know better than to talk like that!” scolded Mom. “Well, she’s always a pest,” grumbled Austin.

Mom frowned. “Watch your tongue, Austin,” she said. “I have noticed that you have been having trouble with it lately.”

“Austin, maybe you need to be more like that mesquite tree and barrel cactus you told us about—maybe you need to ‘drink’ more deeply from God’s Word,” suggested Dad. “In fact, we should all have a thirst for His Word. It would be nice if we are as motivated to read the Bible as those desert plants are to get water. If our hearts are filled with God’s Word, good words would be coming out of our mouths and we would have a desire to get along with one another.”

Thought: What kind of words come out of your mouth?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that words reflect what is in my heart. May I read more of Your Word, and think about it, and obey it. As Your Word fills my heart, good thoughts, words, and actions will come out. Please help me Heavenly Father. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

GOD IN CHARGE OF ALL

Siew Lian secretly gloated because her parents had pointedly reminded her brother Austin of his need to learn to control his tongue. “Austin is always nasty to me,” she complained aloud. She looked out the window. “He’s almost as bad as the rain!” she added. “I hate rain! I wish...” Her words were interrupted by Dad’s voice.

“As for you, Siew Lian,” said Dad, “you need to quit complaining so much. Remember what Austin said? Places where there is little or no rain are deserts.” The smug, self-satisfied look disappeared from Siew Lian’s face. “Without rain, you wouldn’t have enjoyed the curry chicken we had for dinner tonight,” Dad added.

“Or the apple pie we’re going to have for dessert,” said Mom. “But rain always ruins our plans,” whined Siew Lian. “It does not ruin God’s plans,” said Dad.

Mom nodded. “It is not always easy to accept everything God has in store for us,” she said, “but I think those desert plants have a lesson for you, too. Dad reminded us that we all need to ‘drink’ deeply from God’s Word, remember? When we do that, it helps us to accept the ‘rain’ that falls in our lives, as well as the rain that falls outside.”

“Rain in our lives?” asked Siew Lian. “What do you mean?”

“I mean the disappointments and difficult circumstances that we all must face at one time or another,” replied Mom. “We need to accept what God allows to happen to us, and realise that He is working all things for our good.”

In Romans 8:28, the Bible says, ‘And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.’ Whenever it rains - whether it is literal rain coming from the sky or difficult times in our lives - we need to remember that God is in control and knows what is best. When we remember that God uses rain to bring good things, we can stop complaining.

Thought: Do you have a lot of difficulties? Turn to God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s reminder that You truly do know what is best for me. Sometimes You use rain or difficult times to bring good things, so teach me to trust in You whatever the situation. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

NEVER JUDGE BY LOOKS

“I cannot believe it!” Breanna exclaimed as she kept an eye on the news channel while setting the table for dinner. “This movie star has everything going for her. She’s gorgeous, she’s talented, she’s rich, she’s famous...”

“And she is wasting her life by using drugs-and now she has been arrested,” said Breanna’s mother, shaking her head. “How sad!”

“If only I looked like that!” said Breanna as she watched Jennifer Taylor being led away in handcuffs. “Don’t forget that looks can be deceiving,” said Mom. She opened the refrigerator. “Oh, Breanna, please go down to the larder and get a jar of Grandma’s pickled lettuce. We’ll have some for dinner.”

“Okay,” said Breanna. She soon returned with a jar of deep brown lettuces. “Just look at the colour of these, especially the juice!” she exclaimed as she held up the jar at a sunny window. “I wish I had a sweater this colour.”

Mom laughed. “They do look beautiful,” she agreed. Breanna handed the jar to her mother. “Oh, no,” said Mom as she opened it. “This lid is not sealed. We had better not eat them. They may be spoiled!”

“But they look just fine,” said Breanna.

“They may be okay, but when the lid is not sealed, bacteria can get in. I am not going to take a chance,” answered Mom. She poured the contents down the garbage disposal. “If they are spoiled, they could cause serious food poisoning.”

“Wow!” said Breanna. “Then I am glad you noticed that the seal was broken.” You know, love, that jar of pickled lettuce reminds me of Jennifer Taylor,” said Mom. “She’s beautiful and talented and her life appears perfect to many people, but Satan has spread poison to destroy her life.”

Breanna sighed. “I guess you are right, Mom,” she said.

“Appearances can deceive us,” said Mom. “Things can look good to us when they are really not good at all, and people can, too. On the other hand, someone who is not attractive may be a fine person. We need to try to see what people are really like and not judge them by their appearance.”

Thought: Are you careful not to judge kids by what they wear or how many toys they have?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to judge by outward appearances. Also, not whether friends are smart or good-looking but to see if they are honest, if they are kind, and if they obey their parents. You do not judge by appearance, and You do not want me to do that, either. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

EVERY WORD IN THE BIBLE IS TRUE!

“Are you ready for the test on evolution tomorrow?” asked Joshua as he and his friend Dan were walking home.

Dan sighed. “I guess so,” he replied. “I can explain evolution the way Mr. Lee did, but I do not believe it. I believe God created everything.”

“Mr. Lee says he believes the Bible, too, but he just doesn’t think God really created everything,” said Joshua. He shrugged. “What’s the big deal? What does it matter anyway?” As another boy rode by on a bike and waved, Joshua scowled. “There goes Ben. That’s one guy I’ll never believe again!” he exclaimed. “You know what Ben did? He promised me that when he got a new bike, I could buy his old one. After he finally got a new one, he told me he had sold the old one to Jeff for twice as much as he had said I could have it for.”

“Well, you cannot blame Ben for wanting the extra money,” said Dan.

“Maybe not, but I talked to Jeff last week, and he said he paid the same amount I was going to pay! Ben’s been bragging to everybody about his new bike, says his father paid big bucks for it. I saw his cousin yesterday, and he says his dad gave Ben the bike for doing some work, and it is not new, either!” Joshua frowned. “I do not think I’ll ever believe anything Ben says. If he lies like that about one thing, he’ll lie about other things, too.”

“Wouldn’t that be true about God and the Bible, too?” asked Dan. “God?” asked Joshua. “What do you mean?”

“Well, the Bible is God’s Word, and the very first verse says, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,’” replied Dan. “The whole chapter is about God making everything. There are many other verses in the Bible, too, that say God created everything. If they’re lies, how can we believe anything in the Bible?”

Joshua looked thoughtful. “So... if we are going to believe in the Bible and God at all, we have got to believe He created everything?” he asked.

“That is the way I see it,” agreed Dan. “I think I will put that somewhere on my test paper tomorrow, too.”

Thought: Do you believe the Bible? All of it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to remember that You created everything, just like the Bible stated. To believe otherwise is to say that You do not always tell the truth! Teach me never to believe in the lie of evolution! In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE PREPARED

Philip felt his stomach turning. Today was the day of the spelling competition, and he was representing his class to compete against the best spellers in all the other classes of kids his age. “Mom,” he said frantically, “you know that book my teacher gave me to help me get ready for the competition? I’ve got to study it, and I cannot find it. Have you seen it?”

“No,” said Mom. “Where did you use it last?”

“Actually, I’ve hardly even looked at it,” admitted Philip. “It always seemed like there was plenty of time, but now all of a sudden, the day is here.” “Well,” said Mom, “I think you are a little late if you have not studied by now. It is...”

“Mommy!” Philip’s little sister Phoebe called from her room. “Can you help me with my shoes?”

“I’m sorry, Philip,” said Mom, “but I cannot help you search for the book right now. Maybe Dad can help you.”

Philip looked at his father, who was finishing a cup of coffee. “I have got to get to the office, so I do not have much time,” said Dad, “but let us give your room one quick check before I go.” As they headed for Philip’s room, Dad asked, “Do you remember what Pastor preached on last Sunday?”

“I already thought of that, Dad,” said Philip. “He talked about how awful it feels to be unprepared for something important.”

“Right,” said Dad, “and especially how dreadful it would be not to be ready when Jesus returns.” He looked through the books on a shelf in Philip’s room. “Well, I do not see the book you’re looking for, but take comfort in the fact that being unprepared for a spelling competition is not as important as standing unprepared before God on Judgment Day,” added Dad.

“Yeah. I am sure that even the funny feeling I have in my stomach over the spelling competition can’t compare to that,” Philip said. “I guess a lot of people think they have plenty of time to get ready to stand before God, don’t they?”

“I am afraid so,” said Dad. “I am afraid many will wait until it is too late, and when they meet God face to face, they will be caught unprepared.”

Thought: Have you been unprepared for something important? Do not be unprepared for the Second Coming of Jesus!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be busy in service and witness for You while waiting for the Lord Jesus’ return. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HAVE COMPASSION

“Uncle Bob makes me so mad!” said Jana after talking to her cousin for a few minutes. “That was Deanne on the line and she was crying. Uncle Bob has gone off drinking with his buddies again.”

Dad looked up from his newspaper. “I feel sorry for Uncle Bob and for all of them,” Dad said with a sigh.

“Sorry for Uncle Bob?!” exclaimed Jana. “Why feel sorry for him? Uncle Bob is selfish and... m-m-mean - especially when he drinks!”

“He hasn’t always been a heavy drinker,” said Dad. “We need to pray for him. He’s a slave to alcohol.” “He could get free if he wanted to! He just...” Jana was interrupted by a banging sound. “What is that?” she asked. “I don’t know,” Mom said, “We better find out.” She went to the door and opened it. A strange sight met their eyes: their dog Buffy had a plastic pitcher over his head, and he was running around wildly, bumping into everything.

Mom called the frightened dog and gathered him into her arms. She calmed him down while Dad gently twisted the pitcher and pulled it from Buffy’s head. “He must have stuck his nose in the pitcher to see what the water tasted like and then got stuck,” said Dad.

“Poor baby!” crooned Jana. “Your curiosity almost killed you. You could have suffocated.”

Dad nodded. “What if we’d just scolded Buffy and told him how foolish he was? Would that have helped him?” he asked. Jana frowned. “Of course not,” she said.

“Scoldings won’t help Uncle Bob either, he’s like Buffy,” said Dad. “Curiosity got Buffy into trouble, and I think that’s what got Uncle Bob into trouble, too. He wanted to see what it was like to have a drink or two. Now he’s caught in a trap so powerful he can’t break loose. We’ll help his family, but only God can deliver him from his habit.”

Mom nodded. “Do not hate Uncle Bob, Jana. He needs your compassion and love,” she said. “Let us put him at the top of our prayer list.”

Thought: Do you know people who are caught in the trap of sin-alcohol, drugs, gossip, cheating, or some other thing? Pray for them...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me that for people stuck in sin, the only way is to seek Your grace and help. Help me to be compassionate and pray that they will look to Jesus for help to break away from their bad habits. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LOVE NOT THE WORLD

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Jacelyn as she and her parents walked into the house. They could hardly believe their eyes. They saw pink yarn wound around the legs of the dining table and chairs in the kitchen and dining room.

It did not take long to figure out the culprit responsible for the mess. Patches, Jacelyn’s kitten, had to be the culprit. “But how could one little kitten make such a mess?” groaned Jacelyn. “And look at my yarn! I just bought it!”

“I’m sorry, Jacelyn,” said Mom, “but it looks like you will lose most of it. We might as well get the scissors and start cutting.”

“Wait,” said Dad. “That’s a lot of yarn to waste. Let me try to untangle it.” With that, he went to work. Jacelyn and Mom helped, too. It was difficult, but they finally managed to roll the yarn into a ball.

“Well,” said Jacelyn, gazing doubtfully at the yarn, “I am glad we could save this, but it sure doesn’t look like it did when it was new. And see that?” She pointed to a frayed section of the yarn. “A lot of the threads are all pulled apart.”

Mom nodded. “I guess the kitten’s claws did that,” she said. Jacelyn sighed. “It won’t ever be quite the same again, but I will still use it,” she decided. “Tangled threads,” murmured Dad. “It is kind of like what our speaker talked about last Sunday, isn’t it? Only that was worse - he talked about tangled lives.”

Mom nodded. “He had a lot of stories about children - even Christian ones - who messed up their lives when they rebelled against their parents and against God and became entangled with the world and Satan’s way of living.”

“Like kids who are proud or stubborn or do worse things,” Jacelyn remembered.

“Yes,” agreed Dad, “and others who harm their bodies with alcohol or other sinful activities. God still loves them. He can still use them if they come back to Him, but a life of sin often leaves scars that never completely go away.”

Thought: Is Satan trying to get you entangled in some kind of sin?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You know that at times, I am tempted to follow what the world does. Help me please to keep my life untangled from the world and Satan, so that I could enjoy Your wonderful plan for me. And if I am already caught up in some wrong activity, please help me stop. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

LEARN TO FORGIVE

“Mom! Keri took my magazine without asking!” Shawn called from his bedroom.

“Shawn never shares anything, and he always says no when I ask to borrow something!” Keri’s shout followed her brother’s.

Mom sighed and headed for the room. Shawn and Keri seemed to be constantly arguing and tattling on each other. “Do you think your attitude pleases God?” Mom had asked them often. “You have to learn to work out your problems and forgive each other and get along.” But the children kept on tattling, and now Mom had finally had enough. “I am tired of all this!” she declared. “I am going to give each of you a notebook. Instead of telling me all your complaints, write down anything the other one does that bothers you. After dinner this Friday, Dad and I will look at your lists and give out any punishment we feel is necessary.”

All right! thought Shawn. Keri’s going to get it now! He did not have to wait very long before he saw his sister playing with his cars without asking. He ran to get his notebook. All week he watched, and by Friday, Shawn had listed twenty-three things his sister had done.

Just before dinner that day, Keri came to him. “I’ll show you my list if you will show me yours,” she said.

“Okay,” agreed Shawn. “Let us see it.”

Shawn was surprised to see almost thirty things on Keri’s list. He read, “Shawn slammed the door in my face... Shawn messed up my doll house today... Shawn called me names.” And worst of all, “Shawn hit me when I wouldn’t give him some of my candy.”

“Oh, no!” moaned Shawn. “If Mom and Dad see this, I am really going to be in trouble!” Keri was busy reading Shawn’s list. “I am, too,” she said. “Shawn, I am sorry I did all these things.” She gave him a pleading look. “Me, too,” said Shawn. Then his face brightened. “Hey, let us tear up these lists,” he suggested. “We can tell Mom and Dad we decided being a tattletale is not as much fun as we thought it was! Okay?” Keri eagerly nodded.

Thought: Do you like to say bad things about your siblings or others? Do you think it pleases God? Learn to forgive!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to forgive others, just as You have forgiven me. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

BE CONSIDERATE AND KIND

“Kate makes me so mad!” Tammy fumed as she returned home from Kate’s house. The two friends had argued, and Tammy thought of some things she wished she had said to Kate, and they were not nice. As soon as she got home, she scribbled an angry note to her friend, marched to the corner mailbox, and dropped it in. “That will fix her,” she thought.

But as Tammy began to walk back to her home, she remembered what a good friend Kate had been for a long time. “I should not have sent that letter,” she thought. “Maybe I can get it back.” Turning around, she ran to the mailbox. She pulled open the slot and tried to retrieve the letter but was not able to do so. “Oh, no,” she whispered. “It’s gone for good.”

When Tammy got home, she sat down on a stool at the kitchen counter and told her mother what she had done. “I do not know why I sent that letter. I was so mad, I was not thinking straight. How can I get it back?”

“Sorry, honey,” she said, “but you cannot.” “Maybe I could wait for the mailman to pick up the mail tomorrow,” suggested Tammy. “He could find it and give it back to me.” Mom shook her head. “No, once we mail something, we cannot get it back. No one can interfere with the mail. You should have thought twice before you sent that letter.”

“But, Mom,” wailed Tammy, “then what can I do?” Mom hugged her tearful daughter. “Call Kate and apologize. Why not invite her over to play?” Tammy blew her nose. “Okay,” she agreed. “I can do that.”

“And, honey,” said Mom, “always remember that just like you cannot take back the letter, we cannot take back any part of our lives.” “What do you mean?” asked Tammy. “God has given us a certain number of days in which to live,” Mom said. “He lets us choose the words we say, the thoughts we think, and the things we do. So we must take care that our thoughts, the words we say and the things we do, will bring honour and glory to God.”

Thought: Are you careful about the things you do and the words you say? Have you done something mean when you were angry?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be godly in my thoughts, actions and speech. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

HAVE YOU PERSONALLY ACCEPTED CHRIST?

“Of course I am a Christian! My mom and dad go to church all the time,” Mark told his friend Brad. “Dad’s a leader in church, and Mom teaches Sunday school.” He paused, then added, “Besides, last week they both gave testimonies about when they were saved.”

“So what?” retorted Brad. “That does not make you a Christian.” “It does,” insisted Mark.

After overhearing part of the conversation the boys were having on the sofa, Mark’s mother decided she needed to have a talk with her son.

Brad went home and Mark started to do something to his bike. Then he told mom “I was tightening a screw on the seat of my bike,” he said, “and the screwdriver slipped. My finger got cut!” He held out his hand.

Mom inspected the finger. “That does not feel very good, does it?” she said sympathetically. “I will get you a Band-Aid.” She went to the medicine cabinet, took out a Band-Aid, tore it open, and carefully put it on her own finger. “There... a little bandage to keep the dirt out of the cut,” she said. “I hope it makes you feel better, too.”

Mark stared at his mother. Then he laughed. “Mom! I guess you’re just not thinking!” he exclaimed. “It is my finger that’s hurt. I am the one who needs the Band-Aid.”

“Oh?” Mom looked at him. “You mean the bandage on my finger does not help yours?” “Of course not!” exclaimed Mark.

“Well,” replied Mom, “didn’t I hear you telling Brad a while ago that because Dad and I are Christians, you are one, too?” Mark nodded uncertainly. “We took the cure for sin – we accepted Jesus as our Saviour,” continued Mom. “If that makes you a Christian, too, then I think this Band-Aid on my finger should also take care of your cut.”

Mark stared thoughtfully at his mother. “I guess you’re right,” he admitted. “I need to trust Jesus for myself, don’t I?”

“Yes, you do,” agreed Mom as she took out another Band-Aid to put on Mark’s finger. “Want to talk about it some more?” Mark nodded.

Thought: Are your parents Christians? Do you come from a Christian home? That does not make you a Christian!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the reminder that the real question for my salvation is - have I accepted Jesus as my own personal Saviour? If not, I am not a Christian. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

SING OF GOD'S GOODNESS!

Joe's parents agreed to let him keep either a bird or a guinea pig if he would care for it properly. On one hand, he wanted a bird because it would be cool to have a pet that sings, but he also wanted to hold and play with a guinea pig. It was a hard decision, but he finally decided on the guinea pig. "I am going to name it Rascal," said Joe, and that was what he did.

Each day, Joe checked Rascal's food and water and spent time petting him. Before long, Rascal scrambled to Joe whenever Joe put him on the floor. "I'm glad I got Rascal! He's fun to play with," said Joe. With a grin, he added, "Now if he could just learn to sing, we would be all set."

One morning Joe rushed into the kitchen. "Mom! Come to my room," he exclaimed. "There is something you have got to see!" Setting the frying pan to one side, Mom followed Joe to his room. "Listen!" said Joe as Rascal began making chirping and whistling sounds. "He is singing! I thought about getting a bird because it would sing, and now Rascal is singing! What do you think of that?"

"I am impressed!" declared Mom. "I did not know guinea pigs could sing. What a sweet sound!" She smiled at Joe. "I wonder if they all make sounds like that?"

"I do not know." Joe shrugged. "I guess he must be happy!"

"He sounds happy to me," Mom agreed, "and I noticed he began singing when you stepped into the room. Do you think he's singing to thank you for your care and to express affection in his own way?" Joe's eyes lit up with the thought. "Yeah, I guess," he replied, pleased with the idea.

"It makes you feel pretty good, doesn't it, to think you're taking care of all his needs, and he's happy and contented and showing his gratitude?" Joe nodded. "You know, I believe God is pleased when we sing praises to Him, too," Mom continued. "King David of the Bible - whom God called a man after His own heart - wrote many songs of praise."

Joe smiled and nodded. "I guess we should be like Rascal," he decided, "and sing praises to thank God for how He cares for us."

Thought: Do you appreciate all the care God gives you? Do you thank Him for the many blessings He has provided—food, clothes, toys, family, friends, protection?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes I forget to thank You. I am grateful for forgiveness, new life in Christ, and a sure future in heaven! Teach me to sing praises to You, even right out loud! In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

TOUGH TIMES...

Scott came into the living room carrying Snowflake, who purred and snuggled comfortably in his arms. "I am so glad you let me keep this kitten, even though we already have two cats," he told his parents. "Snowflake is the only one that will let me pick her up and carry her anywhere I go." He sat down on the sofa, and Snowflake curled beside him. "See? She will just rest here, nice and quiet beside me, as long as I want her to."

Mom smiled at them. "Well, Scott," she said, "I guess that is because you have been so gentle with her ever since she was tiny."

"I know." answered Scott, "I treat Jemimah the same way but if I pick her up, she howls and cries the whole time I hold her. She's so nervous and jittery. She just waits for a chance to run off." Dad nodded. "She is that way with all of us," he said.

"Maybe that's because she had a deprived 'kittenhood' before we got her," suggested Mom. "She was not treated well when she was little, and I do not think she ever got over it. We have taken good care of her all the years we have had her, but she has never learned to trust us completely."

"And that Tangerine!" added Scott. "I will never try to pick him up! I do not want to be scratched!"

Dad put his newspaper down. "These three cats remind me of the ways people react to God's 'picking them up' and placing them where He wants them," he said slowly. "Think about it - which one do you think you are like?" Scott looked at Snowflake, still lying peacefully beside him, and grinned. "I hope I am like Snowflake," he decided, "content to be wherever God puts me."

Mom nodded. "That is how we should be, but I am afraid that, once in a while, we react like Jemimah - faithless and nervous about everything that happens or like Tangerine - too full of ourselves."

"We can all pray for grace to be content where God has placed us," said Dad with a smile. "We are happy as we trust Him in both the pleasant periods of our lives and in the difficult circumstances we must face."

Thought: Has God placed you in a difficult spot - such as a broken home, a class you do not enjoy?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help to trust in You whenever I face difficult circumstances. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ISRAEL IS TAKEN CAPTIVE

It was a very sad and tragic day when God's people, the Jews, were captured by the Babylonians and carried to faraway Babylon. Babylon was about 900 km away from Israel. There were no trucks or trains in 605 B.C. You can imagine that as slaves, they had to walk all the way. Even Jehoiakim, king of Judah, was taken prisoner by the Babylonians.

This happened not because Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon was very great or more powerful than God. It was God who delivered Israel into Nebuchadnezzar's hands as a just punishment, because Israel had disobeyed Him many times. God also allowed Nebuchadnezzar to take away some of the vessels in the Temple to the treasure house of his idol.

This happened because Israel had broken the covenant made with God, which promises blessing if Israel obeys God and punishment if they disobey and turn away from Him. Our God is a Thrice Holy God and serious about punishment. Let us be careful how we live our lives. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31)



God's people as prisoners
traveling from Judah to

Thought: The fear of God will keep us from sin.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know that You keep all Your promises. I pray that I will not take Your commands lightly. Help me to have godly fear and obey You always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

STANDING BEFORE THE KING

King Nebuchadnezzar ordered his servant, Ashpenaz, to bring some of the children from Israel to live in his palace. He wanted to make these children true Babylonians to serve in his empire. Their duty was to study the Babylonian language and culture. There were special requirements for choosing them.

The children had to be healthy, well-liked, knowledgeable, and clever. They also had to be mature beyond their age, and be able to present themselves before a king. They had to approach the king respectfully. Not just anyone but only those chosen could come before the king.

Among those chosen were Daniel and his three friends – Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. They would have the next three years to prepare themselves to stand before the king.

Dear friend, if an earthly king demands such respect and preparation, how much more the Almighty God, who is King above all kings! When we approach God in prayer, during our Quiet Time, or in worship, are our hearts prepared to meet Him reverently? God has chosen you to be one of the privileged few to approach Him!

QUESTION:

Why are you able to approach the King of kings directly?
Write 1 Peter 3:18.

For _____



Thought: I can stand before the King of kings, because Christ suffered for my sins once for all.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of salvation in Christ Jesus that allows me to pray to You directly. Teach me how to pray according to Your will. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PURPOSE IN YOUR HEART

King Nebuchadnezzar gave Daniel and his three friends Babylonian names. Daniel was called Belteshazzar, and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Part of their training programme to become Babylonians, was to eat the food and wine from King Nebuchadnezzar's table. However, Daniel and his friends rejected the food and wine; and requested for vegetables and water instead.

What was wrong with the king's food? Is it wrong to enjoy expensive and delicious food?

The problem with the food was not because it was rich, but because the Babylonians ate food offered to idols. They also ate unclean animals, like pigs, which God had forbidden the Jews to eat. Daniel and his friends were afraid to sin against God, so they resolved in their hearts not to defile themselves by eating from the king's table.

This decision was fraught with danger as it was an insult to the king. He could decide to throw them into the dungeon or even behead them but Daniel and his friends feared God and not Man.



Dear friend, to 'purpose in your heart' means to decide to live for God and to stick to it. Your heart is convicted and firm about the decision made for God. No matter how your friends may persuade and tempt you, or threaten to leave you, you will not be moved! Like a strong tree with deep roots that stands firm in different seasons, no matter how things may change you will also stand firm, deeply rooted in the Word of God and His promises. Nothing will move you. Daniel's desire was to please God. Do you have this desire too?

Thought: To 'purpose in my heart' is to make godly decisions and to ask God to help me stick to it no matter what the cost.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray for the conviction and courage to always stand firm on Your Word, that my faith will not waver in times of temptation. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD BLESSED DANIEL AND HIS FRIENDS

Melzar, prince of the eunuchs, did not want Daniel and his friends to go hungry and look sick before the king, or else his life would be in danger. However, despite his persuasion to get them to eat the king's food and drink, Daniel and his friends stood firm. They had 'purposed' not to eat food that was offered to idols and of unclean animals.

Daniel proposed a test. He and his friends would eat pulse (a type of bean) and water for ten days, after which Melzar would examine them if they were any worse off compared to the others who ate the king's food and drink. Then, Melzar could do what he wanted with Daniel and his friends.

God was with Daniel and his three friends because after ten days, they were discovered to be fairer and healthier than all the other children who ate the portion of the king's meat. God promises us that He will honour those who honour Him. God blessed Daniel and his friends because they sincerely sought to please Him alone.

Here is a similar test you might meet. Should you eat food offered to idols? Which is the correct response if an adult asks you to eat the food? Tick the correct box.

- "Oh... okay, thank you auntie."
- "Sorry auntie, I'm a Christian and cannot eat food offered to idols."
- "Thanks auntie, I'll just have a little bit."

Thought: When we honour the Lord, He will also honour us. (1 Samuel 2:30)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to stand up for You when put to the test. Help me to always bravely take Your side, no matter what the cost. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

10 TIMES BETTER

Not only were these four children of Judah brave and spiritually strong to stand up for their God, they were also admirable in other ways. Three years had passed, and now all the young captive Jews were called to stand before King Nebuchadnezzar.

When the king spoke to them, he examined them in matters of wisdom and understanding. This is probably like going for a major exam after three years of rigorous preparation. However, there would be no ‘Ten-Year Series’ or exam tips to prepare them for what the king would quiz them. We are not told specifically what the topics are, but it could cover a wide range! From politics, to governing an empire, to elements of war – King Nebuchadnezzar could have chosen any topic to examine them on, and they were just teenagers at that time!

What was the result of the exam? The king found that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were far superior to their peers. In fact, he even found them ten times better than all the old magicians and astrologers that he usually consulted. They were not twice better but ten times better! What a great testimony, especially to all who knew they did not eat the king’s food and drink. Who do you think made them so gifted?

Read the answer from Daniel’s own words in Daniel 2:21 and fill in the blanks below:

And he changeth the times and the seasons: he _____ kings,
and _____ up kings: he _____ _____ unto the wise,
and knowledge to them that know understanding:

Dear child, please remember that obeying and honouring God does not guarantee you would do well in school or exams. It is not a formula for success in our academic life. Rather, it is a formula to please God, and to know we follow His gracious will for us when we obey and honour Him.

Thought: I am weak, but God is mighty and strong. He can use me to glorify His name before men.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise You for You are the one living and true God. There is none like You. Though I be weak and frail, I pray that You would use me to bring glory to Your name. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S DREAM

Have you ever had a bad dream? King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that disturbed him so much, he became deeply troubled and could not go back to sleep. He immediately called for his advisers – magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and the Chaldeans, who were known to be very wise – to tell him what he dreamt.

Kings have the power to summon their subjects at any time, even in the dead of the night. Imagine you were woken from your sleep to hear Nebuchadnezzar's words. Was the king mad? How could they know what he had dreamt? Far from being mad, he probably wanted to use the dream to test the capability of these old advisers.

They asked the king to tell them the dream, so that they could tell him the meaning but Nebuchadnezzar refused and said, "The thing is gone from me," meaning his words had gone from him. He would not take it back. They had to tell him both the dream and the interpretation. These old advisers were helpless and told the king it was impossible for any man. This made the king even angrier.

This sets the scene for Daniel's next big meeting before the king. All this is recorded for our benefit to learn that **what is impossible with man, is possible with God**. The old advisers only looked to themselves and were afraid of the difficult task but Daniel was not afraid. He did not look to himself or any wise man for the solution, **but to God alone**.

Thought: God's wisdom is higher than man's wisdom.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to always look to You for help and wisdom and not depend on man or self. Man will always disappoint and fail, but Heavenly Father You will never fail. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

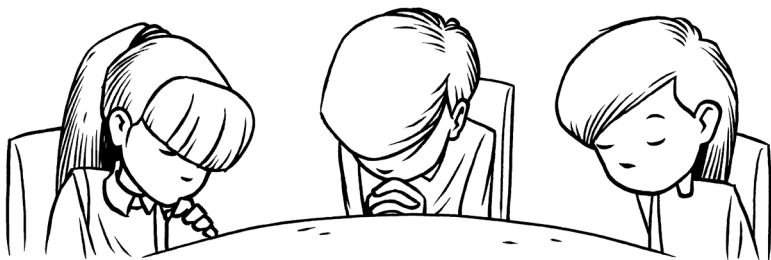
PRAYER AND GOOD CHRISTIAN FRIENDS

The king was so furious that he issued a command to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. This included Daniel and his three friends who were not there at that time. Daniel responded wisely when Arioch, captain of the king's guard who was tasked to kill all the wise men, came for him. He asked for the reason for the king's hasty decision. Then, Daniel went before the king to ask for more time to tell him both his dream and the interpretation of it.

Remember what Daniel's gift was? In Daniel 1:17, we read he was given understanding in all _____ and _____. Despite this, Daniel did not take his gift for granted. He knew that only God could help him.

Daniel went to share with his good friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah what had happened. They prayed together, seeking God for His mercies to spare them from the king's judgment. There is a great difference between the responses of the worldly old advisers and Daniel and his friends. The world will not seek the God of Heaven but as Christians, we are to look up to the God of Heaven in prayer, like what Daniel and his friends did. We are to recognise that we are helpless on our own, and desire for God's mercies and help.

Notice also that Daniel did not shoulder this great burden alone. He had good friends whom he knew he could confide in and pray together. Do you have Christian friends that you can share your concerns and pray with? If not, I encourage you to get involved in Christian fellowship whenever you can, and pray for God to bless you with good Christian friends. It is a great blessing to have a close group of Christian friends.



Thought: Daniel prayed for God's help, so must I.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me about the importance of praying for self as well as for others. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THANKING GOD FOR ANSWERED PRAYER

A wonderful thing happened! The dream and its meaning were shown to Daniel in a night vision. Daniel immediately praised and thanked God. Without God's help, there was no way he could know the king's dream. It was a miracle – God doing that which is impossible for man! Daniel gave all honour and glory to God.

What about you? Are you quick to praise and thank God for answered prayer? We are usually quick to ask for help but slow to give thanks after we have received the help. We might even forget that God was the one who gave us what we asked for, and took credit for it. For example, we may pray for God to help us through the exams, or to serve Him better in church. However, when success and man's praises come along, it is easy to forget God was the one who enabled. Daniel was quick to praise and thank God for His help. He took no credit but understood that the source of his wisdom and might was from God and not from himself (verse 22).

Write a prayer to give thanks to God for answered prayer in one area of your life.

Father in Heaven, Thank You for

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Thought: Count your blessings, see what God has done.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for hearing my prayers. Help me to remember to give thanks for answered prayer and the blessings You have given me. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO GIVE GOD GLORY?

When I was young, I could not understand what it meant to bring glory to God. If I work hard, then should the good results not be the fruits of my own labour? Why do people pray asking that they can glorify God through their successes?

In today's reading, we see how Daniel gave God the glory. We left off yesterday where Daniel prayed to thank God for revealing the king's dream and meaning to him. Today's scene starts with Daniel requesting Arioch to bring him before the king.

Although it was Daniel who found Arioch, Arioch told the king, "I have found a man..." (verse 25) Arioch wanted the king to know he found someone that could solve the mystery of his dream. He wanted the king to think well of him! It is like that with us, too, isn't it? When there is success, we like to take credit – especially in front of someone important.

Daniel was different. He knew the mystery of the king's dream and its meaning. He could have easily said he knew it from his own intelligence and wisdom. Yet, Daniel's attitude was very different from Arioch. He did not claim any credit but said that it was God who revealed the secret to him. Daniel was humble. He told the king that God had revealed it to him, not because he was any wiser, but for the sake of the old advisers' lives, and that the king might know the meaning of his dream.

David gave all credit to God and in doing so, gave glory to Him. What does it mean to give God glory? From today's reading, one way to give glory to God is to give Him all credit whenever He blesses you with successes. Let us not get carried away with success or man's praises but immediately direct all praise and thanks to God.

Can you think of one example where you give God glory?

Thought: How do I respond to success and man's praise?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to always see that it is You who enables me to do all things. Therefore, when I experience successes and good results, I pray that I will give You all the glory. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE SECRET REVEALED

Daniel went on to describe King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and explained to him its meaning. In his dream, the king saw a great and fearsome image.

- Its head was made of _____ ,
- his chest and arms were of _____ ,
- belly and thighs of _____ ,
- _____ were of iron;
- and his _____ were mixed with iron and clay.

A stone that was made without hands then appeared and smashed the great image. It was completely destroyed from head to toe. The stone then became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

What did this all mean? Every material symbolised a kingdom that would arise. King Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian empire was the head of gold. A deeper study teaches us that the other kingdoms are the Medo-Persian (silver), Greek (brass) and Roman (iron) empires. The last kingdom represented by the feet of iron and clay is yet to happen, and will take place during the time of the Antichrist's rule in the Tribulation. These kingdoms will pass away when the God of Heaven begins eternal rule, starting with the Millennial kingdom. This is shown by the stone made without hands, indicating its divine nature.

What does this mean for us? Our Heavenly Father is sovereign over the affairs of the nations. Though the world around us is ever changing, we never have to be afraid because our Heavenly Father is in control. He is also sovereign over your personal affairs and will never let anything happen to you without His permission.

Thought: God is still on His throne, and He will remember His own. When trials oppress us and burdens distress us, He never will leave us alone.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You alone are the everlasting God who knows the beginning from the end. Help me to trust in You to lead and guide me for the future. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

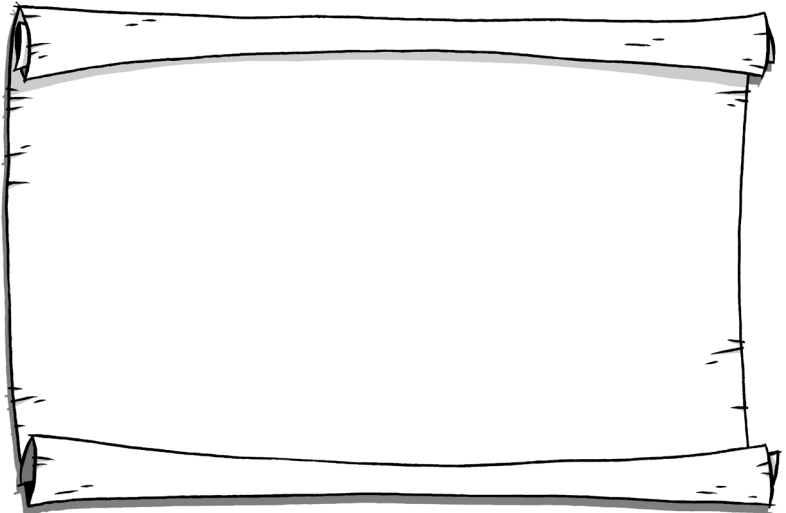
DANIEL'S REWARD

It was amazing how accurate Daniel's description of the king's dream was. The king acknowledged that Daniel's God is a God of gods, a Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets. Through this episode, God's name was praised and glorified!

Daniel was richly rewarded. The king promoted Daniel to become the "ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon." This was a very powerful position! In his success, Daniel did not forget his three friends – Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah who had prayed with and for him. He requested the king to promote them as well, and it was granted. In your success, do you remember to share it with those who had helped you along the way?

This incident shows that promotion comes from God alone and not man. Psalm 75:6-7 teaches this clearly.

Fill the scroll with these 2 wonderful verses.



Thought: Promotion and success do not lie in the hands of man but in God's hands.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to seek the blessings, but to seek You first, the Giver of all blessings. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

IDOL WORSHIP IS FALSE WORSHIP

When God created man, He created us with the unique longing and desire to worship. To worship is to praise and show adoration to the one whom we look up to. Everyone worships someone or something. Some worship idols made of wood, stone and/or clay. Others worship celebrities and pop stars, or even themselves!

Today, we read that King Nebuchadnezzar built a huge gold image 60 cubits high (approximately 27m) and 6 cubits wide (approximately 3m). That would have been a huge statue! All the leaders of the empire were gathered for the dedication of the golden image. An ensemble of instruments was chosen to bring grandeur to the occasion and all kinds of music were to be played. Everyone was commanded to fall down and worship the image when they heard the music. Those who refused would be burned in a fiery furnace. The king led everyone to worship a false god.

Idol worship is false worship. Although we are created to worship, if left to ourselves, we will always worship the wrong person or object, and not God. We would rather worship and pray to images that cannot hear, see and talk. Or, we idolise sinful men whom we admire because of their wealth, good looks or abilities. Korean pop stars, Hong Kong movie stars, American actors and singers, European footballers (and teams), are idolised by both young and old. People spend lots of time and money to watch their shows, know more about them, display their posters and images, and even make pilgrimages to where they stay! We change the truth of God into a lie, ignoring the Creator and worshipping the created instead.

How about you? What is the object of worship that takes up your affections? Is it an image made of men's hands, a celebrity you admire, or a popular schoolmate that everyone thinks is cool? Or are you worshipping the one living and true God who made them all?

Thought: Anything that takes my affection away from God is an idol in my heart.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are the only true God. Please forgive me for I have sinned against You by worshipping the idols I have built up in my heart. Help me to forsake these idols, and grant me the strength to do it on a daily basis. I pray that I will love You more each day and worship only You. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

COURAGE TO STAND FOR GOD

Imagine you were in the crowd that day, would you follow the crowd and worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? Even the respected leaders of the country were doing it. Why would anyone want to stick out like a sore thumb? Refusal to do so was tantamount to suicide. Who would dare to defy the king?

Daniel's three friends – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego continued to stand and did not fall to worship the idol. Though they were in a foreign land, they never forgot their God and His commandments. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me;” and “Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...” They feared God and not Man.

We often face great pressure from others to deny the Lord and do what unbelievers do. Perhaps you come from an unbelieving family, and there is a pressure to worship your parents' idols. Or, in school where everyone uses the name of God as a swear word, you are also pressured to do so. The pressure is to fit in and that is no doubt making a stand that requires courage. As Christians, we are called out of darkness and into God's marvelous light. How can we go back to the darkness and sin against our Saviour who died for us?

Where did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego get their courage and strength from? It came from knowing God and having a personal relationship with Him. Whether God would save them from the burning fiery furnace; it was not an issue for them because their hope was in Heaven and not on this earth. They would not compromise and worship a false god. Will you also make a stand for the Lord where He has placed you?

How is your walk with God? Are there areas where you have compromised in order to fit in with the crowd? Ask the Lord for forgiveness and repent today. Do you find that your faith is weak and small? Ask the Lord to increase your faith and help you find strength in Him alone. By keeping a close walk with God, He will strengthen your faith, help you not to fear, and give you the courage to stand up for Him.

Thought: Dare to stand for God!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please grant me the courage to stand for You always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

GOD'S DELIVERANCE

King Nebuchadnezzar gave Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego a second chance to change their mind and worship the golden image; he would throw them into the burning furnace (v14-15) otherwise. However, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood firm. They feared not the king who could kill their body, but feared God who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Their commitment was to God and they would not bow down to a false god.

This made King Nebuchadnezzar even angrier. He gave the command to increase the heat of the furnace by 7 times and to burn them immediately. The heat was so intense that even the strong men who led them to the furnace died along the way. But what happened to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? Three of them fell into the furnace all tied up. Yet, when the king looked in, he saw four men walking loose in the burning hot fire. How could it be! Who was this fourth person?

The fourth person was the pre-incarnate Christ - Jesus appearing in a tangible form even before He came to earth as a babe in the manger. He was with them when they did not bow down to the golden image. He was right there with them in the burning fiery furnace to deliver them from death. Who can deliver but God alone? All three friends were untouched by the fire. Everyone witnessed the miracle and even the king praised the Lord. God's name was glorified!

Are you facing persecution at home or in school? Do people make things difficult for you because you are different as a Christian? Be not afraid, but be strong and of good courage. This was a unique event in history. Many others have died for their faith in Jesus but one thing is sure. The same Jesus who was in the fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, is the same Jesus who will never leave nor forsake you.

Thought: "...there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."
(Daniel 3:29)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, only You are able to deliver me from trials and persecution. Increase my faith that I may not waver but remain faithful to You alone. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE INTENT OF THE DREAM

King Nebuchadnezzar received another dream from God. This time it was about how a great and tall tree was cut down. The branches were cut off, the leaves shaken off and its fruits scattered. The birds and animals that came to it for food and shelter all escaped. Only the stump of its roots was spared, with a band of iron and brass around it.

The dream troubled the king greatly and he could not sleep. As with the first dream in Daniel 2, he again called together all his old advisers to tell him what the dream meant. The magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, soothsayers were all summoned, but none could interpret its meaning. Man cannot know God's mysteries unless He reveals it to them!

Why did God give this dream to King Nebuchadnezzar? The interpretation would come later through Daniel. This time, however, He revealed the purpose of the dream directly to Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was a successful king who won many wars, conquered great lands, and governed the affairs of many nations. He thought he earned it all by his own intelligence and might. Many people must have thought that way about him too! Yet God told him in the dream, that what was soon about to happen was so that all men may know that it is God who rules over all mankind. It is the Most High God who sets up lowly man as kings over earthly kingdoms.

With this purpose made known to Nebuchadnezzar, the interpretation later would give him a full picture of who he really was in the presence of the Almighty God.

Thought: The leaders and governments of every country are in power only because God decreed it so.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise You for You are the Most High God who has established every leader in each nation. Grant me the faith to know that You alone are sovereign over all matters in this wicked and sinful world. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A SHOCKING INTERPRETATION

When Daniel received the interpretation from God, he was shocked to silence for an hour and wished that the prophecy would not be for the king, but that it would happen to the king's enemies instead. Although it was a difficult message, he did not mince his words or try to dilute it. As a true prophet of God, Daniel explained every part of the dream, according to God's revelation.

What was the interpretation? The great and high tree which bore much fruit and gave shelter to many animals represented King Nebuchadnezzar. He was a great king who conquered many lands and had ruled over them, but he would become mad, and be driven out from men to live as an animal, eating grass and drinking water in the wild! This would last 7 years. At the end of 7 years, Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom would be restored to him.

It must have sounded unbelievable at that time to the king and his subjects, seeing he was still dressed in kingly robes and living in a lavish palace. But the decree was sure and certain because it came from the Most High God. Nebuchadnezzar had to learn who he was before God. It also warned him about being proud of his achievements.

What about us? Do we know who we are before a Thrice Holy and Almighty God? God is holy and righteous. He is no respecter of persons. Your position in the world and success before man will not be taken into consideration when God judges. If Nebuchadnezzar's temporal state of punishment seems to be great suffering, an eternal punishment in hell will be far worse. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death. Even though we still see ourselves dressed in nice clothes and living well, make no mistake that this decree is also sure and certain. The Bible tells us that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Will you not come to Him today?

Thought: Eternal punishment in hell will be a rude shock for unrepentant sinners.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, humble me that I may know who I am before You. You hold the keys to eternal life and death. Humble me that Christ may take first place in my life as my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BOASTING IN ACHIEVEMENTS

Daniel's words soon slipped from King Nebuchadnezzar's mind as he walked around the palace, admiring the beauty and splendour of Babylon. Indeed, Babylon was a sight to behold! The city was protected by great double walls and 260 towers, and there was a beautiful street through the city centre decorated with ornaments of animals which were skillfully carved. Nebuchadnezzar's throne room was richly decorated, and he built one of the famous ancient wonders of the world – the hanging gardens of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar boasted of his achievements and was proud that he did it all by his own might and power (v30). While he was still speaking these words, God interrupted his thoughts and spoke to him. In the same hour, the kingdom was taken away from him. Nebuchadnezzar really became mad and was driven out to the wild. For 7 years, he behaved like an animal. His diet was grass; his hair grew so unkempt it resembled feathers of eagles; and his nails were like a bird's claws because they were so long. Every detail of the dream was fulfilled. We may not boast of the same things as Nebuchadnezzar did but the same lesson applies to us. Are you a proud person who likes to boast of your achievements? Achievements are things viewed favourably by yourself and others. Perhaps you are doing well in your studies or you are the leader of your group of friends. Perhaps you are smart – doing well in school despite not studying much.

If you think that success lies in your own intelligence, charm and strength, you are wrong. God is the one who has given you success and put you where you are. Do not be like Nebuchadnezzar who was punished for his pride and boasting. In humility, acknowledge and testify before man that God is the Giver of success. Give God all the glory!

What are the achievements you are proud of?
Remember to give God the glory for these

1. _____
2. _____

Thought: Without God, I can do nothing.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me not to think highly of myself and not to boast of any achievements, but to recognise that all things are from Your sovereign hand. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

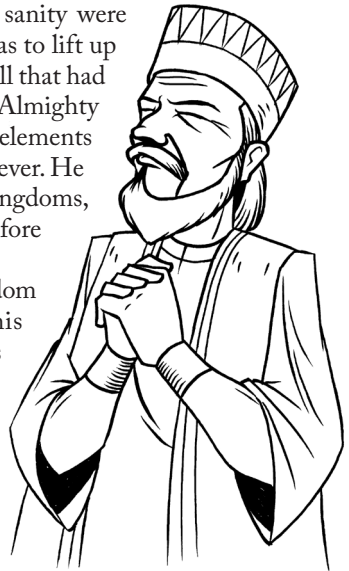
NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S CONVERSION

This was a very different prayer from the previous utterances of God from Nebuchadnezzar's lips. Earlier, he spoke of God as Daniel's God, or the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He recognised there was something unique about Daniel and his friends, and called it the spirit of the holy gods in them. Nebuchadnezzar saw the miracle of God delivering Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego from the burning fiery furnace. He heard Daniel's interpretations of dreams and visions but he never knew the Almighty God for himself and continued to worship his own gods.

Like Nebuchadnezzar, many of us have seen how God has worked in the lives of others. We have also heard His words of truth and promise. But, do you know the Almighty God personally through His only begotten Son, or choose to continue in your own worldly ways?

At the end of the 7 years living as a madman in the wild, Nebuchadnezzar's reason and sanity were returned to him. The first thing he did was to lift up his eyes toward Heaven. He understood all that had happened and for the first time, knew the Almighty God in a personal way. There were 2 main elements in Nebuchadnezzar's first prayer as a believer. He praised God as the sovereign ruler of all kingdoms, and acknowledged that man is nothing before an Almighty God.

As promised, God restored the kingdom to Nebuchadnezzar and established his reign again in Babylon. The king learnt his lesson well and acknowledged that God can bring those who walk in pride to a lowly state. God used this experience to convert Nebuchadnezzar to a God-fearing Christian.



Thought: Salvation is of the Lord and not of man.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise You for you are the King of Heaven and Your ways are perfect in everyone's lives. Teach me the ways of humility that I may walk in them. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL

We turn to the last chapter of the Babylonian empire. The king in this chapter is no longer Nebuchadnezzar, but Belshazzar, one of his descendants and also the last Babylonian king.

Belshazzar held a great feast for a thousand of his lords. During the feast, he commanded that the gold and silver vessels from the temple of Jerusalem be taken out. These vessels were used for service in the temple of God but Belshazzar did not care about that; he filled the vessels with wine for his princes, wives, concubines and himself to drink from. They feasted and drank, praising their gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone. It was an act to mock the God of Israel, to show that their gods were more powerful.

In the same hour, the party atmosphere of feasting changed to one of confusion and fear. The king saw a strange sight! He saw the fingers of a man's hand writing over a candlestick on the wall. As the hand wrote, Belshazzar was silenced in fear. Everyone else must also have been frightened! What did it all mean?

Belshazzar had laughed at and mocked God, and showed disrespect for the vessels reserved for holy use in the temple of Jerusalem. For this, God would teach him and many others that He was not to be taken lightly. Many today also take God's name lightly. They use His name as a swear word and laugh at the Bible's teachings. God is longsuffering and very merciful. But all who mock and dismiss Him will be punished in due time.

To say the 'writing is on the wall' is to mean something bad is going to happen soon. It originates from Daniel 5, and now we know the context of this idiom. We will soon read how God will show forth His righteous judgment. God is not oblivious and He cannot be mocked!

Thought: Take God and His Word seriously, not lightly.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are a holy God who judges righteously. Help me to have a deep reverence and godly fear for You, that I may not be like the unbelievers and take You lightly. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DANIEL IS CALLED

Yesterday, we read that King Belshazzar saw the fingers of a man's handwriting on the wall. It was a very frightful thing to witness and tremendous fear gripped the proud king. His whole expression and mood changed. He was very troubled and his knees kept shaking and knocking against each other.

As did Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar gathered all the wise men of Babylon to interpret the writing but none of them could read or understand the message. He dangled rewards of riches and promotion before them, but that did not make them any wiser! As a last resort, Daniel was called before King Belshazzar. The queen remembered Daniel as one who had 'the spirit of the holy gods' and the 'wisdom of the gods'. She told Belshazzar that Daniel, who could interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, would also be able to interpret the writing on the wall.

Then, Daniel was called and brought in before the king. Belshazzar dangled the same rewards of riches and power before Daniel. Daniel could have easily accepted it and continued to give the interpretation. If someone were to offer you lots of money or rewards for a task that you know you can do well, would you not do the task and take the reward?

Daniel was very clear that his calling as a wise man in the king's court was given by God. Therefore, his allegiance was to God first. He served to please and glorify God alone and not for filthy lucre, promotion, fame, or any worldly gain. Daniel's service was not dependent on rewards. He made that plainly clear to Belshazzar by refusing the gifts and promotion. What motivates you in your daily living? Are your motivations pure or do you have any hidden agenda?

Which of the statements below are examples of impure motives?

- Do things in order that people will notice me
- Study hard so that I can win a scholarship and study overseas
- Be successful in life so that I can feel good about myself

Thought: Daniel's calling was from God and not man.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, search me and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. I pray that I will serve You with pure motives to please and glorify You alone. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

YOU KNOW BUT DO NOT TAKE HEED

Before Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall, he gave Belshazzar a sharp rebuke. Belshazzar had taken the temple vessels and used them for drunken revelry, praised the idols made by the hands of men and mocked the living and true God. The writing on the wall was a result of Belshazzar's sins and its interpretation was the final judgement on him.

In Daniel's rebuke, he first reminded the king of God's punishment on Nebuchadnezzar. This was known to all, and definitely known to Belshazzar. God punished Nebuchadnezzar for his pride in thinking that he was a great king because of his own might and power. For 7 years, the mighty Nebuchadnezzar lived as a madman in the wild, behaving like an animal and eating grass. This happened so that Nebuchadnezzar would be humbled, and know that it was God who was sovereign over the kingdoms of men, and giving it to whosoever He wills. It was such a stern lesson, yet Belshazzar ignored it and did not take heed. Daniel told Belshazzar, "And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this".

If we are not mindful, we too, will take the road that Belshazzar took. We have heard God's Word taught and the gospel message preached. We have been warned of the consequences of pride and the judgment of God yet our hearts can still be lifted up and hardened with pride! We may know the truth in our head but, like Belshazzar, we ignore these lessons and have not humbled our hearts.

Question: What goes before destruction and one's fall?
(Read Proverbs 16:18)

Answer: _____ and a _____

Thought: To know in my head is not enough, it must affect my heart and life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to take heed and be mindful of what You have taught me about the sin of pride. Please grant me a humble and teachable heart to learn from Your Word and apply it in my daily life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE END OF THE BABYLONIAN EMPIRE

The writing on the wall is:



Write the interpretation of each word below:

MENE (v26): _____

Mene is used twice to emphasise the finality of Belshazzar's Babylonian kingdom, that it is truly finished.

TEKEL (v27): _____

Tekel means that God has judged Belshazzar with fair and righteous judgment and he is found to have failed.

PERES (v27): _____

Peres indicates that the kingdom will be given over to the Medes and Persians.

God judged Belshazzar for his folly and pride. That very night, the prophecy was fulfilled. Belshazzar was killed by Darius, the Median king, who took over the kingdom. God's promises are true and what He says will come to pass. It will happen whether we believe Him or not. We choose to ignore God and the gospel of Christ at our own peril.

Thought: God is mighty to save, and mighty to judge.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your judgments are true and righteous. Save me from the eternal judgment of hell, help me to trust and believe in Jesus because only in Him is there true salvation. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT WAS IN HIM

We start a new chapter with the Medo-Persian Empire. If you recall, this is the empire described as the silver chest and arms of the great image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan 2:32). God used Darius to accomplish His will and judgement against Belshazzar and the Babylonian kingdom.

The first thing Darius did was to set up and establish the leadership of the kingdom. Darius appointed 120 princes and 3 presidents over his whole kingdom. Leaders of all the provinces were to report to their respective princes. The princes in turn would report to the presidents, who would be directly accountable to the king. Darius chose Daniel to be the chief president. What an important position!

Darius had the pick of all the wise men in the empire. Why did he choose Daniel? Darius preferred him above all the presidents and princes, because Daniel had an excellent spirit in him. What is this excellent spirit?

Daniel was excellent and surpassed everyone around him in every area of knowledge, wisdom and intellect. He understood how to conduct himself before kings and men. This excellent spirit is more than the intelligence of a scholar. What really set Daniel apart from all the rest was his single desire to honour his God. He consulted and sought God in everything he did. He had the Spirit of God guiding him! Daniel was righteous, honest and a trustworthy right-hand man that would not betray or usurp the king. Darius recognised this and wanted to put him in charge of the kingdom, second only to him.

As Christians, we must also have this excellent spirit that Daniel had. There is an instruction book for us to follow closely, one thing we must always do, and a pure motive we must have.

Read the following verses to find out what they are:

Instruction Book to follow (Ps 119:105): _____

One thing to always do (1 Thess 5:17): _____

A Pure Motive to have (Col 3:23): _____

Thought: An excellent spirit is one that desires to honour and obey God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I desire to honour You with my life. Bless me with Your abiding presence and guide me in all that I do; that others may see the difference with You working in my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

THE SCHEME AGAINST DANIEL

Fill in the blanks:

If ye were of the _____, the world would _____ his own: but because ye are _____ of the world, but I have _____ you out of the world, therefore the world _____ you. (John 15:19)

This verse describes Daniel's relationship with his colleagues. The princes and other presidents hated Daniel and were envious of his position. They wanted to find something against him so that he would be kicked out of his high position. A Christian who is doing his work with honesty and an upright spirit goes against the grain of the world. The world likes to cheat and conduct dishonest dealings in order to further their selfish ambition. With Daniel in charge, all these corrupt means were unacceptable so the world hated him. Daniel's light exposed their evil deeds. However, because his life was so good and without any fault or error, they could not find anything against him to cause his fall.

Are you living a life that is so different from the world that people can tell you are a Christian? Daniel did. That was the reason why the only way they could cause Daniel's downfall was to find fault in his total devotion and commitment to God.

They devised an evil scheme and approached King Darius. They lied to the king that all the presidents, governors, princes, counselors and captains had decided to set a law and requested the king to make a decree to throw anyone who prays or asks for help from any other god or man, other than the king, into the lions' den for the next thirty days. They knew that this plan would definitely trap Daniel who prayed three times a day.

With this decree, Darius was made to feel like he was a god. He also thought that all his leaders had discussed and agreed to this law. Darius signed the decree. According to the law of the Medes and Persians, once a law was set, no one could change it, not even the king himself. The evil scheme succeeded in trapping Daniel.

Thought: God will grant courage in times of trouble.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, though the world may hate and persecute me, help me to remember that I am not alone and that You are with me all the way. I pray that you will strengthen my faith. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

WHAT IS “AS HE DID AFORETIME”?



Daniel soon learned of the decree. Did he let the fear of being eaten up by hungry lions affect his practice of praying to God three times a day? Daniel made no protest or charge against his colleagues. Instead, he went into his house, and as he always did, opened his windows to face Jerusalem, and prayed before the Lord. His enemies lay in wait to catch Daniel. When they saw him praying, they told the king to throw him into the lions' den.

When faced with persecution, the temptation to compromise often causes us to fall. Only daily walking close to the Lord can prepare us for such a situation. Daniel had a personal relationship with the Lord. He tasted God's goodness, experienced God's blessings and saw for Himself God's judgments and prophecies being fulfilled before his very eyes. He stood firm on the Lord's side and did not budge, not for one moment. How was he able to do this?

There is much to gain from the phrase “as he did aforetime”. This means that Daniel continued in his spiritual disciplines of praying and trusting in God as he did before. We too, will do well to be schooled in spiritual disciplines of daily private prayer and meditation on God's Word. In these private moments, we are spiritually strengthened and nourished as we totally cast all our cares upon Him.

“As he did aforetime” also means that Daniel was faithful and consistent in his walk with the Lord. When he was first captured by the Babylonians and brought out of Judah, he ‘purposed’ in his heart not to defile himself with the king's food and wine. Now in his old age, he continued to be consistent in his resolve to honour the Lord. That was why he could continue to pray “as he did aforetime”.

Dear friend, may Daniel's example of faithfulness and consistency help you to also persevere in spiritual disciplines, in order that you may grow and find strength in God.

Thought: This all my prayer shall be: More love, O Christ, to Thee.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to keep a close walk with You always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

MAN CANNOT SAVE

According to the law of the Medes and Persians, once a law is set and the king has signed it, no one can change it. Not even the king. When King Darius knew that Daniel had broken the decree, he was very displeased with himself. He realised that it was an evil plot to destroy this man of God who had served him with distinction.

Darius liked Daniel for his excellent spirit and showed great favour toward him. The prospect of throwing Daniel into the lions' den caused him to be deeply troubled. He probably also felt guilty for signing the decree. Darius tried all ways and means to save Daniel from this cruel death. He laboured until the evening, but was not able to find a way of escape for Daniel. There was no choice but to send Daniel into the den of hungry lions. Daniel's enemies must have thought they succeeded in destroying Daniel once and for all!

As Daniel was cast into the den, Darius spoke to him saying, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee." What a testimony! Here was a heathen king who comforted himself and also Daniel that God would save him.

Man can try to save but he is limited in many ways. Darius tried to deliver Daniel but he was limited by his own decree. He could not do anything even though he was a king. We cannot trust in man to provide a way of escape in times of trouble. We can only trust and pray to God for help. Man will disappoint but God will never fail us. Are you facing any problems in your life? Put your trust in God today.

Thought: "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God." (Psalm 20:7)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are many things out of my control. Help me to trust in You for help and not in man. Sometimes, the way ahead seems uncertain, and I pray that in times like that, I would be strong, continue in my spiritual disciplines, pray and wait. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

ONLY GOD CAN SAVE

Who can save but God? He worked a wonderful miracle of deliverance. Where man fails in the simple, God delivers the impossible. Darius was bound by his own laws and could not change a decree he signed. But, God was not bound by evil men or hungry lions. He protected Daniel and saved him from certain death.

The worry and anxiety that Darius experienced throughout the night was immediately lifted when he heard Daniel answering his call. He no longer felt the heavy burden of guilt in signing the decree that sent Daniel to the lions' den. What exactly happened inside the den?

Daniel testified to the king what happened after he was thrown into the lions' den. God sent his angel to protect and keep Daniel safe. God also shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt him. What a testimony of the Lord's constant presence and protection to His children! Dear friend, you may be experiencing some trials in your life right now, or you feel alone because others hate your faith in God. In times of deep distress when there seems to be no way out, remember that God is ever with you and cares for you. Pray to Him. Seek Him. Trust in Him. God is faithful and hears the sincere cry of His children.

Daniel's case was a unique one. We must bear in mind that many other godly Christians also suffered for the faith, but God allowed them to be tortured and killed for their faith. However, God was with them all the way, more than we can ever imagine. It is better to be in Heaven with the Lord where our faith shall be sight – that means we will be able to see and understand everything that the Lord has allowed in our lives. But, God had His divine purpose for Daniel to remain on earth. He works out all things for our good and unto His glory.

Dare to be a Daniel

*Standing by a purpose true, Heeding God's command,
Honour them, the faithful few! All hail to Daniel's band!*

Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone!

Dare to have a purpose firm! Dare to make it known.

Thought: It is better to stand alone on the Lord's side, than to stand with many and have God against me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, grant me the courage to stand firm on Your side always. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A CRUEL PUNISHMENT

King Darius directed his fury at the men who plotted against Daniel. The lions were very hungry. Even before those who were thrown in the bottom of the den, the lions caught hold of them and broke all their bones. This shows that Daniel was truly protected by God. The moment he was taken out of the den, the mouths of the lions were set loose.

You may be wondering why the king was so cruel to throw the men's families of women and young children into the den together with them. According to the law of the Medes and Persians, when a man commits a crime against the king, his whole family would be killed. This was to prevent the family from taking revenge against the king for killing the man.

It seems to be a very unjust and cruel punishment, based on the king's fear of being the victim of revenge. On the other hand, God neither over-punishes nor under-punishes. His laws are always merciful and just, and his punishment is just right.

Compare this with God's law in Deuteronomy 24:16.

After reading, answer the True/False questions below:

When a man sins, his children will have to die together with him. True/False

Every man shall be put to death for his own sin. True/False

God's laws are fair and just. He will not punish the innocent together with the sinner. True/False

Thought: Sinful men may not execute perfect and righteous judgement.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You are the all-knowing and righteous Judge. Put in me godly fear, so that I will not sin against You. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

A NEW DECREE

King Darius saw with his own eyes how God had saved Daniel. What an amazing miracle to witness! The first decree was centred on Darius as though he were god, and made the Almighty God inferior to him. Now, Darius issued a new decree to everyone in his land. The new decree was centred on God, praising and declaring His power.

Darius decreed that all men in his kingdom tremble and fear Daniel's God because He is the living God. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God – that means there is no start and no end with God. There is no god or idol that can compare with Him. He was always there from infinity past and will be in the infinite years to come. God is steadfast forever. Circumstances may change and people come in and out of our lives, but God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. Once He's in your life, He will never leave nor forsake you. The God of Daniel is the same God who watches over you.

Darius acknowledged that God's kingdom shall never be destroyed and His dominion is unto the end. No world leader or super power can ever dethrone our God. He sits upon His throne in Heaven and man cannot rival Him. God is the one who has total and absolute dominion. This means that He has the right and power to control and rule over the nations. We see world leaders in the newspapers and on TV. Do not forget that they are in power, only because God has given them the kingdom of men. Your Heavenly Father is in control of the affairs of men.

Darius testified of God's mighty work in delivering Daniel from the power of the lions. The power of the lions was no match for God. He made them and at His command, their mouths were shut. Is there anything too hard for Him? There is nothing He cannot do. Are you of little faith? Dare to be a Daniel in the small things and God will build up your faith for big things! Every problem faced with God, is His blessing for you to experience His deliverance and protection.

Thought: "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." (Psalm 34:8)

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise You for You alone are the everlasting God and there is none besides You. All may change, but You will never. May my walk with You grow sweeter with each passing day. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

DANIEL PROSPERED

Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the Persian king Cyrus. Daniel served many kings in his lifetime, though the Bible only names 4 of these kings – Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius and Cyrus. He was promoted to high offices in these kingdoms and the kings trusted his advice and counsel. How was he able to earn such respect and prosper?

Daniel did not do it by being likeable and popular. That is what we tend to do in order to get into the good books of the people we like or the people of authority. It may be a popular thing to dress according to the current fashion, or to carry branded gadgets and buy the latest computer games. We may also go out of our way to flatter those in positions of authority, like our teachers or seniors in school, so that they will like us, or give us more opportunities to perform in school.

Daniel was different. He was not promoted because he was popular. In fact, he was not well-liked at all. His enemies tried to trap him so that he would be eaten up by lions. Yet, Daniel prospered because of His unwavering faithfulness to the Lord. He ‘purposed’ in his heart not to defile himself and continued to do so throughout his life. Daniel’s life was a wonderful testimony of one who honoured the Lord and whom the Lord honoured. Because of Daniel’s resolve to honour God, men of many lands got to hear of God’s power and mighty work through his life. They knew of Daniel’s God as the living God who is above all other gods.

Daniel prospered because God was pleased with him. He will also bless you richly when you live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Thought: What is one lesson that I have learned from Daniel’s life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Daniel’s testimony and for teaching me precious lessons through his life. I pray that you will help me to apply these lessons in my life, that I may live a life that is pleasing in Your sight. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.

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