

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

VOL 3, SEPTEMBER–DECEMBER 2021

BWJ PLUS

NAME:

Being with
PASSION

Going with
PURPOSE

Doing with
POWER

SSMC's VISION

Transforming Lives, Expanding His Kingdom

Dear SSMC Church Family,

This is our 11th volume of *Being With Jesus (BWJ)*. What started in 2017 as a follow-through on Mark 3:14b-15 “... that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” has resulted in the SSMC Church family taking a journey of reading through the Bible from different perspectives.

We started by reading through the New Testament in 2017, followed by reading through the Old Testament chronologically over two years – 2018 and 2019. For 2020 we read through the Bible topically, covering all the major doctrines, and for 2021, we read through again the entire New Testament but in the chronological time frame of the events recorded.

We started 2021 as a *Year of HOPE* (Hebrew *Yakhal*), not knowing or even conceiving what is in store for us. Truly with the Covid 19 pandemic ravaging the entire world and turning the lives of everyone literally upside down, life can no longer be normal or with any possibility of it ever returning to the normality that we once knew, not anytime in the foreseeable future.

This time of uncertainty fraught with fears of getting infected, compounded with the challenges of working from home and meeting the educational needs of confined children, and the restrictions on physical social interactions, has taken a toll on us. Affecting us physically, emotionally and even spiritually, the resulting anxiety and stress is impossible to quantify, with some coping much better than others.

As Christians, one major advantage that we have in these uncertain times is the certainty and assurance that we worship a God who not only knows the whole situation but is also in full control of it. We talk about the ‘New Normal’ but as Ps Daniel Ho rightly says, we should refer to it as the ‘New Reality’ that we must accept, adapt and acquiesce to. In this New Reality, our *HOPE* must not be on the SOPs, MCOs, Government, politicians or even the Covid vaccine, good, helpful and necessary as they may be, but ultimately, our *HOPE* must be in GOD alone and His ‘good and perfect will’ in the life of each of His children. We need to ‘lift up our eyes unto Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith’.

SSMC's VISION

Transforming Lives, Expanding His Kingdom

In this BWJ 2021 Vol 3 covering September to December, we have included a special week of devotionals focusing on Christmas and the end of yet another year, whereby we need to take stock of the year that has been and prepare for the year that is to come.

Just a quick recap on BWJ 2021:

1. Reading through the entire **New Testament** again but in a **chronological** order. With this 3rd volume, we will be completing the whole New Testament.
2. **Short Devotional Reading** for the day which is more Asian-focused in terms of context and content, hopefully making it easier to understand, relate to and apply.
NB: The Devotional Readings are taken from published materials and the source references are listed at the bottom of the page.
3. **Reflective Statements / Questions** at the end of each Devotion as an aid to that day's reading and as a useful guide for DG Word discussion and sharing.
4. Our BWJ acronym **P.R.A.Y.** – Pray – Read & Reflect – Apply – Yield – have been expanded-to : **PRAY & PRAISE – READ & REFLECT – ASK & APPLY – YIELD & 'YAKHAL'** (Hebrew for HOPE).
5. **BWJ Plus edition made available** for those who want more in-depth reading and study. This is available in soft copy, downloadable from our church website. Hard copies of BWJ Plus in A4 and A5 sizes are made available upon request.

Let's continue to **P.R.A.Y.**

PRAY & PRAISE – READ & REFLECT – ASK & APPLY – YIELD & 'YAKHAL'.

Blessed Continuing BWJing 2021

Ps Swee Ming

20th July 2021

Acknowledgements:

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GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

For your devotion, please try to use a easily understandable Bible version eg. NIV, ESV or NLT.

PRAY as you begin your devotion followed by a time of **PRAISE** – a simple chorus, scripture set to song or even a familiar hymn, whatever the Holy Spirit may impress upon your spirit. Some people find soft soothing background worship music helpful for their devotion.

READ the Bible Passage(s) for the day aloud if you can and then proceed to read the short devotional for the day. This will help to give a better understanding of the particular passage under consideration.

Take time to **REFLECT** on the words, the short devotional and also the ‘guiding thoughts/ questions’ at the end.

Try to see the connection between the Scripture Passage(s) and the Daily Key Topic and Key Verse.

ASK the famous “W’s” questions : *Who! Where! When! Why! What!* Please take special note of REPETITIONS, SIMILARITIES and CONTRAST as well as sentences beginning with - BUT, THEREFORE, BECAUSE, IF and THEN.

APPLY – ask *How!* – How does it apply to me today? How is it relevant to my life, family, work, church or nation ? How, How, How!

Sometimes it’s also helpful to ask :

- Is there a lesson to learn?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a promise to claim and keep?
- What encouragement or comfort may I gain?
- What new perspective is God showing me?

Lastly is there any area of my life that I need to **YIELD** to the Word – my behaviour, speech, action, thoughts, priorities etc. Reaffirm the ‘**YAKHAL**’ or HOPE that we all have in Jesus Christ through His Precious Word - the Bible, written, preserved and kept throughout the ages.

GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

Any thoughts, comments, impressions or even questions that come into your heart and/ or your mind – please record it in the blank space provided.

Your BWJ book is PRIVATE and only you will read it. You can be totally honest and transparent with God especially if you have doubts, fears, even confusion and outright anger – write it down and lay it before God.

Rest assured that Almighty God is much much bigger than whatever doubts, fears or anger that you may have or feel.

Close by being still in the Lord's Presence, asking Him to reveal to you what is that ONE THING you need to learn and apply from today's reading to bring about life transformation?

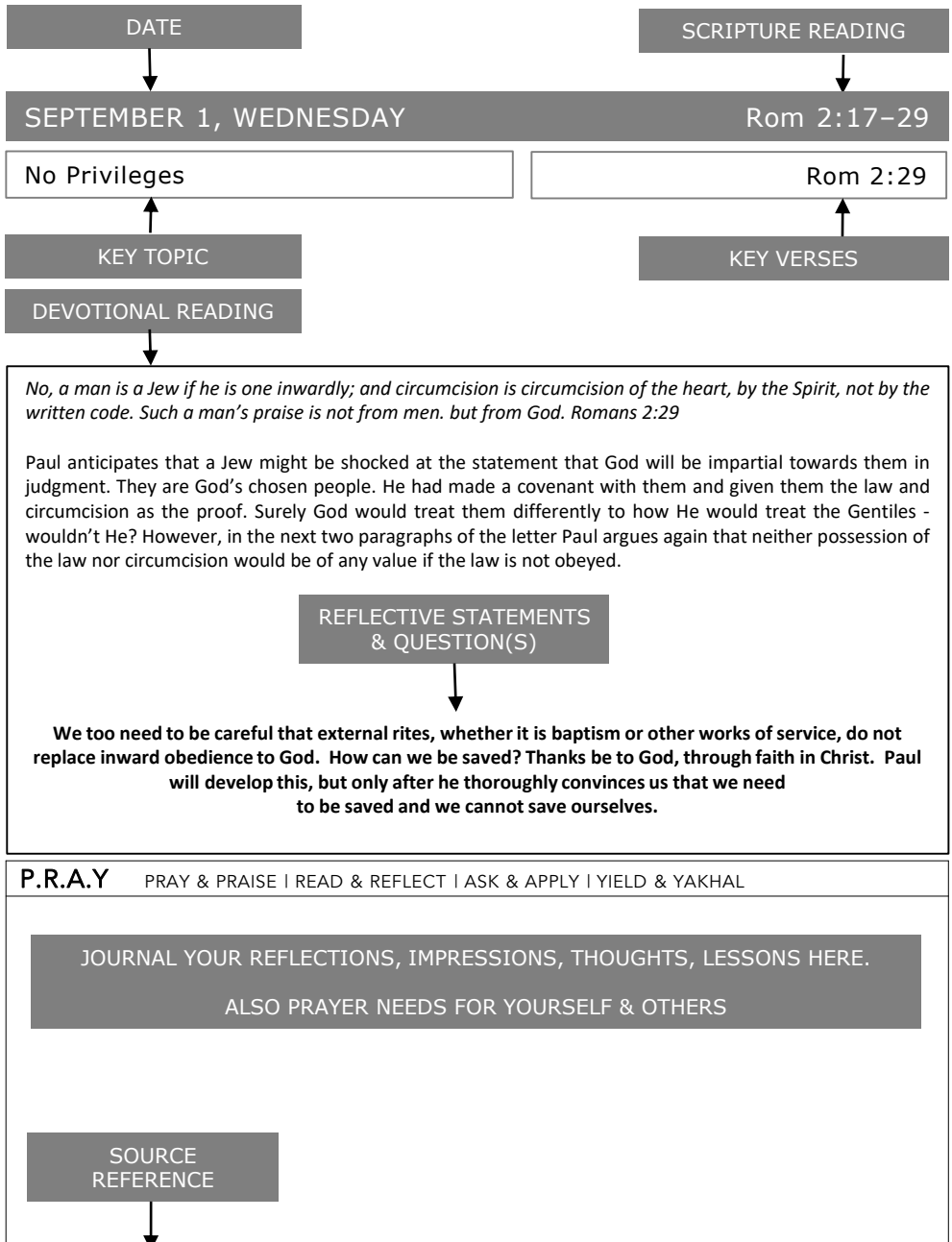
"To the degree & to the extent that I yield and submit to the Holy Spirit in my life, God's Kingdom will come more and more into my life, my family, my Discipleship Group, my work, my Church & my community."

Closing Thanksgiving Prayer

- *Pray for obedience and strength to faithfully work out the ONE THING that you have been reminded by His Holy Spirit.*
- *Bring to the Lord any prayer request that you may have for yourself, family, church, work, friends in the area of health, guidance, relationships, protection, provision etc.*
- *Good to write down key prayer items as a reminder of what and when you brought them before the Lord.*

GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

The daily readings for BWJ 2021 has been formatted as such:



SEP 1, WEDNESDAY

Rom 2:17-29

No Privileges

Rom 2:29

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men. but from God. Romans 2:29

Paul anticipates that a Jew might be shocked at the statement that God will be impartial towards them in judgment. They are God's chosen people. He had made a covenant with them and given them the law and circumcision as the proof. Surely God would treat them differently to how He would treat the Gentiles - wouldn't He? However, in the next two paragraphs of the letter Paul argues again that neither possession of the law nor circumcision would be of any value if the law is not obeyed.

It was indeed a privilege that God had entrusted the Jews with the law (a point that he will come back to again in chapter 3). Through it they would know God's will and be in the position to instruct others who have not been given the law. However, instead of becoming the instructors of God's ways to the other nations, they had themselves transgressed the law. It seemed that they needed to be taught the law themselves. Instead of becoming a light to the Gentiles, they had caused God's name to be blasphemed. Circumcision was indeed the sign given to them to mark them out as the privileged covenant people. However, by not keeping the law, their circumcision became valueless. They were just as liable to God's judgment as the Gentiles were.

Once again, Paul emphasized that it was not possession of the law (and the sign of circumcision) that ultimately mattered. They had to obey it. They had shown that they were unable to obey the law and thus, by their disobedience, had put themselves under God's judgment.

We too need to be careful that external rites, whether it is baptism or other works of service, do not replace inward obedience to God. How can we be saved? Thanks be to God, through faith in Christ. Paul will develop this, but only after he thoroughly convinces us that we need to be saved and we cannot save ourselves.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 1, WEDNESDAY

Rom 2:17-29

Practice What You Preach

Rom 2:29

A number of years ago a university was accused of plagiarism (which means, to take the writings of someone else and pass them off as one's own). What made it so unusual was that the school had plagiarized the section on plagiarism from another university's handbook.

A news report stated, "A graduate student of one school, who was considering a teaching assistant's job at the other, was reading the school handbook when he noted that the section warning students against plagiarism was identical to the caution in the handbook of the other university." Another student said, "The thing that bothered me most was the hypocrisy."

In Romans 2 the apostle Paul exposed the hypocrisy of self-righteous religionists. He said, "You who preach that man should not steal, do you steal?" (v.21). Paul warned that people who are quick to judge the sins of others are guilty of the very things they condemn.

I think all of us can identify with this tendency. We see a sin in another person's life and we rise up in pride to correct that person. But if we are honest with ourselves, we can see similar faults in our own life.

Be careful to examine yourself before pointing out the faults of others.
Practice what you preach!

By: Richard DeHaan

***Consistency! How much we need, To walk a measured pace,
To live the life of which we speak, And show God's love and grace. —Anon.
You please God when your walk matches your talk.***

Mohandas Gandhi spearheaded India's struggle for freedom from British rule. His Hindu religious practices and his political philosophy had a radical and revolutionary influence on millions of his countrymen.

Earlier in his life, Gandhi had considered the possibility of becoming a follower of Jesus. Attracted by His life and teachings, Gandhi attended the services of a church in Pretoria, South Africa. He later wrote, "The congregation did not strike me as being particularly religious; they were not an assembly of devout souls, but appeared rather to be worldly-minded people going to church for recreation and in conformity to custom." Christianity, he concluded, could not add anything of value to Hinduism. So he turned away from Jesus, to his own loss, and to the loss of the many who followed after him.

Are we like those churchgoers in Pretoria? Is our adherence to Christianity merely a matter of custom, a nice way of enjoying social relationships? Would a stranger who is sincerely seeking a relationship with God be attracted or turned off by the quality of our worship and personal devotion to Christ? Do we live out the Christianity we profess? Do we practice what we preach? (Romans 2:21).

By: Vernon Grounds

***I'd rather see a Christian, Than to hear one merely talk,
I'd rather see his actions, And behold his daily walk. —Herrell
What we practice is the best illustration of what we preach.***

SEP 2, THURSDAY

Rom 3:1-31

No Escape For Anyone

Rom 3:23

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Romans 3:19

Out of all the nations of the world, God had chosen the Jews to be His precious possession (Exo 19). From the previous chapter, however, someone might misunderstand Paul to be arguing that there was no advantage whatsoever in being a Jew. But that is not true. He emphasizes that it was in fact a tremendous privilege for the Jews to be entrusted with the Old Testament, the very words of God. But if salvation was by faith and not through their possession of the law, then wouldn't their faithlessness exclude them from salvation and thus nullify God's promises in choosing them? No. In fact, God's faithfulness was shown even more clearly when, despite Israel's faithlessness, He continued to remain faithful to them (read chapters 9-11). However, Paul maintains his position that their privileged status did not imply that God would overlook their sinfulness (v 9). Thus, all people, Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin, held helplessly under its power.

The human problem is not just that they sin; rather it is that they are enslaved to sin and are unable to break free from it. And who are involved in this? Paul emphatically restates his point through a series of Old Testament quotations (vs 9-18) that everyone is, without exception. The whole world is held accountable and declared guilty before God.

If you feel depressed after reading these last few passages (1:18-3:20) then you have understood and felt the weight of Paul's argument. Paul has a very important message to tell his Roman friends and us. God loves us and wants to be our God. But sinful people are not able to dwell with God. And we are all sinners without exception. There is nothing that we can do to rectify this situation because we are enslaved by sin.

**It is only when we realize this that the Gospel of Grace becomes such wonderful news.
It is like a bright light piercing through the darkness of despair.
Salvation can be ours only through faith in the Lord Jesus.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 2, THURSDAY

Rom 3:1-31

The Wonder Of Forgiveness

Rom 3:23

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Romans 3:21 -22

Romans 1:18-3:20 is depressing. In these chapters Paul hammers home the harsh reality that all of humanity has come under a damning indictment: Guilty of sin, as charged. Every mouth is silenced and the whole world is held accountable to God. Acknowledging this is depressing but necessary. For it is only with the realization that we are sinners and unable to make ourselves righteous before the holy God, that we would flee to Him for mercy and help. Only then is the Gospel that Paul preaches truly recognized for the wonderful news that it is. It is wonderful news because in it is revealed how we might be acquitted of our guilt and therefore be declared righteous before God.

This is a righteousness that is available, not through the observation of rules and regulations, but through faith in Jesus to all who would believe (vs 21-22). However, herein lies a potential problem. Could the righteous Judge declare unrighteous people righteous and continue to be righteous? With two successive expressions Paul answers this in the affirmative. Firstly, God is able to justify, i.e. acquit, the guilty because they have been redeemed through Jesus (v 24). Jesus was the ransom God paid to purchase the freedom of guilty people who were enslaved by sin and death. Secondly, Jesus' death is described as a sacrifice of atonement (v 25). He died in our place, taking away our sin and therefore turning God's righteous anger away from us.

Sin is a heinous crime that a righteous God could not overlook. In His great love. He dealt with our guilt by sending His Son to take our punishment for us. Nothing we did merited His forgiveness. It was by grace - His gift - and therefore there is no basis for boasting (v 27). 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.'

God promises forgiveness of our sins, no matter what they might be.

All this is possible because of His Son and is available to all who have faith in Him.

All praise to the just, loving and merciful God.

Before we can have a new beginning, we need to deal with the old, the past. Our past, full of sin. often hinders us and the Apostle Paul deals with it most wonderfully and powerfully in this passage of Romans.

We are all sinful (v 9). Sin has affected our total being. Our tongues are deceitfully busy (v 13), our feet move quickly in destructive ways (v 15), and we fail to stand in awe of God (v 18). Even those who seek to be righteous before God by observing the Law will fail. The Law reveals to us how far short we fall of its demands and sets before us the nature and the seriousness of sin. It leaves us with a deep realisation of our natural helplessness in turning away from sin. However, Paul is not simply trying to explain sin but is leading us on to understand the overwhelming sign of God's mercy and grace - the Cross. Like prisoners on death row, we were guilty, condemned to death by God's wrath until Christ came to acquit us by taking our punishment and set us free.

If we catch a glimpse of God's wrath upon sin, followed by His perfect demonstration of love by sending His Son to appease that wrath, then we begin to understand our need for repentance, if we have not felt our dire need for a Saviour and the necessity to come in repentance before God, now is the time to respond. Let this moment be a new beginning in our lives.

'Amazing patience lie bears with this faithless, foolish heart, and suffers me to come, laden with sins, to receive new grace every day.' (Henry Martyn)

SEP 3, FRIDAY

Rom 4:1-25

Justification By Faith Alone

Rom 4:7-8

However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. Romans 4:5

In the previous reading, Paul proclaimed that a righteousness from God had now been made available. We did nothing and can do nothing to deserve it. It is by God's grace, it is His gift. To those who see the rationale of Paul's argument from 1:18-3:20 (that we are all helpless to save ourselves from God's wrath), this revelation comes as a brilliant light of hope which pierces through the darkness of despair.

In today's passage, Paul uses the patriarch Abraham as an example to illustrate this principle. Abraham was the founding father of Israel and was held in high esteem by the Jews of Paul's days. They thought that Abraham was justified (i.e. declared righteous) by his works. But not even Abraham was justified by his good works. We are told that it was by believing or having faith in God that he was declared righteous (v 3). This was not a reward for his faithful obedience, it was a gift of God. Neither was Abraham declared righteous by being circumcised (which the Jews considered another 'good work'). He was credited with righteousness before he was circumcised (v 10).

The important implication here is that Abraham now becomes the spiritual father of all who trust God just as he had. It is by faith alone that we too are declared right with God and become part of Abraham's family, the people of God. For it is those who have faith who have had their sins forgiven - blotted out - so that God will never count it against them (vs 7-8).

This is great news to those condemned to face God's wrath. We could never achieve the righteousness required to escape that wrath. However, it can now be ours for free, as a gift. All we need to do is to trust in the God who promised it to us.

Thank God for His free gift to us. Pray that we will fully depend on Him to make us righteous and not think that we contribute to our salvation by the things that we do.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 3, FRIDAY

Rom 4:1–25

Three Sisters

Rom 4:7–8

Grace, mercy, and peace are the three sisters of salvation. In these three words we have the gospel in capsule form. They sum up our complete salvation in Jesus Christ.

Grace is the foundation of our redemption, mercy is the manifestation of our redemption, and peace is the consummation.

- Grace points to the past—our salvation goes back “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4).
- Mercy speaks of the present—it is manifested to us day by day.
- And peace is the consummation because it makes our future secure.

Grace is receiving what we do not deserve. Mercy is not receiving what we do deserve. We deserve to go to hell, but by His mercy we shall never go there. We do not deserve to go to heaven, but by grace we’ll spend eternity there. Grace justifies. Mercy pardons. Grace admits us to heaven. Mercy saves us from hell. The death of Christ was enough to pardon us in mercy, but it took the resurrection to effect our justification. He “was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification” (Rom. 4:25).

And now, by faith, we have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1).

By: M.R. DeHaan

***[Our Lord] took death upon Himself, On that cruel cross of pain,
And those who look in faith to Him, Eternal life shall gain! —Johnson***

None live so serenely, so pleasantly, and so triumphantly as those who walk by faith. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. Romans 4:16

Some consider faith in God to be irrational. It is something one clings to when recourse to reason is exhausted. Paul taught that righteousness would be credited to those who trust in what God has done for them in Jesus. But is faith in God and His promises reasonable?

Abraham was promised that his descendants would inherit the world (v 13). They would be as numerous as sand on the seashore and as stars in the sky (Gen 22:17). Could Abraham have been a little skeptical at first? After all, he was nearly a hundred years old and his wife was about ninety and barren (v 19)! Those were not the best conditions for child bearing. Yet, Scriptures tell us that instead of doubting God in the light of what looked like insurmountable obstacles, Abraham had faith. And his faith was reasonable because the object of his faith. God, is reliable for God is both powerful and faithful. If God were only either powerful or faithful or neither of the two, then Abraham’s faith would indeed be futile and irrational. But he was fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He desired and was faithful to his promises (vs 20-21). And because he trusted God. he became the father of many nations (v 18) and was credited with righteousness (v 22).

Many Asians find it hard to accept the concept of grace. To many, there is no such thing as a free ticket. We get what we deserve. However, Paul tells us that justification comes to those who rely not on their good works but on the God who justifies (v 5). And God keeps His promises. This surely is a relief to those who know they fail to live up to God’s standards.

**Praise the merciful God who promises to give us new life when it was impossible
for us to have life because of sin. Pray that we will always trust in Him alone
and completely to justify us through Christ.**

SEP 4, SATURDAY

Rom 5:1-11

The Love of God

Rom 5:8

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

Paul now explains the important implications of the righteousness that believers have through faith. They now enjoy a different relationship with God. Once they were under His wrath and condemnation (1:18-3:20), now they have peace with Him. Believers have been acquitted of their sins. They have been reconciled to God (v 10). They can rejoice that they will one day share in His glory (v 2), being freed from the taint of sin and restored to the image that He created them to be in.

Moreover, the peace that they have with God also enables them to rejoice in their suffering. They not only rejoice despite their suffering, they rejoice because of their suffering, realizing that this is the means by which their loving God hones their hope. Through suffering, Christians learn to cultivate perseverance and a steadfast character which in turn reinforces hope (v 4). Thus, like a muscle, hope is strengthened as we face suffering with stubborn perseverance.

We might be tempted to doubt this hope in the face of suffering. However, this hope will never disappoint us because our heavenly Father loves us greatly. Subjectively, Christians recognize this love because God has poured it into their hearts and conveyed it to them by His Spirit (v 5). But even at the lowest ebb of emotional conviction, the love of God displayed on the cross continues to be an objective certainty. For it was when we were still sinners (v 8), ungodly people (v 6), enemies of God (v 10), that God demonstrated the extent of His love by sending Jesus to die for us (v 8). If He was willing to justify us when we were still His enemies, there can be no doubt that He will save us on the last day, now that we have been reconciled with Him (v 9). Our hope stands on the solid ground of His love and He will not disappoint us.

**Thank you Heavenly Father for Your amazing love for us.
Help us to remember the forgiveness that You've given us through Jesus
that we may stand firm always in this hope.**

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 4, SATURDAY

Rom 5:1–11

One Heart

Rom 5:8

Jim Walton was translating the New Testament for the Muinane people of La Sabana in the jungles of Colombia. But he was having trouble with the word peace.

During this time, Fernando, the village chief, was promised a 20-minute plane ride to a location that would have taken him 3 days to travel by walking. The plane was delayed in arriving at La Sabana, so Fernando departed on foot. When the plane finally came, a runner took off to bring Fernando back. But by the time he had returned, the plane had left.

Fernando was livid because of the mix-up. He went to Jim and launched into an angry tirade. Fortunately, Walton had taped the chief's diatribe. When he later translated it, he discovered that the chief kept repeating the phrase, "I don't have one heart." Jim asked other villagers what having "one heart" meant, and he found that it was like saying, "There is nothing between you and the other person." That, Walton realized, was just what he needed to translate the word peace.

To have peace with God means that there is nothing—no sin, no guilt, no condemnation—that separates us. And that peace with God is possible only through Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Do you have "one heart" with God?

By: Dave Branon

***When Jesus took our punishment, God's wrath was satisfied;
Now we can live at peace with Him, Because our Savior died. —Sper
To be of one heart with God is to know the peace of God.***

Rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix led a promiscuous life, indulging in drugs and behaving outrageously on and off the stage.

At the end of a concert in 1970, Jimi smashed his guitar. According to Robert McGee and Donald Sapaugh in *Search for Peace*, the audience screamed and applauded, but suddenly the frenzied applause stopped. Jimi had fallen on his knees and was staying in that position motionless. He broke the stillness by asking, "If you know real peace, I want to visit with you backstage." But apparently nobody responded to his startling invitation. Several days later he died from an overdose of drugs. Peace, real peace, eluded Jimi Hendrix.

Do you know real peace? Have you discovered, as that rock star did, that fame, money, and self-indulgence don't bring inner serenity? Prayerfully, then, you need to make another discovery. Only through a trustful commitment to Christ can you experience peace with God (Rom. 5:1). Open your heart in faith to the Prince of Peace, inviting Him to come into your life and take control of it. Then, underneath all of life's agitation, you can know the peace of God —the very tranquility of heaven in the depths of your soul (Phil. 4:6-7).

By: Vernon Grounds

***Our heart is always seeking — We long to know real peace;
But if we trust in Jesus, Our restlessness will cease. —DJJ
Peace floods the soul when Christ rules the heart.***

SEP 5, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 6, MONDAY

Rom 5:12-21

The Life that Brought Death & the Death that Brought Life

Rom 5:17b

For if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Romans 5:17

Yesterday's passage provides much comfort and joy to Christians. It gives us grounds to rejoice even in the face of suffering. We know that the God who loves us will not forsake us. However, quiet confidence in God's salvation might seem elusive at times. The fact of our forgiveness through Christ's death is hidden from our senses. We may not see or feel the certainty of this work. The inevitability of death, on the other hand, is a reality that we live with. We see people dying and feel the pain when a loved one dies. Might death thwart God's plans to save us? Why does death reign in this world?

Today we are introduced to the two most significant representatives of humanity. Firstly, we have Adam. He introduced sin into the human world. Death results as a punishment. It is not death for Adam alone but also for the whole human race (vs 12, 15, 17). Adam sinned and thus brought condemnation on his posterity (vs 16, 18). As a result, death reigns over the children of Adam (v 17). But there is a second representative of humanity - Jesus, the second Adam. Like Adam, His actions would affect those whom He represents (vs 18-19). But unlike sinful Adam, He would be righteous and obedient to His Father (vs 18-19). Where the first Adam sinned, causing death to reign over all people, the second Adam would, through His death, bring justification to the many who would receive God's abundant provision of grace (v 17). Having been made righteous, the children of the second Adam would not merely be survivors of the reign of death; they will in fact reign in life (vs 17, 21) through the abundant provision of God's grace! (vs 17, 20).

Those who have accepted God's provision of grace may confidently wait for the Lord Jesus to appear. For we know that we will then reign with Him.

Let us hold unwaveringly to this hope and share it with those who have no hope.

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 6, MONDAY

Rom 5:12-21

Making Wrong Right

Rom 5:17b

Sin and justification are two powerful themes in Romans. Sin is active rebellion against God. The outcome is death to all (v 12) and condemnation for all (v 18). Justification, on the other hand, is the act of being put right. But then, how can a sinner be justified? Or more simply, how can a wrong be made right?

Justification does not mean God declares bad people to be good; nor that He overlooks wrongdoing. Something was done to us and for us so that we might be credited as having been 'made right' before God. And this, God did through Jesus Christ. All the sins of the world were heaped upon Him as He died on the cross that we might be justified (Rom 1:25). Justification brings peace of mind and heart. Peace has always eluded mankind (Jn 14:1, 27). That peace does not depend on our fickle moods and responses, but on God's unmerited favor towards us. The rebellion is over and we are no longer at war with Him. On the contrary, we have immediate access to God (v 2) and enjoy personal communion with Him. Hence, we are no longer at odds with ourselves but rather we experience an abiding and enduring joy even when suffering intrudes into our lives. We are now free and able to view life from a totally different perspective: positive not negative, satisfying not disappointing.

***It was difficult to follow Christ on the way to Calvary. It is still difficult today.
But amidst the distress of living in a fractured world,
we may rejoice that God is now ours to have and to hold.***

Four people—a pilot, a professor, a pastor, and a hiker—were flying in a small plane when the engines died. The pilot said, "There are only three parachutes. Since this is my plane, I'm taking one of them." He put it on and jumped out. The professor said, "I'm brilliant and the world needs me, so I'm taking a parachute," and he jumped out.

Then the pastor told the hiker, "I don't want to be selfish, so you take the last parachute." The hiker replied, "There are still two left, so we can each have one. The professor jumped out with my backpack instead of the parachute!" Though the professor thought he would land safely, his assurance was based on faulty thinking.

Some people have an assurance of salvation based on faulty thinking. They believe that church attendance, baptism, or just being good will gain them approval from God. But our thinking is faulty if it isn't based on what God says in His Word. God says that "all have sinned" and that we are His enemies. But through the death and resurrection of His Son, we can be made right with God (Rom. 3:23; 5:8-10). By faith in what Christ has done, we can have peace with God (5:1) and the assurance of eternal life in heaven.

Do you believe it? Your eternity is at stake.
Don't trust faulty thinking but put your faith in Christ.

By: Anne Cetas

***I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus— Trusting only Thee;
Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free. — Havergal
If we could earn our salvation, Christ would not have died to provide it.***

SEP 7, TUESDAY

Rom 6:1-23

To Sin Or Not To Sin

Rom 6:23

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Romans 6:1-2

It is hard to overstate the importance of the doctrine of justification by faith that Paul expounds. It tells us how a holy God makes unrighteous people righteous and acceptable to Him through faith alone in Christ alone. God's graciousness in dealing with human sinfulness has been a recurring theme in these chapters. Now, however, Paul anticipates an objection to this teaching. If salvation is not our effort but God's, and God is glorified in justifying us when we come to faith, then shouldn't we sin even more so that He is shown to be even more gracious when He forgives us (5:20-6:1)? There seems to be some logic in this but, as we might expect, it is perverse logic.

It is because of sin that we stored up God's wrath against us (2:5). However, we died to and have been freed from the penalty of sin (v 2) when we died with Christ. Thus we are no longer slaves to sin. Furthermore, having died with Christ, we also have new life and look forward in faith to spending our resurrected life with Him (vs 5, 8). Knowing what we've come from (condemnation due to sin), and what we've been brought to (new life through Christ), how can we live in sin any longer? By no means are we to do that!

In this life we will fail and we will sin. When that happens, repent, pray for God's strength and walk resolutely away from that sin. We need not fear sin's accusation against us. For we know that sin is no longer a master that has mastery over us or condemns us, since by grace we have been justified through the blood of Christ. However, we must no longer offer our bodies in obedience to sin. Instead, we are to offer ourselves to God to live according to His ways.

Thank God for His love and grace in freeing us from the penalty of sin through the Lord Jesus. Pray that God will give us the strength not to delight in sin anymore but to submit our lives in obedience to Him in ever increasing measure.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 7, TUESDAY

Rom 6:1-23

To Sin Or Not To Sin

Rom 6:23

Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. Romans 6:19

As with the previous passage, Paul again anticipates an objection to his teaching that our salvation comes entirely by God's grace and not our efforts. If one's salvation is found not in law observance but is entirely a gift of God, then surely it would not matter if we continued to sin, would it? Once again, we find Paul answering this absurd assertion as we would expect: 'By no means!' (v 15). Of course it matters!

Firstly, Paul tells us that those who 'offer' or yield themselves in willing obedience to sin are actually enslaved to it (v 16). It is popular to think that a person could be neutral to both sin and righteousness. But that is a deception. If we do not give ourselves to obedience to God then by default we have offered ourselves to sin.

Secondly, when that happens we do not just stagnate at a particular level of sinfulness but grow in ever increasing wickedness (19). It is like an incurable cancer that keeps growing in us.

Finally, and most tragically, this enslavement leads to condemnation and death (vs 16, 21) for that is the necessary recompense for sin (v 23). If this is what we've been rescued from then it would be ridiculous to go back there and be enslaved to it all over again.

Enslavement sounds terrible. However, the alternative to enslavement to sin is enslavement to God. And enslavement to God and willing submission to His kingship leads to a life of righteousness. And He gives us eternal life. This surely is worth being enslaved to. Why then would those who have now been given this go back to sin?

Praise God that the blood of Christ liberates us from the condemnation that sin brings. Thank Him that we can now be wholly committed to Him.

Pray for His strength to keep fighting to resist sin and to keep growing in godliness.

Paul argues here that the more we are convicted of sin, the greater grace abounds. However, sin subtly entices us and we say, 'If that is the case, I can give in to sin. After all I will always be forgiven.' We are then tempted to think that the more we sin, the greater the grace bestowed in forgiveness.

Paul refutes such thinking for it not only gives us the excuse to indulge in sinful living but also shows that our understanding of God's grace is fundamentally flawed. How could a sinner accept the gift of grace, and continue living his old life? With this comes Paul's great statement that we are dead to sin and alive to God (v 11). This is now possible because the eternal Son of God took upon Himself a human body. He died, was buried and rose again. This being 'dead to sin' does not just mean taking some new steps in life, changing some habits or undergoing character improvement or behavioral change. No, it means having a new life where sin has no mastery over us again. We are set free from sin. In fact, Christians shudder at the dreadfulness of their sin because they know the awful sacrifice Christ had to pay at Calvary.

They are people who have repented of their sin and have turned away from it because they have seen sin for what it is: wilful rebellion against the rulership of God over their lives. As such, new life in Christ is seen as both the exclusion of evil and the inclusion of good. We are dead to unrighteousness, impurity and wickedness but alive to obedience, righteousness and holiness.

Sin was sovereign in our lives until Christ came to dethrone it.

SEP 8, WEDNESDAY

Rom 7:1–25

Freedom From The Law

Rom 7:24–25a

But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. Romans 7:6

It is a tremendous privilege to be counted as the people of God. The Israelites knew that. Out of all the nations of the earth, they were chosen to be God’s treasured possession (Exo 19:5). Along with this privilege was given them the knowledge of God through His laws. However, as Paul pointed out, it was obedience to and not mere possession of the law that mattered. Those who obeyed were declared righteous (2:12-13). And therein lies the problem. Everyone was guilty of breaking God’s law (3:23). Consequently, the law just made people conscious of their sins. The law could not make them righteous and acceptable before God. In fact, the law gave the basis for convicting them before God.

But the good news is that we are no longer under law but under grace. This means that the law is no longer able to condemn those belonging to Christ.

Yet how could God's people not be under the law? Are they not bound by it? Well, no. Using marriage as an illustration, Paul explains that Christians died to the law when they died with Christ. They are now no longer in bondage to the law and are free to belong to Christ instead. Our relationship with God is now no longer dependent on our devotion to the law but through Christ. This enables us to serve God fruitfully, not through the law but in the spirit. Furthermore, as someone puts it, we now serve 'not because the law is our master and we have to, but because Christ is our husband and we want to.'

**Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us Your laws so that we may know
Your holy ways. We are sorry that we fail to live according to Your law.
Thank you for forgiving us through Jesus’ death for us.**

**Please help us to keep trusting in Jesus for our salvation. Help us to serve You, not out of a
dreaded sense of obligation but from a grateful and willing heart.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 8, WEDNESDAY

Rom 7:1-25

Wretched Man

Rom 7:24-25a

What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! Romans 7:24-25a

We would probably not have noticed anything amiss had Paul not written verses 7-25. The discussion on serving in the new way of the Spirit and not the old way of the law in verse 6 really only continues in 8:1. However, Paul makes a necessary digression here in order to address some anticipated objections. So far he has portrayed the law very negatively (3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 7:5). Thus, it is not surprising if someone surmised that the law itself was evil. Here Paul vindicates the law's goodness and presents a penetrating insight into human nature.

The law reveals sin for what it is - a rebellion against God. But instead of repenting in light of this revelation, the sinful nature is provoked to sin even more. We might recognise this provocative power of the law ourselves. We are sometimes tempted to do things just because they are not allowed, believing that the proverbial forbidden fruit does seem to be the sweetest. Thus, it is not the law that is the problem. Sin is.

As a Christian. Paul finds that the Spirit enables his mind to delight in God's law but the sinful nature continues to be an opposing force. He desires to do what is good but at times is not able to carry it out. Even worse, it entices him to do the evil he does not desire to do. Thus, he cries out despairingly, 'What a wretched man I am!'

The Spirit's presence enables Christians to desire God's ways. This will then heighten their struggle with sin in their lives (not end it!) However, when Satan points an accusing finger at our sins, trying to convince us that those sins have condemned us before God, let us go to the cross. Then we will again cry with Paul, but this time it is a cry of thanksgiving - 'Thanks be to God!' By His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus has fully paid the penalty for our sin.

In the passage, Paul has become unreservedly autobiographical. It is now 'I' and 'We' and not 'You' and 'They'. It requires an extraordinary Christian to reveal the inner strife that Paul confesses here.

Paul begins by first looking at the status and nature of the Law. The Law is good and shows the way of living rightly. If there is no Law, then we would not know what wrongdoing is. But can a man keep the Law so absolutely that he has no need of a Saviour? Is it possible that someone might just be able to 'cast the first stone' (Jn 8:7)? The truth is, the Law exposes our fallen nature and condemns us to death (vs 10-11). The Law, Paul explained, deceived him. The more he strove to keep the excellence of God's demands, the more it revealed his wretchedness.

As we look into Paul's struggles, we see the same conflict within us. The Law is given, and we know the right thing to do but we fail to keep it. We resolve to stop doing the things we hate but we find instead that they become even more enticing. This is too commonly our experience. The reason is clear. Our base natural self slips easily towards evil. Thoughts race through our minds, convincing us that we will never be able to make things right. But the regenerate man renewed by the Spirit (5:5) does not need to live in failure. In the battle we are engaged in, we move towards victory. The exclamation of thanksgiving in verse 25 shows we will eventually triumph in Christ who has overcome sin.

**Lord, preserve us even in the darkest night of our failure
that we may not be deterred in our resolve to keep pressing on.**

SEP 9, THURSDAY

Rom 8:1-17

Life in the Spirit

Rom 8:15

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you ... And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Romans 8:9-11

The major theme in Romans is the Gospel. It tells us how, by the grace of God, sinful people are justified through faith in the cross of Christ. Those who have been justified enjoy peace with God. They are no longer enslaved to sin and its condemnation because they have been freed from the law which gives sin its condemnatory power. Christians are therefore now free to serve God in the new way of the Spirit. The first three verses of today's passage summarise this glorious news for us.

But why did God do all this? The purpose, we are told in verse 4, is so that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us. This law required total obedience. It also required a penalty to be paid when perfect obedience was not rendered. Both these requirements were met when the righteous Son of God fulfilled those requirements in His life and paid for the penalty that we deserved by dying on the cross. The goal was that God's people might live holy lives. Now, it is impossible for the sinful mind to please God (v 8), but praise God that those who have the Spirit of God are led by the Spirit. They come under His direction and control. One writer reminds us that this does not imply perfectionism. However, it does mean that obedience is necessary in Christian discipleship and it is made possible by the power of the indwelling Spirit. And each and every child of God, i.e. Christians, will have the Spirit of God. His ministry involves assuring us of our adoption as God's children.

How wonderful the news that God should count me worthy of being called His child. And if that is our realization, then surely we would want to be led by the Spirit in ever increasing holiness in order to please Him who has adopted us. This may involve much hardship, but all this becomes bearable when we remember that it prepares us to be co-heirs with Christ and partakers in His glory. Hallelujah. Come, Lord Jesus.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 9, THURSDAY

Rom 8:1-17

Set Free

Rom 8:15

When I was a boy in the village, something about chickens fascinated me. Whenever I caught one, I held it down for a few moments and then gently released it. Thinking I was still holding it, the chicken remained down; even though it was free to dash away, it felt trapped.

When we put our faith in Jesus, He graciously delivers us from sin and the hold that Satan had on us. However, because it may take time to change our sinful habits and behavior, Satan can make us feel trapped. But God's Spirit has set us free; He doesn't enslave us. Paul told the Romans, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

Through our Bible reading, prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit, God works in us to cleanse us and to help us live for Him. The Bible encourages us to be confident in our walk with Jesus without feeling as if we are not set free.

Jesus said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). May the freedom we have in Christ spur us on to love Him and serve Him.

By: Lawrence Darmani

***Lord, forgive me for sometimes revisiting my past and
forgetting that You have washed away my sins.
Thank You for taking my burden and setting me free to enjoy living for You.***

My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee. Charles Wesley

The Christian life really isn't hard to live—it's impossible! In fact, only one person in history has actually lived it perfectly—Jesus Christ.

The situation isn't hopeless for us, however. When Jesus returned to His Father in heaven, He sent His Holy Spirit to help us live in a supernatural way (Jn. 14:15-17; Rom. 8:2-4). Just as the Spirit gives us new life in Christ, so also He enables us to live the Christian life as we walk in close fellowship with Jesus (Jn. 15:4-5).

A church bulletin captured this reality in the following prayer: "So far today, Lord, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped; I haven't lost my temper; I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But in a few moments, Lord, I'm going to get out of bed. And from then on, I'm going to need a lot of help."

The good news is that we have God's help. Believers possess the Holy Spirit of God! That leads to a probing question: "What's going on in your life that could not go on without the Holy Spirit?" The answer should be: "Everything!" The Christian needs the Holy Spirit for everything.

Whatever you face today, you don't face alone. Christ's Spirit is there with you. Count on it!

By: Haddon W. Robinson

***What does Romans 7:15-23 tell us about the apostle Paul's attempt to
live the Christian life? How did he find victory? (7:24-8:1).***

What Jesus accomplished for us, the Spirit works out in us.

Overview of Romans 8:18–16:27

In Romans we find a carefully constructed argument on Christian doctrines. Paul deals with God's revelation through created nature (1: 19–20), universality of sin (3:9-20), justification (3:21-24), faith (chapter 4), the original sin (5:12), union with Christ (chapter 6), sanctification (8:1-14), God's election of Israel and the Gentiles (chapters 9-11), and practical applications of those doctrinal teachings in our daily living in a complex society (chapters 12-15). But the theme of this book is justification by faith. 'For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith' (1:17).

The letter was most probably written during Paul's third missionary journey, possibly at Corinth, where he stayed for three months in the spring of either 56 or 57 AD. He did not start the church in Rome, nor had he ever visited there before writing this letter (1:13-15). But many of his co-labourers were living and serving in Rome (chapter 16). He wanted to visit them but there was no good opportunity for him to go there. But as he was thinking of going to Spain (15:23), he decided to visit Rome for mutual encouragement, and most probably to recruit a group of Christians who would support his mission to Spain.

Through the book of Romans, together with Paul, we rejoice in the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:16) and the deep love of God (5:8) not only towards Jews but also towards Gentiles. We also see the sure leading of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (chapter 8). As we read and study Romans we gain a grand perspective of what it means to be a Christian in any cultural context and in any age.

SEP 10, FRIDAY

Rom 8:18-39

Three Groans

Rom 8:28

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:22-23

Do you enjoy bird watching, visiting scenic spots, or experiencing the four seasons? There is much to marvel about the beauty of created nature. But in the inner reality of nature, there is also ugliness and decay.

Paul says in verse 22, 'We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time'. The fall of Adam and Eve brought the sufferings and frustration of the whole creation. But Paul declares that the whole creation is groaning and waiting for a time when the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (v 21). What a view of the creation to come!

Next, Paul speaks about the groans of Christians (vs 23-25). They groan inwardly as they wait eagerly for their adoption as sons. They will become like Christ with resurrected bodies. We still have to suffer now as we have not attained to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. But Paul considers that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Do you have that groan in you?

Lastly, we have to know the groans of the Holy Spirit: 'In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.' A groan is a manifestation of an inexpressible feeling. When we are weak and cannot pray, the Spirit helps to intercede for us. God the Father knows the mind of the Spirit (v 27). The Spirit assures us that the best is yet to come. What a grand perspective of God's plan of redemption!

**Heavenly Father, thank you for Christ who intercedes for us in the court of heaven,
and thank you for the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us in our hearts.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 10, FRIDAY

Rom 8:18-39

More Than Conquerors

Rom 8:28

Today's theme, 'More than Conquerors' (v 37), is one of the gems of Scripture. It is a triumphant confidence we have, as God's people, that even if the tide should rise against us, we can be victorious.

How is this so? The reason is clear, and indeed, specific. We are so incredibly precious and special that nothing can alienate or stand between God and us (v 35). Nothing can separate the child of God from his Father. God loves us to such an extent that He gave up His Son to die for us. Surely He will also work for our ultimate good (v 28) and work on our side (v 31). It was difficult for the disciples to follow Christ to Calvary. It is also difficult for many today.

The way that we walk is often hard, lonely and unpopular, especially in an Asian environment that is so often opposed to the Christian faith. But if faith stands firm, there is the assurance that no experience is meaningless, that everything committed to God's creative hands will turn into good for us (v 28). God's tremendous care for us is further shown in the way He comes alongside us to help us in our prayers (v 34). What great love God has for us - Christ did not just die for us, but also rose for us, and reigns in power for us. And He prays for us.

Here, then, is our Christian security: the assurance that with God on our side, we can overcome all forces arrayed against us.

***The Christian is no battered and exhausted victor,
but a confident, triumphant conqueror.***

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose ...In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:28, 37

What sort of suffering, pain or difficulty are you going through now? Do you sometimes feel that there is no hope for the future? Here is the sure promise of God for you: 'And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose' (v 28),

We know God works in our lives. The goal of His dealings with us is our ultimate conformity to the likeness of Christ. He works for our good in all things including all our negative or unexpected experiences. He works for the good of those who love Him and we should love Him with all our being. Those who love God are those who have been called according to His purpose of salvation. We usually do not welcome failure, suffering, pain or misfortune as we feel they work negatively against us. But our God is a God who helps us even through all these experiences and works good out of all these.

Paul gives us God's five stages where His good and saving purpose is realised in the believers. They are God's foreknowledge or His initial love, predestination or God's sovereign choice, the calling which is God's call, justification by faith, and glorification in the age to come (vs 29-30).

The Spirit of God makes the love of God real to us. The Father is for us (vs 31 -32), the Son is for us (v 34), and the Spirit is for us (vs 26-27). Nothing can separate us from His love. Who can be against us? Who will bring any charge against us? Who will condemn us? Will God not give us all things? Is there any reason why we should not be 'more than conquerors' (v 37)? Praise the Lord for His love for us!

**Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God
that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

SEP 11, SATURDAY

Rom 9:1–29

In God's Mercy There Is Always Hope

Rom 9:25

What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? Romans 9:22

If God is for Israel and will never remove His love from them, why has He set aside His chosen people? In chapters 9-11, Paul defends the righteousness of God in His dealings with Israel. Nothing had separated them from His love. God's present dealings with them do not indicate that He has abandoned them but they need to be viewed in the light of His future plans for the nation. In chapter 9 Paul explains God's dealings with Israel in the past, in chapter 10 with their present situation, and in chapter 11 with His future plans for the nation.

In chapter 9 which emphasizes the sovereignty of God, we see the sorrow and anguish Paul feels over Israel (vs 1-3). Do we have the same sorrow and anguish over our own people? With all their privileges, why did Israel reject the Messiah? God's election of Israel did not depend on natural descent (vs 6-10) or human merit (vs 11-14). They were chosen only because of His grace and love (Deut 7:6-8). God is not obligated to save anybody, for all deserve to be condemned. Therefore, nobody can criticize God or say He is unfair. He is merciful to sinners and we should rejoice that Israel's rejection of Christ did not ruin God's plan, for He went to the Gentiles who gladly received the good news. However, God has a remnant among the Jews (vs 27-29), and believing Jews and Gentiles are one in the church. Israel rejected the Messiah, but God has never removed His love from Israel.

The Christian population is still less than 1% of the whole population in Japan. As a Japanese Christian, I should also believe that God will someday, somehow, save the stubborn and proud Japanese, who are now rejecting the Gospel. May God deal with the Japanese on the basis of His mercy!

**Lord, give me genuine love towards those who reject Christ,
and help me to trust fully the sovereignty of God.**

P.R.A.Y

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SEP 11, SATURDAY

Rom 9:1–29

What's It All About?

Rom 9:25

Recently I was in a crowded shopping area when I saw a woman plowing her way through the crowd. What intrigued me was the message on her T-shirt, which read in bold capital letters, IT'S ALL ABOUT ME. Her actions reinforced the words on her shirt.

I'm afraid she's not alone. That message is declared by so many men and women today that it could be the motto of our modern world. For followers of Christ, however, that statement simply is not true. It is not all about us—it's all about Jesus Christ and others.

The apostle Paul certainly felt the weight of this reality. He was so concerned that his fellow Israelites would know Christ that he said, "I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). That is a remarkable statement! Far from thinking it was all about himself, Paul affirmed that he would willingly exchange his eternity for theirs.

Paul's teaching is a refreshing reminder of self-sacrifice in a challenging world that is destructively self-centered. The question we must ask is: Is it all about me? Or is our life about Jesus Christ and the people He came to reach.

Think about it. What's it all about?

By: Bill Crowder

Others, Lord, yes others, May this my motto be.

Help me to live for others, That I may live for Thee. —Meigs

Our lives should be marked by love for Christ and others—not obsession with self.

As a convert to Jesus Christ, Nabeel Qureshi has written books to help his readers understand the people in the religion he left. His tone is respectful, and Qureshi always displays a heart of love for his people.

Qureshi dedicated one of his books to his sister, who has not yet put her faith in Jesus. The dedication is brief, but powerful, "I am begging God for the day that we can worship him together," he wrote.

We get a sense of that kind of love as we read Paul's letter to the church in Rome. "My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief," he said, "for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them" (Romans 9:2–3 NLT).

Paul loved the Jewish people so much that he would have chosen separation from God if only they would accept Christ. He understood that by rejecting Jesus, his people were rejecting the one true God. This motivated him to appeal to his readers to share the good news of Jesus with everyone (10:14–15).

Today, may we prayerfully dedicate ourselves to the love that aches for those close to us!

By: Tim Gustafson

Father, we ask You to fill our hearts with Your love for others.

We hold _____ up to You and beg for them to see the truth about Your Son Jesus.

We must love those for whom Christ died as well as those in whom Christ lives.

SEP 12, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 13, MONDAY

Rom 9:30-10:21

Salvation By Faith is Simple and for All

Rom 10:9

That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Romans 10:9-10

I often use 10:9-10 when I lead somebody to Christ. These verses are in the context of bringing the message of salvation both to the disobedient and obstinate people of Israel and to Gentiles (vs 11-13, 19-21). Salvation by faith is simple and it is for all.

Paul (when he was Saul), and Israel both had zeal for God, but it was a zeal that lacked knowledge that Jesus is the Messiah. Zeal without knowledge or enthusiasm without understanding is dangerous fanaticism. Paul gives the right understanding of righteousness by faith in verses 6-7, by quoting from Deuteronomy 30:14. You do not have to go up to the heights, or go down to the depths to look for Christ because He has already come, died and risen. Israel as a whole hoped to gain justification by keeping the law but we are justified only by believing the Gospel. Why did Israel stumble over Christ and reject Him? Because they did not understand the kind of righteousness God wanted or how to get it. Like the Pharisees (and many people today), they thought only of righteous works and could not comprehend a righteousness that comes by faith (v 13).

Asians are ready to do difficult things but choose not to have faith in Christ. They are so busy with social work, peace movements, cultural activities, religious studies - but they reject the necessity of looking up to Jesus by faith. They are pursuing righteousness by works.

The missionary heart of Paul comes out in verses 14-17. Salvation is by faith, and faith comes 'by hearing the word of God' (17). But unbelieving sinners (including Israel) cannot hear unless we tell them. God needs people with 'beautiful feet' (Isa 52:7) to carry the Gospel to the lost. When you feel discouraged in your witnessing, remember Paul. Continue to care, to pray, and share the Good News. Keep those feet beautiful!

The Gospel is available to all. Who will go and preach the Gospel?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 13, MONDAY

Rom 9:30-10:21

Misplaced Zeal

Rom 10:9

In chapters 9-11, Paul is explaining the special relationship of the Jews to God and the place of Israel in God's purpose. In today's passage, Paul focuses particularly on the most grievous burden that he bore - the plight of unbelieving Israel.

The Jews were the inheritors of God's unique work (9:4-5). They enjoyed the special privilege of being the children of God's promise and covenant. They knew it too and were zealous for God (10:2-3). But their understanding was flawed in several ways. They established their own righteousness rather than God's. They relied on their own obedience to the Law rather than on God's grace. They thought religious zeal and sincerity would be sufficient to make them acceptable to God. The gravest problem for the Jewish nation is that they rejected Jesus as the Savior. Sadly, Jesus became the great 'stumbling stone' for them (9:32-33). Their unbelief broke Paul's heart. He was not denouncing them but pleading with them to open their eyes and grasp the significance of all that God had done for them. Such was his burning compassion for his fellow people.

On the other hand, Paul was thrilled that the Gentiles, though lacking the advantages of the Jews, responded to God's grace, understood the meaning of faith in Christ (9:30) and were saved. Paul made it clear that the only way available for Jews or Gentiles was simply to trust Jesus and acknowledge God's claim on their lives (10:8-11). It is as simple as that, yet many of us share the same tragic blindness of the Jews and choose to go our own way.

***Our confidence in God does not rest on our religiosity in keeping rules,
but on His mercy towards us.***

When challenged to speak to others about Christ, some believers excuse their silence by saying, "Well, I am not a preacher." But every follower of Jesus is (or at least should be) a preacher. We don't need a pulpit. It can be done in friendly conversation, by handing out a tract or portion of Scripture, by writing a letter, or by singing a song.

I received the following letter: "Several months ago, on a bus in Detroit, I picked up a copy of Our Daily Bread, which someone had left on the seat. I began reading it and became so interested I wrote to you asking for the current booklet. Through this I began listening to your radio program and was wonderfully saved. I am eager to get to heaven and find out who left that booklet on the seat in the bus!"

A dying woman testified that she was saved by reading a piece of wrapping paper in a package from Australia. The crumpled pages contained a sermon by British pastor Charles H. Spurgeon. The sermon, first preached in England, printed in America, shipped to Australia, and then sent back to England as wrapping paper, was the means of converting a precious soul in London where the sermon was first preached! That is the power of the Word! —M. R. De Haan, M.D. (founder of RBC Ministries)

By: M.R. DeHaan

***We do not need a pulpit, From which to speak God's Word;
It only takes our willingness, To share what we have heard. —Sper***

Jesus said, "Go into all the world" (Mk. 16:15). The world begins where your front yard ends.

SEP 14, TUESDAY

Rom 11:1-24

A Chain Of Blessing Starting & Ending with Israel

Rom 11:20-21

But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! Romans 11:12

'Did God reject his people? By no means!' (v 1). Paul gives an eye-opening explanation in this chapter. Although many Jews hardened their hearts against the Gospel, God did not reject Israel. Paul himself was a good example. God will never break His covenant with His people for He foreknew or foreknows all things. As in the time of Elijah, in Paul's day as well, God was keeping a faithful remnant of Jews. God's future plans for Israel, when unfolded, will fully vindicate His righteousness.

Gentile salvation really depends on Israel's covenant relationship with God, as Paul illustrates with the olive tree. Gentile believers are the wild olive tree branches grafted into the cultivated olive tree and branches which are the Jewish believers. Through Israel's fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles. The salvation of Gentiles in the present age not only magnifies the grace of God, but it will also provoke Israel to jealousy and make her envious, and so lead to her ultimate restoration or fullness. Israel's fullness will bring yet much greater riches to the world! God knows what He is doing even if we do not understand it fully.

Many missionaries have been disappointed because of the spiritual barrenness in Japan. Despite the years of hard work and the money spent in reaching out to the Japanese, most of them are indifferent to or have rejected the Gospel. Meanwhile, the Gospel has been accepted by the Koreans and the Chinese in a wonderful way. But the Japanese Christians and churches should believe that God has not rejected the Japanese. In the future He will lead them back to Himself. When you become discouraged about the future of the church and feel that you may be the only faithful Christian left, read I Kings 19 and focus on God's greatness.

May we be humble and thankful, remembering God's marvelous plan of salvation, as we share the Gospel with others.

P.R.A.Y

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SEP 14, TUESDAY

Rom 11:1–24

Tree of Rest

Rom 11:20–21

There is a remnant according to the election of grace. — Romans 11:5

The lone tree in the field across from my office remained a mystery. Acres of trees had been cut down so the farmer could grow corn. But one tree remained standing, its branches reaching up and spreading out. The mystery was solved when I learned the tree was spared for a purpose. Farmers long ago traditionally left one tree standing so that they and their animals would have a cool place to rest when the hot summer sun was beating down.

At times we find that we alone have survived something, and we don't know why. Soldiers coming home from combat and patients who've survived a life-threatening illness struggle to know why they survived when others did not.

The Old Testament speaks of a remnant of Israelites whom God spared when the nation was sent into exile. The remnant preserved God's law and later rebuilt the temple (Ezra 9:9). The apostle Paul referred to himself as part of the remnant of God (Rom 11:1,5). He was spared to become God's messenger to Gentiles (v.13).

If we stand where others have fallen, it's to raise our hands to heaven in praise and to spread our arms as shade for the weary. The Lord enables us to be a tree of rest for others.

By: Julie Ackerman Link

Thank You, Father, that You are my place of rest. And that all You have brought me through can be used by You to encourage others. Bring praise to Yourself through me.

Hope can be ignited by a spark of encouragement.

If the root is holy, so are the branches. - Romans 11:16

In horticulture, successfully grafting, cutting, and securing the branch of one plant into a different type of plant results in several advantages. Most significantly, the new plant can adopt a root system to survive in otherwise threatening soil.

But the differences between plants is also the largest obstacle to a successful graft. Plants that aren't closely related can seldom form a successful union.

Paul uses the idea of grafting to describe the relationship of Jews and Gentiles, a combination his readers might have considered destined to fail. The Jews are a cultivated olive tree, carefully tended and pruned for centuries; the Gentiles are wild olive branches, grafted in to this older tree and sharing its root, trunk, and sap. The holy roots symbolize the promises God made to the Jewish patriarchs, the founders of the faith; the branches symbolize the Jewish people. Thus, from the Jews, Gentiles gain stability, nourishment, and a religious heritage (v. 17). The whole tree, wild and cultivated, represents the unified people of God growing through history.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses this image to rebuke Christians for their arrogance in regarding themselves as more privileged than the Jews in God's eyes (v. 19). While it's true that individual Jews have been cut off, it's not by virtue of being Jewish, but because of "unbelief." Faith in Christ is the criterion for inclusion in the tree. Reminding the Romans of God's impartial mercy and judgment, Paul exhorts them to "continue in his kindness," lest they too be cut off. Moreover, believing Jews will be grafted on more easily, since they properly belong to the tree (v. 24).

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

Today, let us remember the Jewish people. Pray for the in-grafting of the Jews into the tree of God's people. Pray that God would show mercy in awakening them to faith in Jesus the Messiah. Ask God to continually empower the work of such Jewish-Christian organizations as Jews for Jesus or the Messianic Jews, and give thanks for His merciful inclusion of the Gentiles in His work of redemption.

SEP 15, WEDNESDAY

Rom 11:25–12:8

Offering Yourself As A Living Sacrifice

Rom 12:1–2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Romans 12:1

As you already know, 'therefore' prepares Paul to enter the application or exhortation section after his doctrinal teachings on the amazing measure of the mercy of God. Paul is now ready to deal with the Christian life in the area of relationships with other members of the body of Christ, and to the civil state.

In view of such mercies, the believers are urged to 'offer their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God' (v 1). They are to offer their bodies as ongoing 'sacrifices' to respond to God's measureless mercy. Such sacrifices are our 'spiritual and reasonable worship'. They are not like something offered in the temple in the Old Testament days, but they are sacrifices offered in the way we live. This is the heart of our worship. We worship God when we surrender our entire beings to Him. We are no more conformed to the pattern of this world, but are being transformed by the renewing of our minds (v 2). The cycle of worldliness, materialism, lust and greed, fear and bitterness, envy and pride, hatred and fits of rage, can be cut off as the power of the Holy Spirit works in our hearts and minds.

Once your relationship with God is established, the next thing you have to consider is how you understand and evaluate yourself. You should 'not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you' (v 3). The measure of faith is the Gospel of Christ which always humbles us. Another way of evaluating yourself is to look at your gifts in the body of Christ, which is the church. Listed here are the gifts of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leadership and mercy (vs 4-8). These gifts are given to the members of the body with the common purpose of giving glory to God!

Lord, help my body to be consecrated and my mind renewed. Help me also to evaluate myself soberly both in the light of the Gospel of the cross and in the body of Christ.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 15, WEDNESDAY

Rom 11:25–12:8

God's Promises & Plans Never Change

Rom 12:1–2

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Romans 11:33

Can you compare the history of your people with that of Israel? They have survived over 4000 years! God's covenant with Abraham for all nations (Gen 12:3) has never failed during these years. In I 1:25 Paul explains, 'Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.' Paul goes on to describe that Israel as a whole will be saved, quoting from Isaiah. Although neither Gentiles nor Jews deserve God's mercy, God is merciful to both. He has never turned a deaf ear to anyone who has turned from sin to Christ. What should our response be? We should tell others that God is exactly as declared in the Bible.

Paul further clarifies the unchanging character of God, and that of His love, as well as His plans and His call to Israel to be His covenant people. God's gifts and His call are irrevocable (v 29). When God's love touches us, we are drawn to Him in worship. It was the same with Paul. As his mind fills with God's love and mercy, he breaks into a great doxology of praise. God's ways can never be known to us apart from His revelation to us. We are to trust God as Proverbs 3:5-6 says, 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding: in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight.' God is utterly sufficient in and of Himself in all things, in all places, and at all times. Paul praises God, knowing that He alone deserves the glory. 'For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the glory forever! Amen!' (v 36). Worship must come after the study of God's character and His works, and the end result of our worship must be our service to the God we love.

To God be the glory. His promises and plans never change.

A group of animals decided to improve their general welfare by starting a school. The curriculum included swimming, running, climbing, and flying. The duck, an excellent swimmer, was deficient in other areas, so he majored in climbing and flying, much to the detriment of his swimming. The rabbit, a superior runner, was forced to spend so much time in other classes that he soon lost much of his famed speed. The squirrel, who had been rated "A" as a climber, dropped to a "C" because his instructors spent hours trying to teach him to fly. And the eagle could no longer soar to the treetops because he had to learn how to swim.

What happened to this group of animals portrays what often occurs in our churches. Romans 12:1-8 teaches that we are all given certain gifts. But some of us serve in so many areas that our tasks are not done well. As a result, the whole church suffers.

If God made you a teacher—be a teacher. Study diligently and do your best. If He's given you the gift of mercy, serve cheerfully and don't expect others to do what you do. Accept your spiritual gifts. Cultivate your capabilities. Stop comparing. Enjoy being you. Yes, use what you have!

By: Richard DeHaan

***Be not always wanting, Some other work to do,
But cheerfully perform the task, That Christ has given you. —Anon.
Do what you can, where you are, with what you have. —Moody***

SEP 16, THURSDAY

Rom 12:9–13:7

Love Your Neighbors & Even Evildoers

Rom 12:18

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good ...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:9, 21

How should our relationship with our neighbors be? Sincere love is the key. Paul mentions ten aspects of Christian love in verses 9-15. Note Paul's sensitive and careful life and service in these specific aspects of Christian love. A principle given in verse 9 is, 'Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.' It is not always a sin to hate. If we do not hate what God hates, we are not godly. We must hate lying, stealing, sexual immorality, hatred and murder, and other sins mentioned in Romans 1:28- 32. This does not mean we are to hate the person caught in the sin. Christians are to stand against the sin, while bringing the sinner back to God's throne of grace.

As we come to verses 14 and 17-21, we find four repetitions of negative imperatives: 'Do not curse,' 'Do not repay anyone evil for evil,' 'Do not take revenge' and 'Do not be overcome by evil.' Revenge or retaliation is forbidden. Certainly, there must be a place for the punishment of public evildoers in some sort of law courts. But in personal behavior, the believers are never to retaliate or take revenge (Matt 5:39). We must never let evil control our motives and actions. It is God who will avenge. We are to trust God.

Then come the positive commands (vs 14, 17-21): 'We are to bless,' 'We are to do what is right and to live at peace,' 'We are to leave vengeance to God' as punishment belongs to God, 'We are to serve our enemies' and 'We are to overcome evil with good.'

Christians know that strength and victory are found only in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit.

***Do you desire to show Christ's love to those who persecute you?
Ask the Lord for His strength and enabling.***

P.R.A.Y

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SEP 16, THURSDAY

Rom 12:9–13:7

Submission To The State

Rom 12:18

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Rom 13:1

Do you think you are a good citizen in your country? How best do you submit yourself to your government? 'Governing authorities' should be understood as the authorities of the state or the civil government under which believers live. Paul affirms that any authority, including that of the state, has been established by God Himself (vs 1-2a). The Christian church with her spiritual authority has also been established by God. The relationship between the church and the state is that of partnership where they respect each other's distinct roles and responsibilities. The state should have its right to use 'the sword as an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer' (v 4). 'He who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted' (v 2a). Therefore, we Christians must respect the governmental office even if we cannot respect the officer. The state's authority is God's servant. The highest motivation for obedience is to do what is right. The fear of punishment is a lesser but acceptable motivation to prevent chaos.

As we look at some Asian countries today, we see opposition and persecution inflicted upon innocent people by oppressive governments which abuse the given authority. Does that mean we must obey and follow those fearful governments? The answer is 'No!' We should basically submit to the state as long as obedience to the state is not disobedience to God. Jesus' teaching helps us here. 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's' (Matt 22:21). The first part reinforces Caesar's authority, which goes with verse 7: 'Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes pay taxes ...' The second part of Jesus' teaching draws limits, showing that although the state has legitimate authority, God's is greater. Therefore, those who know God must ultimately obey Him, even if that means disobeying Caesar. Remember, Christians have their citizenship in heaven.

Lord, please teach me not to minimise my responsibilities to the state. Help me be an exemplary citizen. And please help me to discern when and where I should obey God rather than the state.

My neighbor seemed upset with me. Apparently I had done something that bothered her. When I asked if I had offended her, she responded with a curt "No!" I told her, "I don't want any bad feelings between us. If I've done something to offend you, I apologize." Since then the climate has remained cool.

Someone has said, "The more I get to know the human race, the more I love my dog." Dogs are loyal, dependable, eager to please, and quick to forgive and forget. Don't you wish people were more like that? But sometimes no matter how hard we try to have a good relationship with someone, it doesn't work.

The apostle Paul addressed that situation in Romans 12:18. Notice the phrase "as much as depends on you." He knew that some people problems may never be resolved. It takes two to quarrel; it takes two to reconcile. If you do your part and the problem remains, there is still a plan to follow. Don't harbor resentment or retaliate with the weapon of silence. Work at overcoming evil with good (v.21), and let God work out the problem.

We need to keep following the steps given in Romans 12:9-21 until our people problems are resolved—but especially if they're not.

By: Dennis J. DeHaan

How To Handle People Problems (Romans 12)

- ***Be affectionate (v.10)*** ***Be prayerfully patient (v.12)***
- ***Bless your persecutors (v.14)*** ***Be humble (v.16)***
- ***Don't take revenge (v.19)*** ***Defeat evil with good (v.21)***

The best way to conquer an enemy is with the weapon of love.

SEP 17, FRIDAY

Rom 13:8-14:12

Live In Love & Light

Rom 14:8

Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law ... Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Romans 13:10, 14

As citizens of heaven, we must be good examples on earth (vs 8-10). Once again love is explained. First, love is something like an unpaid debt: 'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another' (v 8a). You can never love anybody enough. Second, love is the fulfillment of the law (v 8b): You cannot fulfil the law by your human strength. Only through the death of Christ and by the power of the indwelling Spirit can the requirements of the law be fulfilled. Love does what is right and just, and seeks the best for others. When we have love, we will not commit adultery, murder, steal, and covet. Third, love will not do any harm to our neighbor (v 10).

Paul's other admonition is about the importance of the Christian life in the light of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (vs 11-14). The age to come has already come into the present age. The old age of darkness will soon disappear and the new age of God's kingdom will be started. 'The hour has come.' 'Our salvation is nearer now.' 'The night is nearly over.' Therefore, listen to the following three appeals. First, put aside the deeds of darkness, and put on the armor of light (v 12). Second, behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, debauchery, dissension, or in jealousy (v 13). Third, clothe yourself with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature (v 14). We are to put on His compassion, kindness, gentleness, and humility.

William Clark, one of the earliest missionaries to Japan, brought with him four dozen bottles of the best brandy from USA, not for his enjoyment but for health reasons. But when he saw the serious problem of drunkenness among the Japanese people, he immediately threw away all of his brandy, and started the temperance movement in Japan.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Live in expectation of the Lord's return.

P.R.A.Y

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SEP 17, FRIDAY

Rom 13:8–14:12

The Folly Of Judging One Another

Rom 14:8

For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat Romans 14:9-10

How should I conduct myself when my understanding of God's will conflicts with that of another believer? This seems to be a small matter but it is very important (14:1-15:13). We often face disputable matters in Asia. These matters are not essential for salvation. The Bible does not give definite instructions about them. Paul explains how believers can disagree on these matters and still maintain unity in the church.

When I was a seminary student at the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore many years ago, we had a serious discussion on the Japanese paper doll without a head or face. Some students insisted that it could be a medium for evil spirits to work from. But those of us from Japan did not agree to that understanding, explaining it simply to be Japanese art. At the end of the day, we accepted the other group. We learned to limit our freedom in order to love others.

The command to love and accept other Christians (v 1a) should be foremost in our hearts and minds as we work in unity with others. God has already welcomed the weaker believers (vs 2-3). Christians should not pass judgment on or condemn them. Our one Master is Christ who died and rose to be the Lord (vs 4-9). It is He whom we serve. Our relationship with other believers is to love and support them as Christ loved us. We have the ability to serve others as Jesus would, with a humble and meek heart.

As we have freedom in Christ from rituals and rules, we must use it in such a way that others can be supported and encouraged. We should not use it as an excuse to do whatever we please. Each person will stand before God's judgment seat (vs 1 Ob-12), and on that day every knee will bow and every tongue confess to God. We can all trust that God's judgment will be just.

***Lord, strengthen my faith so that I may accept other Christians
as members of the household of God.***

When students from Southeast Asia met a teacher from North America, the visiting instructor learned a lesson. After giving his class their first multiple-choice test, he was surprised to find many questions left unanswered. While handing back the corrected papers, he suggested that, next time, instead of leaving answers blank they should take a guess. Surprised, one of the students raised their hand and asked, "What if I accidentally get the answer right? I would be implying that I knew the answer when I didn't." The student and teacher had a different perspective and practice.

In the days of the New Testament, Jewish and Gentile converts were coming to Christ with perspectives as different as East and West. Before long they were disagreeing over matters as diverse as worship days and what a Christ-follower is free to eat or drink. The apostle Paul urged them to remember an important fact: None of us is in a position to know or judge the heart of another.

For the sake of harmony with fellow believers, God urges us to realize that we are all accountable to our Lord, to act according to His Word and our conscience. However, He alone is in a position to judge the attitudes of our heart (Rom 14:4–7).

By: Mart DeHaan

***Father in heaven, please have mercy on us for presuming to judge
the heart of those who see so many things differently than we do.
Be slow to judge others but quick to judge yourself.***

SEP 18, SATURDAY

Rom 14:13–15:13

Three Warnings To The Stronger Christian

Rom 14:17

Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way ...No food is unclean in itself... Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. Rom 14:13b, 14a, 15b

Do you think you are a stronger Christian than others? Paul deals more with the temptation that the stronger brother or sister faces. Three warnings are repeated twice: about stumbling blocks (vs 13b, 21), about nothing being 'unclean' in itself (vs 14a, 20b) and about destroying one for whom Christ died (vs 15b, 20a). In the light of these warnings we must examine our hearts and lifestyle in our relationships with weaker Christians. Our thoughts or actions could be self-righteous and judgmental. But we could also desire to come alongside them, encouraging and upholding them in prayer. Christ died for them, too.

Verse 17 says, 'For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.' The kingdom of God is more important than food. Food and drink are secondary matters. So, when it comes to secondary matters, let us consider the needs of our weaker brothers and sisters before our own.

In my generation there are many believers who are first generation Christians in the family. Having to face various new challenges and problems, they tend to become quite strong-willed persons. Often they are better trained in insisting on the truth, rather than in yielding in love and humility. I am one of them. This has often been a stumbling block in my ministries over the past years.

Christians are to serve God with a clear conscience, which comes from our assurance that our sins are forgiven. If sin remains in our hearts, it will always affect our ministry to others. We should continually examine ourselves in prayer as King David did in Psalm 139:23-24, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.' Our relationship with other Christians should be to help and build the church of Jesus Christ. We must strive to make every effort that leads to peace and mutual edification of each believer.

Search me, O God and see if there is any offensive way in me.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 18, SATURDAY

Rom 14:13–15:13

Why Is It Wrong To Please Self?

Rom 14:17

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings or (weaknesses) of the weak. Romans 15:1a

Paul now develops the vital Christian ethics to put the welfare of others before that of self (Gal 6:2). This is love: ‘The strong ought to bear with the failings or (weaknesses) of the weak’ (v 1a). ‘Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up’ (v 2). Neighbor-pleasing is different from people-pleasing, as the latter is something not pleasing to God. What a challenge to you and me!

Then Paul cites the example of Christ who did not please Himself (v 3a). The quotation from Psalm 69:9 proves that the Messiah would refuse to please Himself. Paul further confirms that everything written in the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ, teaching people through the ages about hope through endurance and encouragement (v 4).

There are other reasons why we should not please ourselves. One reason is because both the strong and the weak must be united in Christ in their worship of God (vs 5-6). Another is because both Jews and Gentiles should together glorify God, as Christ has become the servant for both of them (vs 7-13). Paul quotes from four messianic passages from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, which are three divisions of the Old Testament. Throughout Old Testament Scriptures, it was God’s intention for Jews and Gentiles to one day sing praises together to the one true God.

Would you be willing to take a step towards bearing with the failings of your weaker neighbors? You need faith and love. Would you write a letter, an e-mail, or visit them to apologise for what you have done or said? You have to remember the cross of Christ as you humble yourself. The mighty Holy Spirit will intercede for you.

***May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

I remember hearing my dad talk about how difficult it was to walk away from unending arguments over differing interpretations of the Bible. By contrast he recalled how good it was when both sides agreed to disagree.

But is it really possible to set aside irreconcilable differences when so much seems to be at stake? That’s one of the questions the apostle Paul answers in his New Testament letter to the Romans. Writing to readers caught in social, political, and religious conflict, he suggests ways of finding common ground even under the most polarized conditions (14:5–6).

According to Paul, the way to agree to disagree is to recall that each of us will answer to the Lord not only for our opinions but also for how we treat one another in our differences (v. 10).

Conditions of conflict can actually become occasions to remember that there are some things more important than our own ideas—even more than our interpretations of the Bible. All of us will answer for whether we have loved one another, and even our enemies, as Christ loved us.

Now that I think of it, I remember that my dad used to talk about how good it is not just to agree to disagree but to do so with mutual love and respect.

By: Mart DeHaan

***Father, please enable us to be patient and kind with those
who don’t agree with us about anything or everything.
We can agree to disagree—in love.***

SEP 19, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 20, MONDAY

Rom 15:14-16:27

Paul's Ministry

Rom 16:25-27

It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Romans 15:20

Paul was a man of missionary vision. He first gives his testimony concerning his past ministries (vs 14-21). Then he explains his present programme (vs 22-29). Finally, he shares his future plans (vs 30-33). One thing is prominent: he calls himself 'a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the Gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit' (v 16). It seems strange to hear Paul mention his 'priestly duty', as the early church's preachers, pastors, or ministers are never called priests. Jesus Christ is the only Priest, as is explained in Hebrews 10:11-14. He alone has made atonement for our sins by His death on the cross. Why does Paul use these words? He understands his missionary work as a priestly ministry because he has offered (Isaiah 66:20) each of his Gentile converts as a living sacrifice to God. For Paul, even evangelism was closely related to worship. Have you ever done evangelism with this understanding?

Paul's ministry was also a powerful and pioneer ministry (vs 18-22). Phrases such as 'by the power of signs and miracles,' and 'through the power of the Spirit', show Paul's work was powerful. His 'ambition has been to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known' (v 20). Paul planned to visit Rome, Jerusalem, and finally Spain (vs 23-33). Whether or not he got there is an open question. But in verse 24 he seems to be trying to recruit some Roman Christians to become a home support team. In verse 30 he asks them to pray for him. He knew he would face difficulties in Jerusalem.

We praise God for the growing number of Korean, Chinese, Japanese and other Asian missionaries over the past 30-40 years. May more Asian Christians and churches be involved in missions as they see the great need of the whole world!

Does your evangelism lead you to worship? How big is your missionary vision?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 20, MONDAY

Rom 15:14–16:27

God's Family Members

Rom 16:25–27

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house. Romans 16:3-5a

This last chapter gives us a picture of genuine Christian fellowship centering around Paul and his missionary service. Paul's ministry was not driven by duty, but by mutual love and respect for each of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Do we love other Christians like that?

Many ordinary Christians were helping the great missionary Paul. Paul authored Romans but it was Tertius who wrote down the letter (v 22) and Phoebe carried it to Rome (vs 1-2). Gaius prepared a place for Paul to live and work (v 23). Paul names 36 persons in this chapter. They were diverse in race, rank and gender, but there was unity in Christ. Some were Jews and most of the others were Gentiles. Some were from slave backgrounds, while others from the imperial household. Ten out of thirty-six persons greeted are women; in addition he referred to at least two households (vs 10-11) and three house churches (vs 5, 14, 15) plus some other unnamed brethren (v 14) and two other women (vs 13, 15). Eight of these people are with Paul, and the rest are in Rome. Nobody in God's family is unimportant to Him, and no ministry is insignificant!

You may well raise questions about the missionary family. How was Phoebe kept safe in her journey to Rome (vs 1-2)? When and how did Priscilla and Aquila risk their lives to save Paul (vs 3-4)? How did Epenetus become a Christian (v 5)? When and how were Andronicus and Junias in prison with Paul (v 7)? How was Rufus' mother a mother to Paul (v 13)? Who caused divisions that Paul urged to watch out for (v 17)? All the answers will be given when we get to heaven!

Meanwhile, we should listen to Paul's warnings: 'to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles' in our way (v 17a), 'keep away from them' (v 17b), being 'wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil' (v 19).

Is your church held together in love even as you become involved in missions?

One of the intriguing characters in literature and opera is Dr. Faust. The character of Faust was based on a German legend about a man who made a pact with the devil, surrendering his soul in exchange for youth, knowledge, and magical powers.

One artist put the legend onto canvas, depicting the story of Faust as a grim chess game. On one side of the table sits Faust, a symbol of men and women in the world, with only three or four pieces on the board in front of him. His face is contorted in despair. On the other side of the table the devil sits back in his chair gloating over his apparent victory. The artist titled his painting, "Checkmate." A chess master came to the art gallery, stood before the picture, and studied it for a long time. Then he exclaimed, "It's not over! It's not checkmate! The king and the knight still have another move!"

Many times throughout history it has appeared that Satan is winning the game. The god of this world seems to control the board. Yet, Jesus Christ has the final move. Paul could boldly assert, "The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20). The evil one cannot and will not win. As Christians, we can live in the sturdy confidence that the game isn't over till it's over.

By: Haddon W. Robinson

***The prince of darkness grim— We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure— One little word shall fell him. —Luther
There are no losers with Christ and no winners with the devil.***

SEP 21, TUESDAY

Act 20:3b-38

Paul's Farewell

Act 20:38

He travelled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people. Acts 20:2

From Acts 20 onwards, Luke describes Paul's journey to Jerusalem, his arrest there and his final journey to Rome. Acts 20 records two farewell events as Paul wound up his ministry in Greece, Europe and Asia.

Paul's Farewell journey (vs 1-5)

Not expecting to see them again, Paul made his last visit to the churches he had founded. His concern for all the churches was his greatest joy as well as his heaviest burden (2 Cor 11:23-28). Paul had 2 purposes for this journey. He wanted to encourage and strengthen the saints to remain faithful to God and be effective witnesses for God. He also desired to finalize the collection of funds for the suffering saints in Judea. The men who accompanied Paul were representatives of the churches appointed to escort Paul. By having each of them to deliver the gifts personally; the unity of the churches was demonstrated.

Paul's Farewell Service at Troas (vs 6-12)

The worship service was on Sunday (v 7), the LORD'S day (1 Cor 16:1-2) because of Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost, the birthday of the church. The LORD'S Supper was later followed by a farewell meal with Paul (v 11). Intending to leave early the next day, Paul preached his heart out without stopping. He had so much of God's truth to impart but he had too little time to do it (v 7). Eutychus fell asleep, fell out from the first floor window and died (v 9). God's power was at work and Eutychus was raised to life (v 10). A miracle had happened right before their eyes.

***The church was greatly comforted because
God's power was at work in their midst (v 12).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 21, TUESDAY

Act 20:3b-38

Message To Church Leaders

Act 20:38

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:28

Knowing he would never see the Ephesian leaders again, Paul reviewed his ministry among them before he gave them his final instructions concerning their responsibilities. Having earned the right to speak to them, he now exercised his right to instruct them with the full weight of his apostolic authority.

Review of Paul's Ministry

- He had served faithfully from day one without stopping (v 18).
- He had served the LORD, not self or others, with great humility and in tears in spite of great dangers (v 19).
- He had fervently proclaimed the Gospel publicly and privately and called everyone to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (vs 20-21).
- No one's damnation could be blamed on Paul for not teaching the whole will of God (vs 26-27).
- He had worked to support himself and others in ministry and helped the needy without coveting anyone's money (vs 33-35).

Instructions to Leaders

Speaking as a pastor to pastors, these words from Paul's heart are applicable to all church elders past, present and future.

- Church leaders are answerable to the Holy Spirit when they shepherd God's precious flock (v 28).
- A church leader must keep watch over his character and conduct before he can tend God's people (v 28).
- They must be on guard against false teachers from without and within (vs 29-31).
- They must live for God and His word (v 32).

We cannot understand Paul's fervent ministry and his passionate last words apart from verse 24. We cannot identify with Paul's intense emotions and his tearful farewell (vs 36-38) unless we identify with Paul's words in verse 24.

'I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the LORD has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace' (Acts 20:24).

Paul's fervor in preaching the good news of Jesus Christ continues unabated. In spite of having to face hardships and obstacles Paul did not hesitate for a moment to continue preaching the gospel of repentance and urging his audience to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Despite threats of imprisonment and the persecution that he had to face in every city, he focused on only one task, one mission and one goal, that is to 'build [them up and give them] an inheritance among all those who are sanctified' (v 32).

The threat to life paled because his all-consuming passion to see the gospel being preached was paramount. 'For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,' he wrote to the Philippians. He expressed the same sentiments to the elders at Ephesus: 'I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace' (v 2-1).

Paul's hard work and unselfish commitment to those he ministered to manifested the words of our Lord: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' We have a model for single-minded service which we can emulate.

***Lord, give me the single-minded commitment that Paul had.
Help me to selflessly serve You in all that I do.***

SEP 22, WEDNESDAY

Act 21:1-39

Unwavering Steadfastness

Act 21:13

Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the LORD Jesus." Acts 21:13

Was Paul right in his unwavering steadfastness to be in Jerusalem (20: 22-24)? Today's text seems to question Paul's decision on this matter.

- The church at Tyre urged Paul through the Spirit not to go on to Jerusalem (v 4). When a Spirit-filled church speaks, God's servant must listen.
- Agabus, inspired by the Spirit, dramatically signified what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem (vs 10-11). Agabus was a prophet used by God to predict the famine in Judea (11:27-28). When God's prophet speaks forth God's will, should not the apostle take heed?
- Beloved saints begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem (v 12). Agabus, Luke, church representatives, Philip and his family, all who were dear to Paul were broken and in tears. Paul was brokenhearted. Was he unloving in his response to them (v 13)? Was Paul out of God's will when he remained steadfast?

Let's consider the bigger picture before we make any conclusion.

- Paul's destiny had been foretold to Ananias. Paul was God's chosen instrument to suffer for the sake of the Gospel (9:15-16).
- To unite the church, Paul felt he had to be in Jerusalem before he proceeded to Rome (9:21-22).
- Paul was compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He was prepared by the Spirit to expect hardship and imprisonment (20:22-24).
- Paul interpreted the prophecies given to him as warnings to prepare (get ready) and not as prohibitions.
- It was God's will for Paul to be in Jerusalem. Paul's statement in 23:1 and God's reassuring words to Paul in 23:11 support this conclusion.

We ought to applaud Paul for his courage and steadfastness. Paul's unwavering steadfastness epitomizes his life and ministry. These are words every Christian should memorise and hold dear in his heart. Will you be able to confess these words, 'I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die ... for the name of the LORD Jesus' (v 13)?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 22, WEDNESDAY

Act 21:1-39

Peace Within, Turmoil Without

Act 21:13

Though I am free and belong to no man. I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. 1 Cor 9:19-20

The Jerusalem Council had settled the issue of the circumcision of Gentile Christians. They do not have to follow Jewish laws, rituals and customs (15:19-29). But the Jerusalem Council was silent on the contentious issue of circumcision of Jewish Christians. Thousands in the church (v 20) were upset with Paul when they heard the rumor that Paul had forbidden Jews to circumcise their children and to obey Jewish customs (v 21).

To prove them wrong, Paul willingly submitted himself to Jewish rituals in the temple (vs 23-24). To restore peace in the church, Paul complied with the decision of the church elders (v 26). Although Paul was firm on essentials, he was flexible on non-essentials, becoming all things to all people in order to win some for Christ (1Cor 9:19-23). Paul was not observing the Mosaic laws in order to be saved, He was doing it not to offend the Jews. His submission resolved the issue and restored peace in the church. The principle Paul followed was: In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty and in everything love.

What happened next in the temple was a stark contrast to what had happened in the church. Notice how differently this same issue was handled by non-Christians. The Jews from Asia knew how effective Paul had been in Asia and Europe. They twisted the truth and made inflammatory charges against Paul (vs 28-29). They incited mob violence against Paul (v 27). They started a riot to kill Paul (vs 30-31). It was the same issue but a different outcome. One resulted in peace, the other in turmoil. Peace because there was love in the church, turmoil because there was hatred outside the church.

But God was sovereign. His unseen hand was at work in all that happened. He restored peace in the church. He used Roman soldiers to protect Paul (vs 31-36). He made it possible for Paul to witness to the Jews in Jerusalem (vs 37-40).

‘We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’ (Romans 8:28).

The Apostle Paul finally found himself facing the hostilities of the Jewish community in Jerusalem. He was no quitter. As a true messenger of the Gospel to the very end, even in life-threatening situations, he endured the pain inflicted on him by the angry mob. He was calm and patient, knowing that God would deliver him. God, who had led him all these years, would not abandon him to death in the holy city. Had the Roman soldiers not rescued him, he would have been killed. His faith was not shaken. He knew that no amount of trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword could separate him from the love of Christ (cf Rom 8:35).

Like the Master he once persecuted, the Apostle was now 'like a sheep to be slaughtered' (cf Rom 8:36). His experience here in Jerusalem bears witness to what he later wrote to the churches to encourage them to face persecution and other forms of suffering. Persecution in the early days of the church was very real.

Are we prepared for it? Do we believe that persecution will help us to be stronger in our faith? Paul was persecuted because he accepted the Gentiles as equals in the Kingdom of God. He had a holistic vision of the Church.

Do we sometimes behave as if some people in the church are more important than others? Do we support those who work among the poor and downtrodden?

SEP 23, THURSDAY

Act 21:40-22:29

Paul's Testimony

Act 22:14-15

The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Acts 22:14-15

God's destiny for Paul as revealed in Acts 9:15 was being fulfilled. In obedience to God, Paul had suffered much in proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 13-20). He would suffer more before rulers (Acts 24-26) and among his people (Acts 21 -23). Now, because of his great love for his people (Rom 9:1 -3). Paul had the God-given opportunity to speak to them despite the mob screaming for his death (21:36-40), Paul was willing to die in order to save as many as he could. In love, he spoke passionately from his heart as if they were his brothers and fathers (22:1-2).

Paul revealed his earlier credentials and conduct (22:1-5), his extraordinary conversion (vs 6-13) and his ensuing calling (vs 14-21). His credentials won him respect. His previous conduct proved his zeal for God far exceeded the bigotry of his audience. In narrating his conversion experience, Paul boldly contradicted the official Jewish version concerning Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul asserted that Jesus is alive. He had seen God's glory and heard His voice. In quoting Ananias, Paul gave credibility to his conversion experience and the ensuing call to serve God.

God's call was confirmed for Paul three years later in a vision (vs 17-21). Paul's mission was not at home in Jerusalem (v 18). It was elsewhere, to the Gentiles (v 21). The word 'Gentiles' ignited the fire of religious bigotry and racial hatred (vs 22-23). Again the Roman soldiers had to intervene to avert Paul's death. By declaring his Roman citizenship, Paul was spared subsequent torture by flogging (vs 24-29).

For Paul it looked like the end of the road, but God had bigger plans for him. God's missionary will get to Rome under protective custody, all expenses paid for by the Romans.

God knows the end from the beginning. We can trust Him with everything in between.

He who abandons himself to God will never be abandoned by God.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 23, THURSDAY

Act 21:40-22:29

180° U-Turn

Act 22:14-15

A pastor friend once shared his experience of what happened when he was driving from Penang to Johor Bahru to attend a wedding. After a night's rest in Kuala Lumpur, he continued his journey early next morning, not realizing that he had made a wrong turn and was driving happily all the way back to Penang! When he finally discovered that he had gone the wrong way, there was only one thing that he could do - make a U-turn.

In the same manner, the apostle Paul discovered that in life, one has to make a U-turn if the path that one has travelled on is the wrong one. Using his own experience as an example, Paul attempted to persuade his brethren to make the spiritual U-turn necessary for salvation. Realizing that he was talking to a group of zealous Jews who were persecutors of the Way, he drew their attention to the fact that he was one of them at one point in time. His turning point in life was when he saw the resurrected Lord on the road to Damascus.

The mandate was clear: 'Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles.' This was taboo for the religious Jews, who considered themselves far superior to any others in the rest of the world. They believed that the Gentiles were never meant to share in the blessings of the Jewish nation. Paul found himself facing the hostility of these Jews, yet he did not shy away from proclaiming his faith in the One who had sent him. Every testimony that he shared in his defense was based on what he had personally experienced.

It has been said that the strongest testimony is based on your personal encounter with the Lord. Have you been praying lately for the Lord to help you? When was the last time you experienced the Lord's hand working in a difficult situation for you?

One of the most tragic things in our modern society is our failure to know the rights and privileges we should enjoy as citizens in the country we live in. Failure to exercise one's rights is to abrogate one's duties to the country. Sacrificing one's privileges and being willing to suffer is not necessarily the godly thing to do. The right thing to do is to exercise one's rights when we are required to do so as good citizens of the country. When was the last time you cast your vote? Have you exercised your rights as a citizen? Or do you consider yourself too holy and so neglect your earthly duties?

The Apostle Paul was not ashamed of the fact that he was a Roman citizen. It was a position of privilege and he knew when to use it. Although he had always given more weightage to and allegiance to the heavenly kingdom, he had not given up his rights of being a Roman citizen. At the appropriate time, he used his Roman citizenship to secure a better form of treatment by the Roman soldiers. Was he wrong?

This has been an issue disturbing a number of Christians, who believe they must give up their rights and suffer for the faith. Paul shows us clearly that there are occasions when we should use our worldly status to achieve heavenly goals. Jesus Himself faced the hostilities of the Jews when He knew that His time had come.

***Lord, thank You for the rights I have in this world.
Help me to use it to honor and glorify Your Name.***

SEP 24, FRIDAY

Act 22:30–23:35

God Was There

Act 23:11

The following night the LORD stood near to Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Acts 23:11

God was with Stephen when the Jews stoned him to death. Now God was with Paul as he stood before the Sanhedrin.

Paul had fulfilled his duty to God in all good conscience (v 1) and now God was using him to confront the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was made up of both the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection while the Sadducees did not. God showed Paul how to get out of danger unharmed. By claiming he was on trial because he was a Pharisee who believed in the resurrection of the dead he had the Pharisees defending him in the bitter dispute that followed (vs 6-9). Paul's strategy worked. Roman soldiers again had to intervene to save Paul from being torn to pieces (v 10).

Twice in the last two days, Paul had nearly died at the hands of the very people he had come to preach the Good News. His mental and physical strength had been taxed to the limit. Twice before in similar situations, the Lord Jesus had appeared to Paul, when he desperately needed comfort and direction (18:9-10, 22:17-21). This time it was no exception. Again the Lord appeared to Paul to encourage and reassure him. God had been with him in Jerusalem. God will be with Paul when he goes to Rome (v11).

***Our ever-present God is the same yesterday, today and forever.
His Great Commission to Paul and to us remains unchanged:
'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them ...
and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matt 28:19-20).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 24, FRIDAY

Act 22:30–23:35

Man's Delusion, God's Deliverance

Act 23:11

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Psalm 34:7

Man's Delusion (vs 12-15)

'They claim to know God but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.' These words quoted from Titus 1:16 aptly describe those who plotted Paul's assassination. In their delusion they were sure God would be pleased with their evil intention (vs 12-13). Unfortunately, their delusion was reinforced by the support of the religious and political establishments (v 15). Fortunately for Paul, God detested them.

God's Deliverance (vs 16-35)

No one is more secure than the one who is in God's hands. Many times over, God's unseen hands of protection had delivered Paul from danger and death. This time Paul did not fear the perils around him because God had assured him that His eye was upon him (v 11). What happened next increased Paul's trust in God's faithfulness. In God's providence, Paul's nephew cared enough for Paul to inform him about the plot to kill him (v 16). The centurion and commander responded promptly when they realized Paul's life was in danger (vs 17-22). Paul was escorted out of Jerusalem under the protective custody of 472 fully armed Roman soldiers (vs 23-24, 31-33). The letter to Governor Felix stated that there was no charge against Paul that deserved death or imprisonment (vs 26-30).

Paul's Declaration

Paul's resolute commitment to proclaim the Gospel was his testimony against his persecutors. He exposed the evil in their hearts and the wickedness in their lives. This will stand as a testimony against them on the Day of Judgment (Rom 2:5-6). Despite persecution and opposition, Paul had been a trustworthy witness before the Gentiles and the Jews. Now he was ready for God's final assignment, to be God's witness to the rulers of the world (9:15).

***Let us trust in God and be courageous for the Gospel,
and the LORD Himself will honor our faithfulness.***

Paul would have been ambushed and cold-bloodedly murdered, had it not been for a young man whose bravery earned him mention in God's Word.

Although the name of the young man is not known, his deed was highly commendable, considering that he had to find his way into the enemy's barracks to look for a prisoner who was considered an enemy of his own people. We are told that he was a nephew to Paul, but there is no indication as to whether he later believed in the God whom Paul proclaimed. Nowhere else is this young man ever mentioned again.

However, an important lesson can be learnt here. Although this young man would have been in serious trouble if he were later found to be lying or had the Jews changed their plans, he chose to risk his life. In an environment of hostility towards the Roman soldiers, he could have been charged as having committed treason, especially since his own uncle was also being ill-treated by this group of rioters in Jerusalem. Scripture tells us that the commander, Claudius Lysias, believed him and took the necessary action to safeguard the life of a Roman citizen, a duty in which he dared not fail. The young man did the right thing. He did not have to face the torment of his own conscience for the rest of his life for not revealing the plot.

***Are you willing to take risks for the Gospel? God protects those who act on His behalf.
Help me, Lord, to stand up and speak up for Your Gospel.***

SEP 25, SATURDAY

Act 24:1-27

Testify Truthfully, Judge Justly

Act 24:16

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts. Zechariah 8:16

Truthful testimony and just judgments are not only mandated in human courts, they are commanded by God Himself. Everyone will have to face God who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet 4:5). Tertullus and Ananias pressed three false charges against Paul. They condemned Paul for being a troublemaker, a ringleader and a temple desecrator (vs 5-9). Felix denied Paul fair and instant justice (vs 22-23) to please the Jews.

In contrast, Paul spoke the truth, nothing but the truth. He did not flatter Felix or lie to him (v 10). He was in Jerusalem to worship God (vs 11-12) and to distribute gifts to the poor (v 17). He was innocent because the false charges were unproven (v 13) as there were no witnesses present to substantiate them (v 19). He had been unjustly attacked by the Jews in the temple and unfairly tried by the Sanhedrin (v 20).

Paul feared God more than men and he seized the opportunity to witness for Christ. To his adversaries he claimed to be a fulfilled Jew and not a former Jew. He still worshipped the God of their forefathers but through Jesus. He shared the hope of the resurrection. He had lived with a clear conscience before God and man (vs 15-16). Paul told Felix what he needed to hear to be saved (vs 24-25).

‘Men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned’ (Matt 12:36-37).

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 25, SATURDAY

Act 24:1-27

Flattery & Deceit Versus Truth

Act 24:16

In bringing the case against Paul, the lawyer Tertullus resorted to flattery because he knew that there was no evidence against Paul. His accusation that Paul was a troublemaker (v 5) and had desecrated the Temple had no truth to it. Paul's reply is an account of what had transpired during the last few days. His confidence was in the truth. He did not deny that he belonged to the 'followers of the Way' but he affirmed his belief also in the Law and the Prophets. He realized that it was the crucial question of the resurrection that had been the reason for the Sanhedrin to accuse him.

He did not waver in the Truth, neither did he compromise. When given the opportunity to witness to Felix and Drusilla, 'he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus' (v 24). Felix was hoping for a bribe and so when Paul spoke on 'righteousness, self-control and the judgement to come' (v 25), he must have been conscience-stricken.

We can admire the strength of conviction displayed by Paul. He was unafraid to speak of Jesus and his faith in spite of being imprisoned and having his life threatened.

May we also be willing to stand for the Truth and the gospel when there is opposition or criticism. Let us, like Paul, use opposition as an opportunity.

... exercise thyself ... unto godliness. 1 Timothy 4:7

A man, selling a new kind of liquid adhesive, displayed his merchandise along with a sign which read: "A box of this glue given free to anyone who can break these items apart." At the base of the poster were spools, pieces of wood, and other articles which had been cemented together.

An Oriental gentleman stopped to look, pointed to a peg that had been inserted and glued into a two-inch-deep hole drilled in a small wooden block, and asked what the reward would be if he could pull it out. "Pull it out!" cried the man; "why, if you can do that, I'll not only give you a free box of glue, but ten dollars on top of it!" The dowel projected scarcely a quarter of an inch above the surface of the block, but the challenger was undismayed.

Placing his left hand on the square of wood, he took the peg between the thumb and forefinger of his other hand, and removed it with apparent ease — although a portion of the wood block came along with it. The salesman gasped, "What kind of a strong man are you?" "I'm just a Japanese dentist!" replied the other with a smile. So saying, he pocketed his reward and walked away.

The London Telegraph, which reported the incident, confirmed the fact that some Japanese dentists do use their fingers for forceps. Part of their dental training in the Orient consists of strenuous exercises which develop an incredible amount of power in the hands.

Whether in dentistry in Japan, or in the realm of the Christian life, it is constant application to the task and diligent exercise which brings results. The believer must give daily attention to prayer and the study of the Scriptures. He must frequently examine himself in regard to his spiritual walk, and put forth a zealous effort to grow in the grace of witnessing.

Let us heed Paul's admonition to "exercise" ourselves in these necessary endeavors, and we, too, will soon be doing incredible things for God in the "power of His might."

Exercise your FAITH, before the devil gets you to exercise your FAULTS! —H.G.B.

SEP 26, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OVERVIEW OF PHILIPPIANS 1 - 4

Paul pays warm tribute to the church at Philippi. Their repeated generosity had helped the ministry of Paul since he first left them. He specifically mentions the personal gift sent to him at Thessalonica (4:16), and the funds for the Jerusalem brethren (2 Cor 9:2). Furthermore, the gift in the person of Epaphroditus had been more than a blessing (2:25-30). He was a true partner in the Gospel. Such generosity overflows in thanksgiving to the honor of God.

The other major reason Paul wrote this letter had to do with the troubles experienced in the Philippian church. Disunity had become a threat to the wellbeing of the church. The specific call to Euodia and Syntyche to be in unity (4:2) is important. Other matters include the preaching of the Gospel out of 'envy and rivalry' (1:15). Paul warns of enemies within the church - those who boast of their 'confidence in their flesh' (3:3). He also corrects those whose minds were on 'earthly things' (3:19).

Amidst all these, Paul highlights the need to be steadfast in any and every situation. Since the church was set in a pagan and unfriendly culture, opposition was to be expected. The Judaisers - Jewish believers in Christ who insisted that in order to be saved, believers also had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses - were beginning to make inroads into the church (1:28).

Paul counters all arguments against the Gospel by holding up the supreme example of our Lord Jesus Christ who suffered in humility but is exalted on high (2:5-11). Hence, Paul entreats the church to be like Christ in every way. Finally, he appeals to them to pray with thanksgiving (4:6), to pattern their lives after his own life (4:9, 3:17), to 'shine like stars' (2:15), and, whatever happens, to 'conduct (themselves) in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ' (1:27). 'Rejoice always!' says Paul. It is worthy of our attention that he wrote this letter from prison.

SEP 27, MONDAY

Phi 1:1-30

Let Love Abound

Phi 1:6

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. Philippians 1:9

'Love is blind' is a common saying. The meaning can be enigmatic. However, Christian love is not uninformed. It is dynamic. It involves hard work.

Paul's prayer focus is love (vs 9-11). There seems to be a progression in what he prays. Love is fed by the knowledge of God which helps us to gain depth and moral insight. Love provides what is best and pure. Ultimately, love must bear fruits that are righteous.

This is an amazing prayer. If we want this prayer answered for ourselves, and those to whom we minister, we need to really work on our faith. As Christians, we ought to be growing more and more in true knowledge of God. There is an urgency to return to daily reading and studying of God's word with reflection. This daily intake is important for meaningful growth. Consistency and persistency are essential ingredients for love to grow. Our encouragement is that God is always at work in and through us to bring these things about. Remember that it is His pleasure to do so.

We are constantly bombarded by the media about love that is superficial, false, and deceptive. A good example can be seen from the lyrics in songs with meanings that are sexually colored. Magazines and advertisements are no less notorious. We can be careless too, when we allow unwanted elements from the Internet to invade our homes, pollute our minds and poison our hearts. Christians are not spared from these temptations and influences. Paul's prayer is prophetic for us in today's world.

We can no longer excuse ourselves by our busyness or laziness. Our love must be informed. It will then produce moral fiber and strength. As salt and light, we produce the fruit of righteousness. We cannot allow our love to be blind, or blinded.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 27, MONDAY

Phi 1:1-30

A Win-Win Situation

Phi 1:6

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. Philippians 1:21

Paul was in prison facing a possible death sentence but that did not get him down. As far as he was concerned, whether he lived or died, as long as he was in Christ, he was a winner (v 21). In fact, being in prison had worked to the advantage of his mission to spread the Gospel among the Gentiles (v 12). All the Roman soldiers who were assigned to guard him and visitors who came to see him heard the Gospel from him (v 13).

When the Christians who knew Paul realized that he was making tremendous inroads for the Gospel among the palace guards, they themselves were 'encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly' (v 14). Paul was aware that there were others preaching the Gospel who were not sincere (15, 17). It seemed as if they were competing with him. Paul was not offended, rather he rejoiced that Christ was being preached (v 18b). Paul exemplifies a good attitude for us to follow - when other churches or Christian groups are being successful at winning people to Christ, we are to rejoice and not be envious.

While Paul looked forward to more 'fruitful labor' for the Lord at his release (v 22), he also could not wait to go home to be with his beloved Lord and Master (v 23). A death sentence would not have been unwelcome! As much as he longed to be in the presence of the Lord, he knew where he belonged - for the time being, at least - with the church (vs 24 - 26). It was fine with Paul whether he lived or died. What mattered to him was that the Philippian church conduct themselves 'in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ' (v 27a), and live according to the standards set by Jesus. While it is a blessing to live life united in Christ, we must also count it a privilege to suffer for the faith just as Paul and countless Christians through the ages have done. We are always winners!

Can you honestly say, 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain'?

Or are you either so overwhelmed with problems that you can't wait to die or so thrilled with life that you would like to go on living forever? Life and death are in God's hands. Pray that you will be able to rejoice in life and in death.

Working together often tests relationships. Christians may disagree on the way they conduct church affairs. However, Paul's working relationship with the Philippian believers was exemplary. The Philippian church had a special place in Paul's heart for they had worked together with him in sharing and defending the Gospel. Furthermore, they had shared their blessings with Paul before and during his imprisonment.

'How I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.' says Paul in his letter. His genuine love for the Philippians is reflected in his prayer for them to be united in Christlike love. This love would lead them to a deeper insight of Christ, and sharper moral discernment. In our working relationship with fellow Christians, we should strive for the same Christlike love. Just as Nehemiah's supporters stood side by side when rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, the Philippian Christians rallied around Paul whether he was preaching or in prison. Are we supportive of persecuted Christians in the suffering church? Do we stand by our fellow Christians who are jailed for their beliefs?

In the same way, let us consider how we can show love and sensitivity to our colleagues in our workplace. Can we rise above office politics to help a new staff adapt to the work environment? A lot of unnecessary stress is caused by poor interpersonal relationships whether in the church, office or family. Only love can overcome personality differences, conflicting opinions and working styles. Only love can focus on a co-worker's strengths and 'cover his weaknesses'. Will you stand by one another?

Are you standing by your co-workers in your church or office?

SEP 28, TUESDAY

Phil 2:1–30

Imitate Christ's Humility

Phil 2:3–4

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Philippians 2:5

There is something odd about humility. The moment we declare, 'See, I am humble', we lose it! Humility is not something we achieve on our own. It is a product of godliness.

Oneness in spirit and purpose, and keeping in mind the interests of others are major ingredients that make up humility. Humility comes with an inward attitude that translates into outward actions. Humility's first cry is 'raw honesty' before our God and about our limitations. Humility does not draw attention to self. The humble person will love and serve without fanfare. The well-known example of a humble servant is seen in Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She served untiringly and never drew attention to herself. The services rendered will authenticate the truly humble. Action speaks louder than words.

Humility is also seen in confident trust in the leaders God has placed over us. This must be followed by a quiet submission. At a meeting, someone adamantly declared that his objection had to be recorded because he was the only one who disagreed! It does not mean that we will all agree every time. Humility does not make demands, even if we are right. Jesus gave up His divine rights to be a humble human being and a sacrificial servant. Indeed, we do not rob ourselves when we imitate Christ. We are set free to be more like Him.

Technological advancement is not a measure of our growth. Fault-finding, pride and prejudice remain. Humility is a mighty work of God when we lean heavily on Christ's cross for the flesh to be crucified daily. We need the grace of Christ to cultivate humility in our hearts whether at home, in school or in the market place.

Father, help us individually and collectively to learn from the example of our Lord Jesus. May He increase and we decrease. Make us humble servants worthy of Your name. Amen.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 28, TUESDAY

Phi 2:1-30

'Kiasu' Christians

Phi 2:3-4

Paul knew that church unity suffers when Christians are kiasu (afraid to lose). To counteract this harmful attitude, he taught believers to "consider others better than yourselves". There are pitfalls in trying to impress others as vain conceit can strain relationships. For example, wearing brand-name clothes to church may boost your confidence, but may cause the person seated next to you to feel small and envious. In your enthusiasm to praise God for your child's straight A's, do you unconsciously also imply others do not measure up?

The antidote to 'kiasuism' is humility and looking after the interests of others as well as your own. The hallmark of caring Christians is the ability to love, help and cheer others along the path of faith. Tender-hearted and sympathetic Christians who cooperate with one heart and one purpose are a definite boon to unity. Being "like-minded", "having the same love" and "being of one accord" contribute to unity that produces joy among Christians.

To counter pride, we are encouraged to develop the "mind (attitude) of Christ". Paul points to the humility that characterizes Jesus. Although "equal to God", Christ chose to be of no reputation by taking the form of a servant and became a man. The Creator lowered himself to created status, a carpenter no less. Preachers who demand five-star hotel accommodation or Christian leaders who clamor for recognition do not reflect the mind of Christ. Check yourself for attitudes and behavior that are not Christlike. Materialism pressures Christians to conform to status consciousness. By cultivating the "mind of Christ", Christians go against the grain of society by rendering humble service instead of demanding to be recognized and served.

Kiasu Christians lose out in humility.

As a young pastor, Timothy faced tremendous prejudice from older Christians. His mentor thought otherwise of him. Paul spoke highly of Timothy and commended him for his courage and commitment. Young Timothy cared deeply for people and the things of God.

When the older generation laments the irresponsible behavior of today's youth, they tend to overlook the fact that some teenagers are even godlier than elderly Christians. Adults may 'have eaten more salt' (are more experienced) but they must graciously allow young people a longer learning curve. Our youth are the future church leaders. Older Christians should be patient with their shortcomings and affirm their positive behavior. As they experience grace in their youth, they too will be gracious to others later on in life. It is therefore worthwhile for adults to invest time and energy in nurturing the young ones, especially students. Scripture Union stands as a testimony to the fruitfulness of student ministry.

Timothy was what he was because of the influence of two adults in his life - Eunice, his mother, and Lois, his grandmother. Imagine these two women beaming with pride as they heard Paul praising Timothy for his character and 'stickability'. Let's not dismiss teenagers' ideas as mere 'youthful enthusiasm' without giving them a fair hearing. God used children and teenagers in biblical times. He is no respecter of age and still uses young people to achieve His will. So do not despise the youth!

Today, invest your time in a Timothy for the benefit of tomorrow's church.

SEP 29, WEDNESDAY

Phi 3:1-4:1

In Christ Alone

Phi 3:10

Put no confidence in the flesh. Philippians 3:3b

The recent rise in the use of titles such as ‘Doctor’, ‘Prophet’ and ‘Apostle’ by church leaders has caused much confusion. Questions are being asked about this from both inside and outside the church. Paul puts titles and qualifications in perspective.

If there was anyone who could boast about confidence in the flesh, it had to be Paul (2 Cor 11:22-27). He places no confidence in any social, racial, educational, positional and experiential advantage. He counts them as dung in comparison to knowing Christ supremely and intimately (v 10). That was his passion.

However, this does not mean that there is no place for theological training and ministerial learning. Of course there is! All these must be subservient to knowing and experiencing Christ personally. They are of worth because they are gifts from God and there is no basis to boast about them. Paul advocates Christocentricity not egocentricity. Besides the passion to know Christ, Paul also displays his compassion by his ‘concern for all the churches’ (2 Cor 11:28). This is a natural outflow and overflow of knowing Christ.

When God looks upon us, it is our hearts and not our titles and qualifications that He sees. Be assured that whoever, whatever and wherever we are, God is pleased to reveal Himself to us.

***‘In Christ alone We place our trust
And find our glory In the power of the cross
In every victory Let it be said of us
Our source of strength Our source of hope
Is Christ alone!’ (Shawn Craig & Don Koch)***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 29, WEDNESDAY

Phi 3:1-4:1

Focus On Christ

Phi 3:10

I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:14

Being distracted from Christ and attracted to the world is an unceasing problem for Christians. This twofold attack comes relentlessly and repeatedly. Satan sees to that.

A Hollywood actor has commented: 'We buy with money we don't have, to get things we don't need, to impress people we don't like.' Advertisers are very successful at their jobs. Modern marketing strategies are very aggressive and at times, oppressive. Satan is a master masquerader. He comes deceptively and influences subtly. He appears in different shades, shapes and sizes. There will be attempts to distract us from Christ and attract us to the world where power, position, prestige, pleasure and possessions beckon. We do well to be alert and vigilant!

The key to overcome the world is to focus on Christ. It would be helpful to ask ourselves each time: 'Will this thought or act glorify God and will it benefit others?' Such a question can be posed anywhere, anytime, and on every occasion. To focus on Christ is not a call to be heavenly-minded and to be of no earthly use (v 20). It is to ensure that all acts are a testimony to Christ. We have earthly responsibilities which must be discharged well.

Racehorses wear blinkers when they run. This is to help them to focus and to prevent dust from getting into their eyes. In the same way, we have to abide in Christ and let the cleansing power of His word shield us from the 'dust' of the earthly temptations.

***A cloud of witnesses is cheering us on. Let us fix our eyes on Christ.
Run with faith and faithfulness until we reach the finishing line.***

Imagine Paul sighing and saying, 'If only I had not been party to Stephen's stoning. How I wish I had never persecuted the Christians. Surely, I don't deserve Christ's forgiveness!' Such playback would have petrified Paul – much like Lot's wife - and prevented him from moving forward. Fortunately for us, Paul did neither. He did not fall into self-pitying defeat nor did he rest on his laurels.

Have you ever seen a sprinter leading in a race look back to see how far behind his competitors are? No, because that split second could have cost him his gold medal. Similarly, once we start rewinding our past, we get stuck, repeating the same thing like a broken record. 'Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end ...,' so goes an old song. Another example is a frozen frame during a movie and the show cannot go on. Good or bad, we must not live in memory lane. Sure, we must treasure good memories and learn from our mistakes. But the past must not stop us from moving forward.

Sometimes, it is frustrating to move on to higher ground. It is tough trying to be a perfect Christian. Relax! God's goal is not for us to achieve perfect Christian behavior. His desire is for us to have a perfect attitude in our pursuit of holiness. Paul teaches us to 'live up to what you have already attained', that is, we are to continue with the principles that we have learned in our walk with Him. Spiritual maturity is evident when you obey whatever has been revealed to you.

The process of transformation starts on the day of your salvation and will only finish when Jesus returns (2 Cor 3:18). So, do not be a driven Christian but let God lead the way. If you want to move forward in life, do not backtrack or sidetrack.

When playing the tape of your life, don't 'rewind' but 'fast forward'.

SEP 30, THURSDAY

Phi 4:2-23

Emulate Me

Phi 4:13

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. Phi 4:9

Whether by nature or nurture, we are creatures who imitate one another to some measure. We are all familiar with young children who learn how to speak and behave by watching and listening to their parents.

Young Christians are like infants. They need someone to guide them. We, who are older in the faith, should begin to mentor the younger believers in the ways of the Lord. Perhaps the relationship of a 'mentor/mentee' or 'discipler/disciple' is too daunting to some of us. By whatever name we call this relationship, we have a responsibility to teach and model others in the faith. 'Make disciples' is the Lord's command (Matt 28:18-20).

Some key areas to consider, particularly from our passage, would include gentleness and unity for the sake of Christ, believing prayer and rejoicing always, truth and love held in balance, and purity and excellence in all things. Help is needed to enable young believers to make godly choices in the maze of information overload. In all these, it is important to point them to Christ the Lord. We are only fellow pilgrims along the way, although we may perhaps be a step or two ahead.

The thoughts, language, and behavior of our secular culture may completely overtake young Christians and make them carnal if we fail to produce true disciples of them. Paul cautions us that there are too many teachers but not enough fathers or mothers in the faith. We need to rise to the occasion. We absolutely cannot afford to leave young Christians alone. It would be like leaving them to the lions in the secular arena.

'And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others' (2 Tim 2:2).

Consider prayerfully how you could be a father or mother in the faith to someone, as the Lord leads you. If you are a young Christian, approach your pastor/elder for help.

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

SEP 30, THURSDAY

Phi 4:2-23

Think Kingdom

Phi 4:13

They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. Phi 4:18c

Good gifts bring delight to the recipients. Gifts given with the right attitudes and motives generate liberality and liberty in God's kingdom. Unfortunately, unscrupulous donors can subtly control their beneficiaries.

The Philippian church stands out in two exemplary ways in her giving. First, she gave financial gifts, again and again, to help Paul in his missionary endeavors. Secondly, she gave human resources in the person of Epaphroditus to be a partner with Paul. Clearly, it was an outstanding fellowship in Christ's Gospel for the sake of God's kingdom. The Philippian community acted as a corporate disciple.

Today's world has been described as a global village. Mobility is a reality. It would greatly benefit God's kingdom if the bigger and wealthier churches could share their facilities with smaller struggling churches. This may include things like meeting places and human resources in the form of personnel and so on. They may even commit regular financial aid to those (from another church) who are called to mission work, whether locally or overseas. Sponsors should not exercise oppressive control. Obviously, there must be accountability which is essential for good stewardship.

The sharing of resources amplifies that all good gifts come from God. It also maximizes the use of resources and minimizes duplication and wastage. The Philippian church is a great challenge to our churches today in the use of resources. They readily gave their best to Paul for the Gospel's sake. 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' (Jim Elliot)

And Paul declares, 'Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account' (v 17). Think kingdom. Act kingdom. Invest in God's kingdom. It may involve putting aside our denominational traditions.

Are you contending with discontentment in your life? Learn from Paul. His secret of contentment was to look at things from God's perspective. He focused on mission instead of possessions. Paul did not bother with what he should have. He concentrated on what he should do.

Christians living in cities have a greater struggle against materialism. It is easy to be discontent with your Proton Saga when Mr Wong next door has upgraded to a Mercedes. Who would not envy Mrs Lee's state-of-the-art kitchen? Those in rural settings are also not exempt; temptations come in different forms and at different levels of intensity. It is definitely easier to 'abound than to be abased'. However, in mastering Paul's secret, we are set free to enjoy the simple things of life. We then experience the serenity that contentment brings.

In Paul's thank-you note to the Philippian church, he showed his appreciation of the giver more than the gifts. Paul commended them for their love that generously provided for him in Thessalonica and Rome, long after he had left Macedonia. Paul's contentment qualified him to express his thanks without hinting at any dire need of money. He had experienced Christ's power that sustained him in poverty and abundance. May God forgive us for our discontentment list: houses, money, academic credentials, social status, spouses, children and even looks. Let's start giving thanks for the things we have and not moan about the things out of our reach. Remember if we are 'in Christ', God will supply all our needs - spiritual and material.

The Prodigal Son learnt contentment when he changed his request from 'give me' to 'make me'.

OCT 1, FRIDAY

Act 25:1-27

God Overrules Man's Rule

Act 25:11b

Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD'S purpose that prevails. Prov 19:21

Today's text illustrates vividly how man's plans failed. God's plan prevailed. Man's will was undone. God's will was done.

Human depravity can descend to depths beyond measure. In their wickedness, the chief priests and the Jewish leaders acted as prosecutor, judge and executioner. They condemned Paul as an apostate deserving death. They plotted Paul's assassination (v 3). When that failed, they promptly renewed their efforts to kill Paul through legal means under Roman law (vs 6-8). When that also failed, as a last resort, they appealed to Festus for permission to prosecute Paul under Jewish jurisprudence (v 9). That also failed because Paul dissented. No Roman judge could transfer a case to another court without the consent of the accused.

Paul was a big headache to Festus. Paul was a prisoner with no official charges whose countrymen wanted him dead by whatsoever means. Festus knew Paul was innocent (vs 10, 25). He failed to acquit Paul because he wanted to appease the Jews.

God had already prepared Paul for his defense by revealing His will and plan to Paul. Paul was to be God's witness to rulers and kings all the way to the emperor in Rome. Seizing the opportunity to fulfil God's will, Paul appealed to Caesar (vs 10-12). Paul's appeal to Caesar was irrevocable and it wrecked the plans of Festus and the Jews. Automatically, Festus lost all authority to judge Paul and the opportunity to favor the Jews. The Jews lost the opportunity to sentence Paul. But Paul had the opportunity to witness to one more king (vs 13-23) when Festus needed King Agrippa's help to frame specific charges against Paul (vs 24-27).

***God is sovereign. He is in control in this world. 'Surely, as I have planned, so it will be, and as I have purposed, so it will stand' (Isaiah 14:24).
Christians in many countries today are in danger because they are regarded as apostates.
Pray for God's intervention and protection in their time of need.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 1, FRIDAY

Act 25:1-27

A Claim to Trial

Act 25:11b

'I am bound both to Greeks and non-Greeks. both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome' (Rom 1:14-15).

When writing to the church in Rome, Paul was able to adjust the context of what he had to say. Instead of describing himself as bound both to Jews and Gentiles, as was often the case, he used the term 'Greeks and non-Greeks.' Rome was the capital that controlled the world and also where Caesar lived. Paul was eager to be tried in Rome as he had almost come to the end of his life.

There was only one way he could fulfil his desire to meet with the brethren in Rome and also preach to the important people there. In order to get to Rome, Paul stood his ground before Governor Festus and claimed trial before Caesar. He knew that if he had continued to face the Jewish accusers, there was not going to be any defense. The minds of his accusers were closed. They would not evaluate the truth and accept whatever is true. For Paul, to go to Rome as a prisoner was better than not going at all.

Paul knew his rights and responsibilities as a citizen of Rome and because he was guiltless, he could claim his privileges as a Roman citizen. When we walk close to the Lord, He will watch over our position in the world.

Keep me, Lord, close to You.

Although the Jews wanted Paul dead, it was not easy for anyone to find a transgression that could commit the Apostle Paul to the executioner. Such was the testimony of a man who had lived his life in all godliness. To the Roman Christians, he wrote: 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (Rom 8:31). At the end of the day, it was not Festus or King Agrippa who would make the final decision; it was Jesus Christ who had the authority to decide whether Paul was to suffer for his faith. 'Who will bring any charge against those whom

God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died - more than that, who was raised to life - is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us' (Rom 8:33-34). Festus and King Agrippa might have thought that they were the ones to decide the destiny of Paul, the prisoner, but Paul knew whom he had trusted. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written. "For your sake we face death all day long: we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" ' (Rom 8:35-36).

Most importantly, the Apostle realized that he was to be a conqueror through Jesus Christ. 'For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.'

Rejoice. Your life is in the hands of the living God.

OCT 2, SATURDAY

Act 26:1-32

Walk Your Talk

Act 26:16-18

I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven ... I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. Acts 26:1 9-20

Paul was a powerful and effective witness for God because he preached what he lived and lived what he preached. For Paul, witnessing wasn't a job to be done but a life to be lived. To Paul, the only life worth living was the resurrection life, the life of repentance from self and sin and the life of complete obedience to God. He was a credible witness because he didn't teach what he did not know and he didn't lead where he did not go. Paul's life amplified his testimony.

Prior to his conversion, Paul was a fervent and very orthodox Pharisee who believed in the resurrection of the dead (vs 4-8). Like his persecutors, he once persecuted and killed Christians as blasphemers and apostates (vs 9-11). At his conversion, the resurrected Christ appeared to Paul and spoke to him (vs 10-15).

Paul was appointed God's servant and witness with God's promise of protection (vs 16-17). Paul's special ministry to the Gentiles was specified (v 18). Paul's conversion changed the way he lived. Thereafter Paul preached repentance, obedience and the resurrection (vs 19-20). Festus' and King Agrippa's responses to Paul typified those who reject the Gospel (vs 24-30). They heard but didn't understand; they saw but they didn't perceive the significance (Isa 6:9).

If you haven't found something worth dying for, you haven't discovered anything worth living for. Paul found that something worth dying for. He died to self and sin for Christ's sake. Paul discovered the life worth living. It was the resurrection life lived in continual repentance and total obedience to God. Dare we be like Paul?

***'What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?
Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?' (Matt 16:26).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 2, SATURDAY

Act 26:1-32

V.I.P. Evangelism

Act 26:16-18

There was nothing that could prevent the Apostle Paul from sharing the hope of the resurrection with King Agrippa and the rest of the very important people in the court of Porcius Festus. When called upon to make his defense before King Agrippa, the Apostle was not ashamed to declare his allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth, whom he had once persecuted.

Paul portrayed himself as a persecutor of this Jesus Christ, before he proceeded to tell the story of how he came to learn the truth, which he now so dearly embraced. He boldly identified Jesus Christ as the 'promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night.' He implied that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was a fulfilment of what God had promised to Israel. With the resurrection, there would now be hope after death. King Agrippa, being a Jew himself, would fully understand the hopes that filled every Jewish heart.

Unfortunately, although Jesus Christ came to Earth some 2,000 years ago, His coming still remains very much of a hope to the Jews even today. It is for those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah that this hope has found its fulfilment.

***Do you accept Jesus as the Messiah or are you, like the Jews, languishing in hope?
Jesus brings joy and peace to those who believe and trust in Him.
Are you one of them?***

The story began when the Apostle was on his trip to Damascus to persecute the Church of Jesus Christ. He had intended to drag every Christian to prison and have them killed. He had one objective in mind: to destroy the Christian faith. His brutality was ironically sanctioned by the chief priests themselves, who knew from the Ten Commandments that murder was a sin clearly spelt out in God's Law.

Paul was himself blinded by his own religious fanaticism and he had intended to wipe out Christianity from the face of the earth. There may have been Christians from all across the Graeco-Christian world who were praying for this one man whom they had identified as the arch-enemy of the faith. But God works in mysterious ways. Jesus picked Paul because He knew he would remain faithful as a powerful witness.

It was because of God's grace that Paul became a new person. He found himself making a full turn-around, and later became known in history as the greatest Apostle of the Early Christian Church. Is it any wonder that some of the worst enemies of the Christian faith eventually turn out to be the greatest evangelists or preachers for the Gospel? More of such people need to be brought to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Will you pray for such a person?

***Thank You, Lord, for Your miraculous grace that can melt the hardest heart.
May I too have a 'Damascus Road experience' and become an unwavering disciple of Jesus.***

OCT 3, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 4, MONDAY

Act 27:1-26

Timely Comfort

Act 27:22-25

Lost night an angel of God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' Acts 27:23-24

Finally, after two difficult years of witnessing to the Jews, governors and king, Paul set sail for Rome (v 1) in fulfilment of his God-given destiny (9:15). God was good. He provided Paul with a personal physician, an attendant (v 2) and friends who provided for his needs (v 3). Paul's eventful voyage to Rome mirrored the sufferings in his life and ministry. Strong opposition (v 4), change of plans (v 6), frustrating delays and slow progress through dangerous hardships dogged his journey (vs 7-9).

Pauls objection and warning was deliberately ignored (vs 10-12). The deceptive calm before the storm (v 13) led them straight into a 14-day horrific typhoon (v 14). In spite of desperate efforts to save the lifeboat, to avoid the sandbars and to keep the ship afloat (vs 15-18), the raging storm mercilessly cowed the seasoned sailors into hopeless despair (v 20).

Difficult circumstances do not alter God's goodness. God does not exempt us from trials. He sees us through them. God can be trusted in the typhoon as well as in the calm. Nothing is too big for God to accomplish, nothing too small for Him to notice. You will never know that God is all you need until God is all you've got. Those who trust God can walk in courage in spite of their fears. Paul understood this after he had received God's timely assurance (vs 23-24). He gently rebuked the centurion for ignoring his advice (v 21). He boldly declared God's promise of safety for all in the ship (v 22). He confidently proclaimed his faith in God and His promises (v 25). When your world is falling apart, trust Jesus to hold it together. A trusting heart is the answer for a worried mind. No one is more secure than those who are in God's hands.

'So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand' (Isaiah 41:10).

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 4, MONDAY

Acts 27:1–26

Decision Making

Acts 27:22–25

The way the Roman guards handled their prisoners would have been a major security issue today. During Paul's time, they were allowed to travel with their friends and relatives under the close supervision of the Roman guards. Accompanying Paul were people who looked after his welfare, including the author of the book of Acts, Luke the physician. Luke was also a very fine historian who faithfully recorded every detail of the trip. The whole journey from Israel to Italy was recorded for our sake.

It was clearly not an easy time for Paul and his friends as they sailed to Rome. Yet, God provided for his needs. The unexpected kindness of Julius was certainly the loving provision of a Heavenly Father who cared about the emotional and physical welfare of His child. In rough patches of our life and ministry, be assured that the loving hand of God will plan some pleasant surprises for us. Having been refreshed and encouraged by his friends at Sidon, Paul was now ready to take to the sea again.

They believed in the Almighty God who could easily still the tempestuous storms, yet the ship was threatened by the forces of nature. Paul's warning that the voyage would be disastrous and would bring great loss of cargo and lives went unheeded. The advice of the pilot was taken and they sailed on hoping to reach Phoenix. This turned out to be the wrong decision.

***How do you make decisions in your life?
Do you consult the experts or do you go to God in prayer?***

Shortly before Peter Doot died at age 92, he said, "I am six-foot-four, and every inch belongs to the Lord." I had known him for 65 years, and I'm sure what he said was true.

As a younger man, Peter had left a well-paying job so he could serve as an evangelist for his church. He made a profound impact on hundreds of lives, even though he had little formal training. When I was 19, he challenged me to witness and to preach the gospel in street-corner meetings.

What made Peter so effective? His way of life. Everybody could clearly see that God was his Master.

The same could be said about the apostle Paul. In Acts 27 we read that when he was a prisoner being taken to Rome, the ship on which he was sailing was being battered by a furious storm. The sailors had given up all hope. But when Paul spoke, everybody listened and was encouraged. Even the Roman centurion followed his instructions. Why? Because it was obvious that Paul was a godly man who was telling the truth. They had good reason to believe him when he spoke of "the God to whom I belong and whom I serve," and when he said there would be no loss of life (vv.22-23).

Let's yield ourselves to God so that we too can say, "Every inch belongs to the Lord."

By: Herbert Vander Lugt

***O loving Savior, here's my will— With Yours, I pray, may it be one;
I long to know You more each day, So that Your will in me is done. —D. De Haan***

Give your all to Christ; He gave His all for you.

OCT 5, TUESDAY

Act 27:27–28:10

Glorifying Life

Act 27:34–36

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. 1 Peter 2:12

‘Grateful praise be given to Paul’s God! Had it not been for Paul, none of us would have made it to Rome safely’. That could have been the centurion’s prayer at the end of their voyage to Rome. Paul the prisoner was friendly. He had concerned and caring friends who provided for him (27:2-3). He spoke the truth. His prediction of impending great disaster and grave dangers was accurate (27:10-20). Paul had been a channel of God’s blessing. His courage dispelled hopeless despair. His timely comfort prepared others for the ordeal ahead (27:21-26). His bold intervention saved many lives (27:30-32). His wholehearted trust in God was contagious (27:33-38). Paul’s God must be a personal and powerful God who protected him all the time. This could have been the centurion’s assessment. He had seen Paul’s good deeds during their journey together. He had seen God’s visitation on them all. No doubt he could glorify God because of what Paul had done.

What lessons can we learn from Paul that can inspire us to glorify God with our lives?

- God does not exempt us from trials; He sees us through them.
- Believe in God and you will see miracles. Believe in God’s Son and you will experience miracles in your life.
- It’s not the sense of His presence, but the fact of His presence that is our strength.
- If you want to experience the presence and power of God to impact your world for eternity, like Paul, you need to live life in God’s perfect will.
- God can accomplish extraordinary things through ordinary lives that are fully surrendered to Him.

Trust your past to God’s mercy, your present to His love and your future to His providence.

‘God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work’ (2 Corinthians 9:8).

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 5, TUESDAY

Act 27:27–28:10

A Journey of Faith

Act 27:34–36

Despite the fact that his earlier advice to the centurion had been rejected, Paul is seen here without anger. He gently chides them (v 21) but his concern is for their well-being. He brings comfort to the storm-tossed crew who were weak from not eating. He tells them to eat and to keep up their courage, but best of all, he assures them of God's promise that had been given to him by an angel of the Lord: 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar: and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you' (v 24). Imagine the remarkable impact his words would have had on the bone-weary men. All hope of survival had vanished as the storm continued to rage.

Now Paul's declaration causes hope to surge forth!

Take note of the impact of Paul's words:

- i) There is an Almighty God
- ii) We may have a personal relationship with Him
- iii) He allows us to serve Him
- iv) He knows His plans and purposes for us
- v) He speaks to us
- vi) He is a gracious and compassionate God (vs 22-26).

It is Paul's faith that saves the lives of all the men on board, and gives them the encouragement to also eat (v 36). More than that, Paul has openly shared with them about his faith in the living God. Did his words challenge their beliefs and superstitions? Would some at a later stage seek to know more about this God? God's plan overrides all other intentions. When we have the kind of single-minded faith that Paul had, others will be blessed as well.

Lord, may my faith be always strong and bring blessings to those around me. Make me an instrument of Your peace.

Paul's journey to Rome was drawing to a close. Throughout the journey, his life and the lives of those with him were spared on a number of occasions. They had just survived a shipwreck and had come ashore on an island known as Malta. Although the superstitious natives of the island had earlier accused him of being a murderer, God again protected Paul. When a man of God is out there doing the work of God, God will always be with him. Paul's life was preserved because God's purposes for him had yet to be achieved. We have the certainty that our times are in the hands of God. He alone knows the number of our days.

Once again Paul witnessed to the power of the true God when the viper fell off his hand without any ill effects on him. The opinion of the islanders changed. Paul was no longer a 'murderer'. He was now a 'god'. Paul's reception by Publius and the healing of Publius' father drew a host of other sick persons to whom Paul was able to minister.

The overwhelming love of God is seen in the hospitality and warmth experienced by Paul. Yet another instance of His gracious provision. Will you trust God to provide you with friends in unexpected places? When the going is rough, be comforted. God will arrange His surprises and will strengthen you to go through the trial.

***Lord, let me never fail to trust in Your unfailing providence.
Your mercy and love are new every morning.***

OCT 6, WEDNESDAY

Act 28:11-31

Finishing Faithfully

Act 28:31

Boldly ... he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the LORD Jesus Christ (Acts 28:31). After all the difficulties and dangers, despair and deliverance, men of lesser stature and faith would have said, 'That's enough. No more!' Not Paul. He was still at it. He had been faithful to his God-given calling. He resolved to finish strong on his God-ordained commission.

When he arrived at Rome, Paul proclaimed Messiah Jesus to the Jews (v 17). He began by declaring his innocence (v 18). Using Scripture, Paul proclaimed the kingdom of God and Jesus the Messiah to the Jews (v 23). There's only one God, accessible through one way (faith), salvation through one name (Jesus). Some believed; others did not (v 24).

Though disappointed, Paul was not surprised. Paul remained faithful to his calling. He continued to preach and teach. He proclaimed the Gospel and instructed the new believers (vs 30-31). He didn't give up, let up or shut up till the cause of Christ was built-up. Not only was Paul willing to die for Christ, he was most willing to live for Christ all the way, all the time.

A world in despair needs Christians who care. Our world needs Christians who are compassionate, connected and committed. So many are doing business in God's name, but few are doing God's work. We have known Christ. Let us make Him known to others. God does not call us to do great things but He does call us to do small things with great love. Like Paul, we may be marginalised and maligned. Are we available to be used by God, to go anywhere, to do anything at any time? Do not quit. Finish your race.

***'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them ...
teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matthew 28:19-20).***

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 6, WEDNESDAY

Act 28:11-31

Paul Stays in Focus

Act 28:31

Paul was a man who remained very focused in his calling. Nothing could distract this man of God from preaching about Jesus Christ as the Way to God.

Unlike some modern-day Christians who would curse and rebuke the twin gods Castor and Pollux on the Alexandrian ship, Paul had no qualms about having to travel on a pagan ship. His main business was not to cast out demons from some wooden statues. To him whose conscience was strong, an idol was nothing (cf 1 Cor 8:4). The scenario could have changed if Paul had tried to disparage the statues of the twin gods. He might have been abandoned or assassinated half way through the journey.

Paul's calling was to preach Jesus Christ. He was keen to go to Rome so that he could preach to both the Jews there as well as the Gentiles. God opened the door for him to reach out to a bigger group of Roman citizens. 'They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying' (23).

As believers, we must remain focused in our calling. Whether it is in the preaching of the Gospel or in a teaching ministry, we have to continue doing God's work. It is only when we stay in focus that we will be able to see positive responses to the Gospel.

***Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,
who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame,
and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).***

Author Ragnar Arlander tells about the time he and some friends scaled Mt. Rainier. When they reached a plateau, the group decided they had gone far enough.

Arlander, however, continued the climb to find a person who had traveled on ahead. Eventually he found him resting, gazing at a beautiful glacier. The man was ready to go back, but when he saw Arlander approaching, he jumped up and exclaimed, "Since you've come, let's go higher!"

This experience makes me think of the events described in Acts 28. As the apostle Paul was traveling to Rome, he met some fellow believers, and "when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage" (v.15).

What better compliment could be offered us than to have someone say, "Talking to you has encouraged me to continue on in my spiritual walk." The world is filled with troubled and discouraged souls who are struggling along in the Christian life. Battle weary, they are almost ready to give up. When they see you, what influence do you have on them? Do you inspire them to more noble lives of service? Or does your example tend to drag them down?

May we influence others in such a way that they will take heart and say, "I want to go higher!"

By: Richard DeHaan

***Oh, I would be to others, A cheering ray of light,
Inspiring them with courage, To climb some new-found height! —Bosch
The human spirit soars with hope when lifted by an encouraging word.***

Introduction to Philemon

This is a brief letter written by Paul to Philemon. It is regarding the forgiving and receiving back of Philemon's servant, Onesimus, who was now a believer.

It is an inspiring letter to read. Here, we see Paul, the writer, demonstrating compassionate understanding of the plight of Onesimus, a runaway slave. If Paul were alive today, he could well have a thriving counselling ministry for many of our foreign workers, maids, and their employers. God must have seen it needful to have this letter preserved for us in the Bible in order for us to learn to forgive and restore our repentant employees. All Christians are challenged to forgive no matter what wrong has been committed.

As we read this letter, we see something of Paul's Christlike character. He was once a persecutor of believers (Acts 9:1-2), but now in love (2 Cor 2:4), and with courage (Acts 16:36-37), he speaks up on behalf of Onesimus to his former employer Philemon.

Paul is able to speak so strongly for Onesimus because the latter, after his conversion, was like a son, helping Paul in prison (vs 10–11). And Paul, knowing that a church gathers in Philemon's home (v 2), also wanted to do some teaching. He wanted them to understand that now that Onesimus was a believer, he was on the same standing as Philemon who had been converted through Paul's ministry.

As we study this letter, let us look at three aspects of Christian living.

- Firstly, we need to identify with and understand those in the lower strata of society.
- Secondly, it is the duty of a servant who had run away from his master and then converted, to return and reconcile with his master.
- Thirdly, we must recognize there is no social or class distinctions in Christian fellowship.

OCT 7, THURSDAY

Phm 1:1-25

Love That Forgives

Phm 1:4

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. Philemon 1:17

Some of our friends, and even we, ourselves, may have had our maids run away with our belongings. It was a crime punishable by death during Paul's time but not anymore. Yet how many of them have returned to us, duly repentant? The fact that Onesimus returned willingly to Philemon is testimony to the impact of Paul's tremendous ministry.

Paul could have used his authority as an apostle to instruct Philemon to take back Onesimus but he chooses, rather, to plead with him 'on the basis of love' (v 9). It was the love of God that sought Paul when he was venting his fury against the followers of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 9:1-5). Consumed by this love, he had sought to share it with everybody he met and that included both Philemon and Onesimus. Paul urges Philemon to receive Onesimus back, now that they were both bound together by the love of God (v 16a).

This love had transformed Onesimus from being 'useless' to 'useful' (v 11). Paul states that Onesimus was like a 'son' to him, even referring to him as his 'very heart'. In fact, Onesimus was so useful to him that he wished he could keep him (v 13). However, Paul was willing to set aside his own needs, and with Philemon's consent, arrange for a reconciliation between him and the runaway slave who had stolen from him. Paul made sure that there would be no hindrances to this reconciliation by promising to reimburse Philemon for whatever Onesimus owed him (v 18).

God had forgiven Philemon's sins when he had repented and turned away from them (v 19b). Now it was Philemon's turn to forgive Onesimus and Paul was confident that he would do so and more (v 21).

We know for certain that Philemon and Onesimus were reconciled because church history records that Onesimus, the slave, became an ardent preacher of the Gospel and later, the bishop of Ephesus.

No power can match what the power of God's love and forgiveness can do.

We have experienced God's love and forgiveness. Let us be willing to forgive those who have offended us, be they friends or family, our employees or employers.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 7, THURSDAY

Phm 1:1-25

Thanksgiving & Prayer

Phm 1:4

I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers. Philemon 1:4

Paul's main purpose in writing this letter was for Philemon to willingly receive Onesimus back 'as a dear brother' (v 16). However, in these first seven verses there is no mention of Onesimus at all.

Paul was not merely goal-orientated. He was also people-orientated. He was tactful, tender and gentle in dealing with what must have been a painful matter for Philemon. Instead of rushing into that matter, he began, after the initial greetings, by commending and encouraging Philemon.

A prayer of thanksgiving was always on Paul's lips whenever he thought of Philemon. Paul had brought him to Christ (v 19b) and now he was such a blessing to the Christians in his area (vs 5b, 7b). He is believed to have been a rich man with a house that was big enough to hold the members of the church that met there. Together with Apphia (believed to be his wife) and Archippus (v 2) he ministered to 'the saints' probably by providing for their needs.

Paul's prayer was that he would also actively share his faith with them and thus experience the fullness of life lived with Christ at its center (v 6). Paul did not hesitate to express the 'great joy and encouragement' he received from his relationship with Philemon (v 7).

As we ponder on this passage, we realize afresh the power of the written word. Let us write words of encouragement and love to other believers as God brings their names to us.

Everybody makes mistakes in life, Christians included. Onesimus, the 1st century runaway slave, had committed a serious breach of the law which was punishable by death! In God's wonderful saving grace, his escapade brought him into Paul's company and into the arms of Christ. There, in repentance, he encountered the living and loving God, who not only forgave his sins, but cleansed him from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9), and gave him a changed life and a new start.

This 'forgiven-ness' is to be worked out and lived out: Onesimus began to 'work out his salvation with fear and trembling' (Phil 2:12). He knew that to honor God's name, he would have to face his past and make restitution. He would need God's strength and the help of Paul, his mentor and spiritual father, to be reconciled to his master, Philemon.

Philemon, in receiving Onesimus back, not merely as a slave, but as a beloved Christian brother, was in a wonderful position to repay the debt of love he owed (Rom 13:8). Paul, also Philemon's mentor, appealed to his hospitable and loving nature that had refreshed the hearts of the saints (v 7) – Philemon could now truly refresh his elderly mentor's heart (v 20). By his gracious act, the sharing of his faith will 'become effective when you perceive all the good we may do for Christ' (NASV, v 6).

**Ask for the Lord's strength and boldness to extend grace
to restore those who have hurt us.**

Overview of Colossians

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossian Christians while he was still in prison in Rome. He had neither started nor visited the church in Colosse but he knew all about it through his co-worker, Epaphras, who was from Colosse (4:12). Another of Paul's co-workers, Tychicus, we are told, delivered this letter (4:7-8).

The church was most likely started by Epaphras after he had heard Paul preach the Gospel in Ephesus (Acts 19). While in prison, Paul eagerly looked forward to visits from friends bearing news of how the different churches were doing. It is likely that it was one such visit from Epaphras, bearing news of the Colossian church, that prompted Paul to write this letter.

Colosse was a fairly wealthy city, east of Ephesus. It was multi-religious with Greek ideas, Judaism, Eastern religions and the occult co-existing with the Christian faith. Some in the church had borrowed from other beliefs and added to their faith.

Paul, thus, zooms in on the pre-eminence of Christ from the outset of his letter, devoting the first two chapters to it. He exalts Christ as the very image of God through whom all things were created (1:15-16). Christ is the Pre-existent Sustainer of all things, the Head of the church, the First to be resurrected, the One in whom dwells the fullness of deity and the One who reconciles man to God (1:17-22). Christ is sufficient for our salvation. All other beliefs are deceptive and completely inadequate. The two final chapters deal with right behavior and conduct, with rules for holy living.

Today, we have added to our faith, not so much from other religions but from worldly thinking, especially in matters of morality, power and wealth. This letter is a timely reminder for us to hold fast to Biblical teaching and to place Christ above everything else if we want to lead a victorious life.

OCT 8, FRIDAY

Col 1:1-23

Created by Him for Him

Col 1:10-12

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities: all things were created by him and for him. Col 1:16

Some Bible scholars believe that verses 15-20 belong to a hymn that was sung in the early church. They constitute one of the most important passages concerning Christ in the New Testament. Paul, most likely, quoted it to counteract the false teaching that was afflicting the church. In these verses we see Christ as the agent of both creation (vs 15-17) and the new creation (vs 18-20). More importantly, they declare that Christ has made God known (v 15). While we are made in the image of God, He is the image of God — He reflects perfectly, the character of God. In the six verses, you will notice that the words ‘all creation’, ‘all things’ and ‘everything’ are mentioned seven times. This is to underline the supremacy of Christ over all, whether in heaven or earth.

Christ, through whom the heavens and the earth were created, is also responsible for us becoming new creations (vs 19-22). He accomplished this at great cost to Himself (vs 20, 22). He is not only the firstborn over all creation (v 15), having sovereignty over it, but also the firstborn from among the dead (v 18). He was the first to rise from the dead. As such, we have the confidence that if we continue to hold on and stand firm in our faith in Christ, we too will rise with Him to be united with God (vs 22-23).

We were all alienated from God at one time (v 21). When we first heard the Gospel and realized that our Creator God was offering us the way of reconciliation, we were humbled and accepted His offer with much thanksgiving. How long has it been since you did that? Does the fact that God has chosen to draw you to Himself still humble you and fill you with thanksgiving or are you taking your salvation for granted? Paul wrote this letter more than 20 years after his conversion but his zeal for the Gospel was *so strong that he was prepared to go to the ends of the earth to proclaim it (v 23b)*.

Reflect on what you were when you were alienated from God. Then, think of the time you became a new creation in Christ and your present situation now. How have you progressed? Ask God to show you the areas of your life that need to be surrendered to Him.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 8, FRIDAY

Col 1:1-23

Praying For Others

Col 1:10-12

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. Col 1:10

Paul did not know the Colossian Christians personally (2:1). However, that did not stop him from thanking God for them and praying for them. Praying for others - whether we know them or not - will not only make a difference in their lives but also mature us in Christ.

Before Paul mentioned to the Colossians that he was praying for them, he encouraged them by telling them how thankful he was to God for their faith, hope and love (vs 3-5). He assured them that the Christian faith was not a small-time cult; faith in Christ was transforming lives all over the world (v 6)!

Paul's prayer for the Colossians (vs 9-12) gives us useful pointers for our prayers for others. Notice that his prayer focus is that they live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way (v 10a). In practical terms, that would mean bearing fruit through good works, growing in the knowledge of God and seeking to be strengthened by His power (vs 10b-11a). He prayed that as a result of living lives that please God, they would learn patience and endurance. They would also joyfully give thanks to God who had rescued them from the kingdom of darkness and had given them citizenship and all the privileges of His own kingdom (vs 11b-14).

***Use Paul's prayer to pray for friends and family.
Then, use that same prayer to pray for yourself.***

During an outing, we met a woman who had known my husband's family since he was a child. She looked from Alan to our son, Xavier. "He's the spitting image of his daddy," she said. "Those eyes. That smile. Yep. Looks just like him." As the woman delighted in acknowledging such a strong resemblance between father and son, she even noted similarities in their personalities. Still, though they are alike in many ways, my son doesn't reflect his father perfectly.

There's only one Son—Jesus—who reflects His Father completely. Christ is the "image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (Colossians 1:15). In Him and through Him and for Him all things were created (v. 16). "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (v. 17).

We can spend time in prayer and Bible study, discovering the Father's character by looking at Jesus—God in the flesh. He invites us to witness His love in action by examining how He interacts with others in Scripture and in our day-to-day living. After surrendering our lives to Christ and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can grow in knowing and trusting our loving Father. He transforms us to reflect His character, so we can live for Him.

What a joy it would be if others could say we look just like Jesus!

By: Xochitl Dixon

What character trait of Jesus have you seen cultivated in your life over the last year? What trait would you like to cultivate in the coming year?

Jesus, please help me know You more as You make me more like You!

OCT 9, SATURDAY

Col 1:24-2:23

Don't Exchange Truth for Deception

Col 2:6-7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. Col 2:6-7

In a world where being politically correct is becoming increasingly important, to say that any particular religion is false would be inviting trouble.

But the fact remains that only in Christ is there forgiveness of sin (vs 11, 13-15). In Him 'all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form' and since He rose from the dead, we who are all destined to die have the assurance that that we too will be raised to be forever with Him (vs 9-12). What religious belief, philosophy or tradition can surpass what has been accomplished for us in Christ? They are all deceptions (v8).

What shocked Paul was that the Colossian Christians were actually submitting to deceptive teaching (vs 16-23). They had exchanged the liberty they had in Christ for the bondage of dos and don'ts. Perhaps this is a good time to pause and reflect on our own faith. Are any of the dos and don'ts of our culture holding us back from enjoying the freedom to follow Christ wholeheartedly? Fear and the desire for wealth, health and all that is seemingly good are some of the factors that keep people in bondage. Feng Shui practitioners know this and take advantage.

Sadly, people who are being led astray are blind to the faults of those leading them astray. Paul, however, knew the tricks of the false teachers in Colossae. They were, most likely, members of the church. Pretending to be humble (v 18a), they would have gained the respect of the rest of the church. But by saying that they were privy to visions and angel visitations, they were actually claiming to be superior to all the rest. As far as Paul was concerned, these people were of no use to the church for they had already broken fellowship with Christ who is the Head of the church (v19).

We already have victory in Christ (v 15).

Everything else is less so let's not exchange our position in Christ for anything else.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 9, SATURDAY

Col 1:24–2:23

Don't Exchange Truth for Deception

Col 2:6–7

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. Col 1:24

The apostle Paul was one person who did not shy away from suffering. As we know, he wrote this letter while he was in prison in Rome. Since His Master suffered, he considered it a privilege, being a part of His body, to suffer as well (v 24). In fact, he rejoiced in suffering! And because Paul was willing to suffer, the church, through the ages, has benefited tremendously from his letters written from prison - his letters to Philemon, the Ephesian, Philippiian and Colossian churches.

The precious nature of the Gospel is such that Paul was determined to give his all to proclaim it. Planned before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4), it had remained a mystery until God revealed all through Jesus Christ (v 2b). The mystery which is now an open secret revealed that through Jesus Christ, however sinful we are, we can be reconciled to God, and with His Spirit in us, we are assured of a glorious future. Paul's mission was to get everyone on to this secret. 'To this end I labor' says Paul (v 29a). But it was sweet labor, for the more he suffered in his endeavors, the more he was energized by the power of God (v 29b).

In the mystery religions in Colossae, only certain people were privy to special knowledge through which, they believed, they could be perfectly united with their deity. In contrast, Paul's desire was to proclaim to everyone the Christ in whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (v 3). In Christ, we are already perfect before God (v 28)! 'It is too good to be true!' argue other religions (v 4) but it is true. This incredible knowledge makes whatever we suffer for our faith worthwhile. No suffering can match that of our Lord Jesus Christ and nothing we do can repay His great love for us.

'Foxe's Book of Martyrs' by John Foxe speaks of the boldness and courage of early Christians who suffered and died for their faith. Many modern-day Christians have followed in their footsteps. It is worth it. Let's believe that in our hearts so that if or when the time comes for us to make a stand for Christ, we will do so without hesitation.

Have you ever fought a dragon? If you answered no, author Eugene Peterson disagrees with you. In *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, he wrote, "Dragons are projections of our fears, horrible constructions of all that might hurt us. . . . A peasant confronted by a magnificent dragon is completely outclassed." Peterson's point? Life is filled with dragons: the life-threatening health crisis, the sudden job loss, the failed marriage, the estranged prodigal child. These "dragons" are the supersized dangers and frailties of life that we're inadequate to fight alone.

But in those battles, we have a Champion. Not a fairy tale champion—the ultimate Champion who has fought on our behalf and conquered the dragons that seek to destroy us. Whether they're dragons of our own failures or the spiritual enemy who desires our destruction, our Champion is greater, allowing Paul to write of Jesus, "Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Colossians 2:15). The destructive forces of this broken world are no match for Him!

The moment we realize that the dragons of life are too big for us is the moment we can begin to rest in Christ's rescue. We can confidently say, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

By: Bill Crowder

What "dragons" are you facing in life?

How can Christ's victory on the cross provide encouragement as you deal with them?

Father, thank You for being more than enough for the threats I will face today.

Give me the wisdom and strength to walk with You, trusting You for the grace I need.

OCT 10, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 11, MONDAY

Col 3:1-4:1

Lifestyle Christians

Col 3:1-2

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Col 3:2

When Paul tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above, he does not mean for us to become escapist, to be 'so heavenly minded' that we are of 'no earthly use'. He means the opposite. He urges us to have the right kind of relationship with Christ so that we can live a full and meaningful life on earth.

Since our union with Christ is hidden from the world (v 3), Paul wants Christians to be recognized for having some qualities (vs 12-17) while not having others (vs 5-9). Our character and lifestyle must set us apart from unbelievers. This means dying to the old nature and clothing ourselves with God's nature. We are well aware of our struggles with our old nature. Paul urges us to put it to death so that our new life in Christ is seen in advance of His second coming. This requires conscious effort, but in Christ, who has forgiven our sins and given us the power of the Holy Spirit to clothe ourselves with His nature, we are able to do it.

Do you notice that sexual sin tops the list of sins we are to put to death (v 5)? Obviously, it was as much a problem then as it is now. Sexual sin is the most destructive of sins. It destroys us physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. While, by the grace of God we can be forgiven and healed, the scars remain for a lifetime. Sins of anger and that of lying are not minor sins either (vs 8-9). While sexual sin can be secret sin, these sins are visible to the whole world. If we are guilty of these sins we will be seen to be no different from unbelievers.

The qualities that Paul wants us to cultivate are actually the qualities of Christ (vs 13-14). These qualities, more than any other, set apart the Christian from those who do not believe. If only the church which is the visible body of Christ, were to display what Paul describes in verses 12-17, people would come to our churches in droves. There would be no need to go to great expense to hold huge evangelistic rallies.

***'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him' (v 17).
Let's make this the principle by which we live.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 11, MONDAY

Col 3:1-4:1

Relationships Matter

Col 3:1-2

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Col 3:23

It is unlikely that anyone of us is living as a hermit in some cave. We are, rather, living in relationship with people at home, work, society and church. Paul gives us, in this passage, rules that ensure harmonious relationships at home and at work.

The home is where we are truly ourselves - for better or for worse. It is where masks are removed and it is visible to all whether we are still living in the old nature or we have put on the new one.

Of vital importance is the husband-wife relationship (vs 18-19). The wife must not attempt to rule her husband's life. Rather, she should submit to him, and he in turn, must love her and be sensitive to her needs. Parents should practice what they preach, and live out the Gospel before their children. Such behavior will earn the respect of their children who will then readily obey them, and by doing so, please the Lord (v 20-21).

At the workplace, we must give ourselves totally to the job at hand, working at it as if we were working for the Lord. Do not just do the minimum required to avoid being scolded by our employer (v 23). A bad attitude at work shows that we have no reverence for the Lord while a good attitude will put us in right relationship with both our co-workers and employers. In fact, the right attitude to work can turn any job, big or small, into an act of worship (v 24b).

If you happen to be in the position of an employer, the way you treat your staff can either draw them to Christ or drive them away from Him. It is thus very important that you are fair with them. Give them their due rights and remember that you are answerable to your Master in heaven (4:1).

***If we allow Christ to enter our relationships in both the home and at work,
we would not dread going to work or returning home.
There will be order and harmony in both places.***

While removing the price tag from an item of winter clothing I had purchased, I smiled at these words on the back: "WARNING: This innovative product will make you want to go outdoors and stay there." When properly clothed for the climate, a person can survive and even thrive in harsh and changing weather conditions.

The same principle is true in our spiritual lives. As followers of Jesus, our all-weather spiritual wardrobe has been prescribed by the Lord in His Word, the Bible. "As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. . . . Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Col. 3:12-13 emphasis added).

These garments that God provides—such as kindness, humility, and gentleness—allow us to meet hostility and criticism with patience, forgiveness, and love. They give us staying power in the storms of life.

When we face adverse conditions at home, school, or work, the "clothing" God tells us to wear protects us and enables us to make a positive difference. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (v. 14).

Dressing according to God's guidelines doesn't change the weather—it equips the wearer.

By: David C. McCasland

***Heavenly Father, help me to put on Your garment of love
so that I am prepared for whatever life brings me today.
Kindness is the oil that takes the friction out of life.***

OCT 12, TUESDAY

Col 4:2-18

Prayer and Witness

Col 4:6

Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Col 4:2-3

Prayer and witness are fundamental to the Christian faith. As Paul closes his letter, he urges the Colossian church to devote themselves to prayer and to 'make the most of every opportunity' to proclaim the Gospel (vs 2. 5). We pray because we know God hears our prayers and answers them according to His will. Prayer keeps us connected to Christ and gives us a heart of compassion towards those for whom we pray. Paul had grown to love the Colossian church through praying for them. He now requested that they pray for him, not so much for him to be freed from prison but that he would be able to share the message of the Gospel clearly and that it would be proclaimed far and wide (vs 3-4).

When we witness for Christ, our lives and speech must reflect the message we share (vs 5-6). We must know our faith before we share it so that we will not be caught off guard when we are asked questions (v 6). It's important not to parrot the same standard message to everyone but be sensitive to the person's needs. The more genuine we are, the more people will be convinced that our message is true.

Because of Paul's prayer and witness, he had a large company of friends and co-workers (vs 7-18) who loved and cared for him. It is possible that Tychicus and Onesimus were with him in prison as he closed his letter. They wanted to deliver it for him to the church in Colosse (vs 7-9). Among the six who asked Paul to convey greetings, there were both Jews and Gentiles. They were all united in love for Christ, Paul and the church. Most concerned for the church in Colosse was Epaphras who was always wrestling in prayer (v 12b) for this church that he had started. The problem of the false teachers was a cause for concern. It is possible they had also influenced the church in Laodicea, so Paul urges that his letter be read in Laodicea as well (v 16).

It is wonderful to be in fellowship with people who pray, support and witness for the Lord. Most churches have small groups that do this. If you don't already belong to one, make an attempt to join one. You will find that with the encouragement of fellow Christians, you will 'stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured'(v 12b).

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 12, TUESDAY

Col 4:2-18

Make It Attractive

Col 4:6

The story is told of a young boy who, during a bygone era, was aboard a passenger train attempting to make money selling apples. He made his way through the train car, saying, “Apples! Would you like to buy an apple?” When he got to the rear of the car, he still had a bagful of apples and no money.

A gentleman who noticed his plight took him aside and asked to see one of the apples. He proceeded to go to the front of the train, polish it conspicuously with a napkin, and then walk down the aisle eating the apple and commenting on how delicious and refreshing it was. Then he told the boy to try again. This time, he sold every apple. The difference? The apples had been made attractive to the potential customers.

This story can remind us of one way we can interest others in the gospel of Jesus Christ: Make it attractive to them—show them the difference it has made in our own lives. That is best done by following the words of Paul in Colossians 4:5. “Be wise,” he said, “in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity” (NIV). If we show kindness, love, and compassion to others, those who observe us will wonder why, and that may give us an opening to tell them about the beauty of God’s love for them.

By: Dave Branon

***Dear God, You have given us so much by providing our salvation.
Help us to make the gospel attractive to others
by the way we shine Jesus’ light on those we encounter each day.
The beauty of a changed life can attract others to the One who makes us beautiful.***

A friend told me about a group of people who share a strong bond of faith in Christ. One of them, a 93-year-old woman, said, “I feel like I can call any of you at 2 a.m., and I don’t even have to apologize if I feel the need for any type of assistance.” Whether the need is prayer, practical help, or someone to be there during a time of need, these friends are unconditionally committed to each other.

The same sense of commitment shines through Paul’s letter to the followers of Jesus in Colosse. Writing from prison in Rome, Paul says he is sending Tychicus and Onesimus to encourage them (Col. 4:7-9). Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus send their greetings (vv.10-11). And Epaphras is “always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (v. 12). These are bold assurances of practical help and deep-seated love.

Are you part of a “2 a.m. group”? If so, give thanks for the faithfulness of friends. If not, ask the Lord to connect you with another person with whom you can share a commitment to pray and care. I suspect it will soon grow to include others. Share the love of Christ with one another.

Anything. Anytime. Anywhere. All in Jesus’ name!

By: David C. McCasland

***Jesus, thank You for friends who demonstrate Your love to me.
Help me to do the same for them and those around me.
Most of all, thank You for being the friend who sticks closer than a brother.
Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. Jesus***

Overview Of Ephesians 1-6

The city of Ephesus was a booming commercial, religious and political center. The city also had a great temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Artemis, the daughter of Leto and Zeus and twin sister of Apollo, was revered in many cities as the goddess of fertility and childbirth.

Christianity was established in Ephesus through Paul, with the help of Aquila and Priscilla, during Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, through this epistle, responds to some contemporary spiritual needs in this Church.

The Epistle to the Ephesians begins in the almost customary manner as the other Pauline letters. Yet Ephesians is special because Paul writes the letter from prison. It therefore carries certain spiritual sentiments and emotional impulses that the reader must not fail to catch.

To some, Ephesians is more of a sermon with doctrinal content rather than a casual letter.

In summary, Ephesians deals with three basic issues —

- the **Eternal Divine Purpose**,
- **Christ as the Divine Means for Fulfilment of that Purpose** and
- the **Role of the Church in Fulfilling the Divine Purpose**.

The book neatly combines cardinal Christian beliefs with practical instructions. Hence, Paul consciously uses verbs such as **WALK**, **SIT** and **STAND** quite liberally to make sense of the message.

A further point that the readers of Ephesians must note is that although Paul was in prison, he does not become preoccupied with his own concerns but seeks the welfare and needs of others. Paul considers his suffering to be much less than that of Christ. He wants to press home a vital point, that the mystery and truth of Christ must always be upheld. ***The truth is plain to Paul: Jesus is God's solution for human sins and the author of our salvation.*** Therefore, Paul encourages his readers to hold on to the truth in order to understand the mystery and know the hope now available in Christ (1: 18).

OCT 13, WEDNESDAY

Eph 1:1-23

No More Aliens

Eph 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Ephesians 1:3

When we go to an Immigration Office to apply for an entry visa to another country, we are given a form to fill in which appears the words 'Alien Visa Application'. The term 'alien' could mean: unrelated, unfamiliar, unknown, strange, foreign, extraterrestrial, etc. Paul, in this passage, reminds his readers that in Christ we are no longer aliens to the kingdom of God. Our status has been dramatically changed. This gift of citizenship comes with exclusive kingdom benefits for the believer.

These are:

a) **Wisdom as a gift (v 8)**

Wisdom is the capacity to see into the heart of things in order to understand and differentiate between good and evil. Wisdom as a gift of God is not merely an intellectual or philosophical heightening but a sensitization and enlightenment concerning God - His heavenly mysteries and promises. Such sensitization, according to Paul, should prompt a responsible testimony on our part.

b) **Possession in Christ as a gift (v 11)**

Now we have become a possession of God. The notion that God now owns us fills us with joy and security concerning our standing and status as citizens of heaven.

c) **Seal as a gift (v 13)**

In New Testament times, many cults practiced tattooing as a mark of citizenship. Paul, thinking in similar terms, notes that every Christian is marked or sealed as a sign of ownership. The Holy Spirit is the seal.

***Let us live a life worthy of our heavenly citizenship.
Pray that we may be worthy citizens in order to proclaim
God's glory and preach the risen Christ.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 13, WEDNESDAY

Eph 1:1-23

Privileged Member Benefits in Christ

Eph 1:3

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. Eph 1: 18-19a

Paul was impressed by the positive news concerning the believers at Ephesus. Their outgoing affection was commendable because such love could only come with recognition of the wealth of spiritual blessing inherited in Christ.

We often hear or read about membership benefits that come with credit cards. Those cards and benefits are given only to persons who qualify and settle payments promptly. In Christ, however, we have been received as bona fide members by grace and through faith, and on that basis, membership benefits have been endowed. We need to appreciate the blessings we enjoy as privileged members in Christ.

Consider these blessings:

a) **Hope of His calling (v 18a)**

The wealth of spiritual blessing rests in our ability to comprehend what is the hope and scope of His calling us out from darkness into light. Figuratively speaking, the blind are now made to see the hope of eternal destiny reserved for them.

b) **Riches of glory (v 18b)**

The riches of glory carry two implications for the believer. First, we experience a high quality of life in Christ eternally and second, we experience a high quality of life in our fellowship with Christians.

c) **Greatness of His power (v 19)**

The Greek term *dunamis* or the English equivalent 'dynamic' explains the greatness of God, now expressed in power. Such power of God is not in words but in action. The Christian is now privileged to receive this power to be saved and to serve.

***Thank you, Lord, for the privileges I have as a member of Your Body.
May I never take them for granted, but use them as You would want me to in my daily life.***

A prisoner who survived 14 years in a Cuban jail told how he kept his spirits up and his hope alive: "I had no window in my cell, and so I mentally constructed one on the door. I 'saw' in my mind a beautiful scene from the mountains, with water tumbling down a ravine over rocks. It became so real to me that I would visualize it without effort every time I looked at the cell door."

Ironically, some of the most hopeful books of the Bible—Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians —come out of Paul's house arrest in Rome. The letter to the Ephesians gives a hint as to what the apostle Paul saw when he thought about life beyond his place of confinement.

First, he saw the spiritual growth in the churches he left behind. This book opens with a burst of thanksgiving for the vitality of the Ephesian church (Eph. 1:15-16). Then he sought to open the eyes of their hearts to even more exalted sights: the "exceeding riches" of God's grace (2:7). When Paul cranks up the volume to express God's plan of love, not one low, mournful note sneaks in.

If you feel discouraged or question whether the Christian life is worth it, Ephesians proves to be a great tonic. It prescribes the riches in Christ available to all.

By: Philip Yancey

**Heavenly Father, thank You for the staggering good news of the riches of Your infinite grace.
Thank You for the encouragement and hope we find in Ephesians. Amen.
No one is hopeless whose hope is in God and His Word.**

OCT 14, THURSDAY

Eph 2:1-22

Salvation - Life on Higher Ground

Eph 2:8-10

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Eph 2:10

Paul begins by pointing out that we were once dead but are now alive. Death is described here as the inevitable condition leading to eternal doom. Outside Christ, the whole world stands in judgment and hopelessly faces eternal death. With Christ's intervention, Paul notes that the order is reversed and salvation becomes a reality.

Recently, as I was watching a video recording on the Asian Tsunami (26 December 2004), I was emotionally distressed by the helplessness experienced by those being swept away by the powerful currents. Despite all the technological advancement the world has achieved, nothing was available to them when they needed it most. Sin is like the tsunami waves, but in Christ, help is near. We are:

a) **Saved by grace (v 8)**

This great salvation is a gift from God. No human merits or works of righteousness may be added. Grace lifts people from the destructive waves of sin and transfers them to higher ground, where heavenly peace reigns.

b) **Not saved by works (v 9)**

Having reached the higher ground, we cannot boast about the achievement apart from Christ. It is something beyond human imagination, achievement and reach. Christ does not only show us the way to heaven but brings us into heaven.

c) **Created for good works (v 10)**

On the higher ground we are now called the New Creation. And it is expected that we do good works and live morally in order to glorify God. We must be worthy testimonies and thankful disciples of Christ.

We are not saved by our good works but are saved to do good works. Ask the Lord to help you identify some people in need. How can you use the gifts He has given you to help them?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 14, THURSDAY

Eph 2:1-22

Weight Of Sin Wears Us Down

Eph 2:8-10

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Eph 2:19

One of the key verbs repeatedly used by Paul in Ephesians is WALK. It corresponds to the Jewish law of moral conduct called Halachah which translates as 'walk'. Paul wants us to consciously walk away from evil that would destroy faith and impede maturity.

When I was travelling in South India in 1999, one of the things that caught my attention was how donkeys were used as 'beasts of burden', particularly by the laundry shop owners. Laundry is generally done in the rivers and in the mornings, we could see herds of heavily loaded donkeys (with burdens often twice their weight) making their way slowly to the river. Sometimes the donkeys would just buckle under the weight and lie down and refuse to move. They may get up again when some of the weight is removed. This is a picture of how the weight of sin wears us down. Praise God, the burden of sin has been removed for us.

This is our new position in Christ:

a) **We are fellow-citizens (v 19)**

Since our status and position in Christ have been dramatically altered to suit the character of the heavenly kingdom (without reference to being Jews or Gentiles), the title and privileges accorded require that we walk right.

b) **We are God's household (v 19)**

We are members of God's family. Paul uses the imagery of a house to further explain how each member fits not only into God's household but is also 'fabricated' into a house (v 20). We are required to walk credibly in faith and character.

c) **We are the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit (v 22)**

The presence of the Holy Spirit in us alerts us when we are confronted with sin and directs us to walk away from it.

Let us pray for strength to resist sin and live in obedience to God.

There are times late at night in North America's harsh Sonoran Desert where one can hear a faint, high-pitched howl. But you probably wouldn't suspect the source of the sound—the small yet mighty grasshopper mouse, howling at the moon to establish its territory.

This unique rodent (dubbed the "werewolf mouse") is also carnivorous. In fact, it preys on creatures few would dare mess with, such as the scorpion. But the werewolf mouse is uniquely equipped for that particular battle. It not only has a resistance to scorpion venom but can even convert the toxins into a painkiller!

There's something inspiring about the way this resilient little mouse seems custom-made to survive and even thrive in its harsh environment. As Paul explains in Ephesians 2:10, that kind of marvelous craftsmanship characterizes God's designs for His people as well. Each of us is "God's handiwork" in Jesus, uniquely equipped to contribute to His kingdom. No matter how God has gifted you, you have much to offer. As you embrace with confidence who He's made you to be, you'll be a living witness to the hope and joy of life in Him.

So, as you face whatever feels most menacing in your own life, take courage. You may feel small, but through the gifting and empowerment of the Spirit, God can use you to do mighty things.

By: Monica La Rose

Is it easy or difficult for you to see yourself as God's marvelous handiwork? Why? In what areas of your life might remembering this truth give you renewed confidence and courage?

God, thank You for the incredible way You've designed me to live with joy and purpose.

Help me to believe, and find courage in, the truth of who I am in You.

OCT 15, FRIDAY

Eph 3:1-4:16

Mystery Revealed

Eph 3:20

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Eph 3:16-17a

Paul continues to speak about the wealth of God's blessings in Jesus. The far-reaching consequence of God's amazing grace is placed in the context of a Christological mystery. A mystery is an unfathomable event or occasion which overwhelms human logic and surpasses mental capacity. God becoming a lowly human in order to save sinful people - this is a divine mystery.

In 1994, one of the local Australian dailies reported that a boy had fallen off from the fourth floor of an apartment, landed on a car roof and walked away without a broken bone or injury. Everyone who read about it admitted that the incident defied logic. Some concluded, 'It is divine intervention.'

Unless aided by the Holy Spirit, the mystery surrounding Christ's incarnation is utterly incomprehensible for anyone. We learn from the passage that:

a) **The mystery is about Christ (v 4)**

Paul defines the mystery of Christ's incarnation as the great purpose of God in Jesus, whereby God comes to live in the hearts of people. Therefore, only God-given enlightenment could reveal such truth (1:18).

b) **The mystery is the message of the church (v 10)**

The role of the church is defined in this verse. The mystery is declared to both temporal kingdoms and the authorities in the heavenly places. The church is not just a building or organization, but the body of believers. The church is strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit to carry out her mission and to grasp the fullness of the love of Christ.

Are you doing the work of declaring the mystery of Christ?

Pray that God will continue to empower you in knowledge and strength.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 15, FRIDAY

Eph 3:1-4:16

A High Calling

Eph 3:20

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Eph 4:1

Although becoming a Christian is through God's amazing grace, practicing Christianity requires proper walking (or living) and initiative on our part. When a Christian walks, figuratively speaking, there are many pairs of eyes watching. Firstly, God who is concerned with our well-being, is watching us. Secondly, the devil who is interested in our downfall, is also watching. Thirdly, non-Christians, who may want to condemn or praise our God, are looking at us. Finally, the church (fellow Christians, family members and our children who need spiritual support) is watching as well.

For Paul, the way we walk or live out our faith mirrors our character, commitment and depth of spirituality. The relatedness between our character and the credibility of our testimony is presupposed. According to this passage, our walk should be guided by the following principles:

a) Preserve unity and peace (v 2)

One of the major problems encountered by the Asian church is the denominational divide. We are splintered badly. For unity and peace to prevail we must look beyond this divide and preserve our unity in Christ.

b) Build the body of Christ (v 12)

Building is about learning to work together as a team. In teamwork, we learn to sacrifice our individual rights and give in to corporate rights. This involves making sacrifices.

c) Speak the truth in love (v 15)

To know God and love our neighbors is a Christian responsibility. In the context of Asian missions, we need to constantly review our attitudes and actions to see if we are preaching the Gospel in love.

***Reflect on your relationship with your non-Christian neighbors.
Are they seeing the Gospel of Christ in you?***

According to the family legend, two brothers, one named Billy and the other Melvin, were standing on the family's dairy farm one day when they saw an airplane doing some skywriting. The boys watched as the plane sketched out the letters "GP" overhead.

Both brothers decided that what they saw had meaning for them. One thought it meant "Go preach." The other read it as "Go plow." Later, one of the boys, Billy Graham, dedicated himself to preaching the gospel, becoming an icon of evangelism. His brother Melvin went on to faithfully run the family dairy farm for many years.

Skywriting signs aside, if God did call Billy to preach and Melvin to plow, as seems to be the case, they both honored God through their vocations. While Billy had a long preaching career, his success doesn't mean that his brother's obedience to his calling to plow was any less important.

While God does assign some to be in what we call full-time ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), that doesn't mean those in other jobs and roles aren't doing something just as important. In either case, as Paul said, "each part [should do] its work" (v. 16). That means honoring Jesus by faithfully using the gifts He's given us. When we do, whether we "go preach" or "go plow," we can make a difference for Jesus wherever we serve or work.

By: Dave Branon

***How can you use your gifts to honor God in your vocation?
How can you encourage others you know so they too can use their calling
as a way to serve Jesus?***

*Help me, God, to be used right where You put me.
Help me to see that my words, actions, and work ethic can profoundly affect others.*

OCT 16, SATURDAY

Eph 4:17-5:20

Walk away From Your Old Self

Eph 4:26-27

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Eph 5:1 -2

It is important that we see the world as God sees it in order to resist conforming to the standards of the world. A transformed life should reflect a conscious, constant and consistent walking away from the old nature. This is the key to holy living.

Some time ago in Australia, a television commercial showed ugly caterpillars falling from the top of a tall tree. At the base of the tree were beautiful flowers in bloom. Before the caterpillars could hit the ground, they were transformed into beautiful butterflies that settled on the flowers at the base of the tree. The earlier ugly sight was transformed into a garden of beauty. Caterpillars devour the tree that gives life but butterflies help pollinate and bring growth. A transformed life is about growing into Christ's likeness.

A Christlike person:

a) **Is not shrouded by darkness (4:18)**

The believer is able to consciously walk away from the old self. His/her life will not be shrouded by darkness or lack knowledge of God.

b) **Does not give the devil an opportunity (4:27)**

If we want to progress in our walk away from the old self, Paul alerts us to the five factors that would try to slow us down: lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk and bitterness.

c) **Learns what pleases God and does it (5:8)**

How we think and act determines our character. There is a strong connection between who we are, what we think and what we will do. As people of God, it is our business to do God's will.

How we think and act determines our character.

Pray that we will always be doers of God's will.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 16, SATURDAY

Eph 4:17–5:20

Walk away From Your Old Self

Eph 4:26–27

I once spoke at a secular conference for childless couples. Heartbroken over their infertility, many attendees despaired at their future. Having walked the childless path too, I tried to encourage them. “You can have a meaningful identity without becoming parents,” I said. “I believe you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and there’s new purpose for you to find.”

A woman later approached me in tears. “Thank you,” she said. “I’ve felt worthless being childless and needed to hear that I’m fearfully and wonderfully made.” I asked the woman if she was a believer in Jesus. “I walked away from God years ago,” she said. “But I need a relationship with Him again.”

Times like this remind me how profound the gospel is. Some identities, like “mother” and “father,” are hard for some to attain. Others, like those based on a career, can be lost through unemployment. But through Jesus we become God’s “dearly loved children”—an identity that can never be stolen (Eph 5:1). And then we can “walk in the way of love”—a life purpose that transcends any role or employment status (v. 2).

All human beings are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), and those who follow Jesus become children of God (John 1:12–13). Once in despair, that woman left in hope—about to find an identity and purpose bigger than this world can give.

By: Sheridan Voysey

Is there someone in despair whom you can affirm as “wonderfully made” today? With whom can you share the offer of becoming a child of God?

Father, life in all its fullness is Yours alone to give. I open my hands to accept it.

When I have to travel across time zones by air, I try various remedies to avoid jet lag. I think I’ve tried them all! On one occasion, I decided to adjust my in-flight eating to the time zone where I was heading. Instead of eating dinner with the rest of the passengers, I kept watching a movie and tried to fall asleep. The hours of elective fasting were difficult, and the breakfast that came right before we landed left much to be desired. But living “out of sorts” with those around me worked. It jolted my body clock into a new time zone.

Paul knew that if believers in Jesus were to truly reflect Him in their lives, they would need to live out of step with the world around them. They “were once darkness” but now they were to live as “children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). And what might that look like? Paul goes on to fill out the picture: “The fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth” (v. 9).

Sleeping through dinner may have seemed foolish to the people on my flight, but even as it’s midnight in the world, as believers, we’re called to live like it’s morning. This may provoke scorn and opposition, but in Jesus we can “walk in the way of love,” following the example of the One who “love[s] us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (v. 2).

By: Glenn Packiam

Where have your actions and choices lined up too closely with the world around you? What would the fruit of goodness, righteousness, and truth look like in your life?

Jesus, wake me up to the new day that has come in You. Fill me with Your power to live in a “different time zone.” Open my eyes to choose goodness, righteousness, and beauty.

OCT 17, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 18, MONDAY

Eph 5:21–6:24

Happy Homes Celebrate Marriage

Eph 6:14–18

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ Eph 5:21

We may have already realized by now that the first half of Ephesians is about faith doctrines and the second half is about practicing those doctrines. Practicing doctrines, Paul notes, involves relating with God and people purposefully. With that in mind, Paul addresses the marriage relationship. Recent statistics published in a foreign journal reveal that five in ten marriages in the West end up in divorce after the second year. In Asia, two in ten marriages encounter a similar fate. God instituted marriage and the devil wants to destroy it.

We need to be aware that in Asian homes, the onslaught continues. Breakdown of the marriage institution brings dire consequences to the affected parties. Divorce in this context is a confession of defeat and surrender to the devil. Divorce can be prevented and marriage celebrated if Christian couples view marriage in the following three ways:

a) **Marriage is like the relationship between Christ and the church (v 25)**

The church has been set apart and made holy to share an eternal relationship with Christ. Within this relationship, mutual love and mutual respect are key elements. Love here means willingness to make sacrifices.

b) **Marriage is about nourishing and cherishing (v 29)**

Nourishing and cherishing are about being the BEST to each other: being a blessing, edifying, sharing willingly and being thankful for each other.

c) **Marriage is about cleaving (v 31)**

Cleaving is about the two becoming one and each party being willing to stick with the other even under the heaviest burden. God created marriage for happiness, and cleaving is about letting marriage be that way.

Marriage is like a beehive: difficult to build but easy to destroy.

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 18, MONDAY

Eph 5:21-6:24

Each Family Is a University

Eph 6:14-18

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Eph 6:4

In this passage, Paul concerns himself with two types of relationships: parents-children and slaves-masters. There is an Indian expression, which says: 'Each family is a university'. Parents play the prominent role as professors in these universities, not as masters but mentors.

When I initiated a home (Rumah Chrestus) for underprivileged and neglected children in 2001, I noticed the children who came to us had very little appreciation or respect for their parents or family. Teaching them that 'God is our Father' was one of the most challenging tasks.

Fathers who fail to command the respect of their children will not be able to teach them about faith in God. In the Roman cultural context, children were considered to be without rights and fathers had the right to either keep or throw away new born babies. Paul redefines the relationships in a family:

a) **Children - graduate with a degree in 'Obedience and Respect' (vs 1-2)**

The course on obedience and respect towards their parents should be taught well to children in their respective family universities. Children learn obedience by watching their parents obey Christ.

b) **Parents - graduate with a degree in 'Discipline and Instruction' (v 4)**

Parents who fail to discipline and instruct their children often are a problem themselves. Proper instruction comes only through having proper knowledge and setting the right example.

c) **Family - graduate with a degree in 'Heart Service and Not Lip Service' (v 7)**

Consolidation of the family relationships is based not on mere talk but on service that finds motivation from the heart. Doing for others is synonymous with doing for Christ.

***Family members who honor God will have respect for one another.
Pray that our families will be God-fearing and God-serving.***

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Eph 6:10-24

Influenced by post-modernism, many Christians think of the world as a playground. But Paul urges us to think of the world as a spiritual battleground. We are called to defend our faith, our inheritance in God and our status as kingdom people. We need to learn how to use spiritual weapons.

A prince was going on a long journey and summoned one of his poor friends who lived by the edge of the city. He handed him a piece of paper and said, 'This will be of use to you when I am away.' The friend did not know that it was a cheque and kept it safely hidden away. On his return, the prince was shocked to see the poor friend shabbily dressed and begging for food. The prince asked him, 'Where is the piece of paper I gave you?' and the friend answered, 'I have kept it safely hidden.'

Christians often live a defeated life because they fail to recognize what they possess in Christ. Awake, therefore, and be alert to these truths:

a) **Be strong against our powerful enemy (v 10)**

Being strong involves recognizing our spiritual strength and position in Christ. At the same time, we do not underestimate the enemy.

b) **Resist our wicked enemy (v 13)**

Since the days are evil, resisting involves saying 'No' to the devil. We are to do everything at our disposal to resist being drawn into his snare.

c) **Stand firm against our crafty enemy (v 14)**

Standing firm requires that we remain loyal to Christ in our faith and actions. It is to have a strong footing in Christ.

***Victorious Christian living begins by proclaiming the victorious Christ.
Pray that your family will be vibrant in faith and living.***

Overview Of 1 Timothy

It was the apostle Paul's fourth missionary journey. While he went on to Macedonia he left Timothy, his young understudy, to take care of the Ephesian church.

This first letter of Paul to Timothy was written to help Timothy do his work more effectively in Paul's absence. Paul instructed Timothy on how to deal with false teachings and administer the affairs of the growing church through the selection and appointment of qualified church leaders. The emphasis was for Timothy to know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household (1 Tim 3:15).

The brand of false teaching Timothy had to deal with combined Gnosticism (with its dualistic belief that the body is evil and only the spirit is good), decadent Judaism (that focused on endless myths and genealogies) and false ascetism (that forbade the enjoyment of God's good gifts).

Paul had to instruct Timothy in practical matters such as dealing with different groups with different strengths, weaknesses and needs in the church to ensure its smooth running. Many apt warnings are given so that the church does not lose out through strained and wrong relationships and the mishandling of money. Many of these are issues that we face in our churches today.

We have in this epistle an invaluable manual on church administration.

OCT 19, TUESDAY

1 Ti 1:1-20

Stop People from Teaching False Doctrine

1 Ti 1:15

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer. 1 Tim 1:3

Many people like to be looked up to as Bible teachers. Leaders have to be careful about what is being taught because not everyone who teaches is competent to teach sound doctrine. There are also false teachers who do more damage than good with their teachings. Hearers should carefully test what is being taught before accepting it.

False teachers tend to major on the minor and promote controversies rather than God's word. They are not sincere in their teaching and much of what they so confidently teach is meaningless talk. They try to impress with their cleverness and those who follow after them are led astray.

God's Law is good if used properly. It is meant to turn sinners from their ways and helps them conform to the glorious Gospel of our blessed God. The false teachers will, however, use it to promote controversies and split Christians over minor and obscure points. They should be stopped. Our energies should, instead, be diverted to doing God's work with a clear conscience and sincere faith issuing from a pure heart filled with love, not bitterness.

There are two tests for any teaching. They are:

- Is it in accord with the rest of Scripture?
- What is its effect on its hearers?

***Church leaders must be vigilant.
They must guard the pulpit ministry
and watch who they invite to teach and preach in their churches.***

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 19, TUESDAY

1 Ti 1:1-20

There's Hope for Even The Worst!

1 Ti 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. 1 Tim 1:15

Many Christians in Asia come from non-Christian families and communities. Some of our loved ones, including our parents, are devout followers of other religions or are free thinkers. They tolerate our newfound faith at best or actively persecute us at worst. We may despair that they would ever come to the Lord.

Paul was once a blasphemer and violent persecutor of Christians. But he was touched and transformed by the grace, mercy, love and faith that Christ poured out on him. Christ came to save sinners and Paul claimed that he was the worst.

Christ not only turned him away from his old sinful ways but appointed him to His service as well. Paul was changed from being the 'chief of sinners' into the greatest apostle and missionary in the early church. There is no one too hard-core for Christ to change!

When the going got tough, Paul focused his eyes on God and Christ, the great King, and his strength and courage were renewed. He could go on and he urged Timothy to do likewise. We must not give up our faith, like Hymanaeus and Alexander did. Even when persecuted let us fight the good fight and hold on to Christ till the end. If Christ could save Paul, the worst of sinners, He can save anyone.

***Pray for hard-core unbelieving family members, friends and persecutors of God's children.
Ask God to give them an 'on the road to Damascus' encounter with the risen Christ and
pray that they will be saved to love and serve Him.***

Above all persons, Paul was mindful of God's love, patience and amazing grace shown to him. Before his conversion Saul, as he was then called, was the chief persecutor of Christians. In a zealous crusade he travelled from city to city to round up the Christians and put them in prison. Saul gave approval for the death of Stephen, a martyr of the early church (Acts 8:1).

However, God confronted Saul on the road to Damascus. In a dramatic way Saul, who was blinded, had his sight restored and was soundly converted to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He recognized that he was the worst of sinners. He had acted in ignorance and unbelief. When he had the supernatural encounter with the Lord Jesus, he knew that it was all of God's grace shown to him when he least deserved it. Saul was convinced that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners like him.

Like Paul, each of us has a testimony to share about God's amazing grace and love shown to us when we least deserved it. Our conversion to Christianity may not be as dramatic as Paul's. Nevertheless, we can testify of a time when we did not acknowledge the rule of the Lord Jesus over our lives until He touched us with His love. Once we were enemies of God. Now we are His servants. Our lives have never been the same since then.

What an amazing God!

It was in this context that Paul now urged Timothy to stand up to protect the purity of the gospel. Those who had departed from the faith and succumbed to heretical teaching would be severely disciplined and given up to be tormented by Satan.

***Pray for those who appear indifferent or hostile to the gospel.
God can work miracles in their hearts of stone.***

OCT 20, WEDNESDAY

1 Ti 2:1-3:13

Please God in Worship

1 Ti 2:5

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone.
1 Tim 2:1

Churches practice different worship styles at their Sunday services. Some emphasize good stirring music and songs to help their members engage emotionally with God. Others may prefer a quiet meditative liturgical approach. God is a God of variety and He welcomes His children to worship Him in different ways.

Worship is all about Jesus, not about us. We seek to please Him, our Savior who wants all men to know Him and be saved. Our worship should draw others to Him, not turn them away. We must be reverent in worship and only allow that which points people to Christ and not distract them from Him.

There are certain central elements that should be present in our church worship:

- **Prayer**
 We should pray and give thanks for everyone especially the ruling authorities so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This will facilitate the sharing of the Gospel so that all men can come to a saving knowledge of Christ. We should lift up our holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.
- **Modest Attire**
 We should dress decently and modestly. The church should not be a place for fashion parades. Women, especially, are not to be influenced by fashion fads and are not to dress to draw attention to themselves.
- **Order**
 There should be order in worship. There is to be no chit-chatting when God's word is being taught in church.

May we all honor the Lord each time we gather in His Name.

Is Christ pleased with the way we worship Him in our churches?
Do my dressing and my conduct in church glorify God?

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OCT 20, WEDNESDAY

1 Ti 2:1-3:13

Fit To Lead

1 Ti 2:5

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.
1 Tim 3:1

As long as there are groups of people, there will be leaders. These places of honor and respect have traditionally been reserved for the elderly and the wise in Asian society. We are told to choose our leaders wisely in the church lest they fall and bring Christ's name into disrepute.

Church leaders, whether they are overseers or pastors or deacons, must be persons of good character who command the respect of those inside as well as outside the church. They must manage their lives and their families well in order to qualify to lead the church. Hot-tempered, quarrelsome and violent persons who love money and dishonest gain need not apply. Integrity to live and teach God's word is a prerequisite. Leaders must also be humble and have a heart to serve others.

We are also warned not to be in a hurry to appoint leaders, especially if they are recent converts lest they become conceited. They have to be tested first before we appoint them. Their wives and children too should be worthy of respect as the leaders must manage their families well before they can take care of God's church.

Leaders of God's people must be people of godly character.

Pray for all church leaders that they will be people of integrity who can lead by example.

***Pray too for their wives and children that they will be a blessing and
a help to the leaders in their noble task of serving God's people.***

What practical steps can you take this week to encourage your leaders?

There are cogent reasons why the church needs to offer up prayers and thanksgiving, especially for civil authority (whether executive, legislative or the judicial arms of authority) set over us. No authority exists except that which is allowed to be established by God. This applies even to oppressive and harsh governments. Our God is a God of order and peace. He desires to establish peace, orderliness and tranquility so that we may lead peaceful and quiet lives. It is virtually impossible for us to lead peaceful lives when our country faces anarchy and civil strife. We will not be able to assemble freely to worship the Lord or propagate our faith without fearing for our lives.

Paul lays down guidelines for praying and teaching in the congregation. The lifting up of holy hands refers to the heart attitude of the person offering the prayer. It is an attitude of humility and purity, free of wrong motives or ill will toward others.

Women are not to draw attention to themselves by ornate or immodest dressing. Sometimes such dressing is tolerated by churches for fear of driving people away with their strict dress code. The church should not compromise on standards of decent behavior and conduct if we claim to be different from the world. The teaching of Paul on women in public ministry must be seen in its proper context. The cultural norms and values that prevailed in the days of Paul have changed tremendously. The gift of teaching and expounding the Word of God is not exclusive to men and the church needs to recognize and encourage the outworking of those gifts regardless of whether they reside in men or women.

In what ways can we glorify God in our lives and in our ministry?

OCT 21, THURSDAY

1 Ti 3:14-4:16

Godliness is Not Rules and Regulations

1 Ti 4:12

*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.
1 Tim 4:4*

Many non-believers do not want to become Christians because they perceive Christianity as a hindrance to their progress and enjoyment of life. They are put off by the dreaded long list of dos and don'ts they think every Christian must follow in his daily life. They want to be free to do what they like instead of having to submit to rules and regulations. But a godly life is not a life governed by a man-made list.

Godliness in Christ is a mystery because it is based on believing in the finished work of Christ when He came and died for us. It is not based on our own good works lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

In the latter times, people will be deceived by demons working through false teachers. They will love self above God. They will use others to get what they want. Such predators, often disguised as Bible teachers, will even be found in churches and Christian circles. They will demand that their followers do not marry or must abstain from certain foods.

Everything God has created is good and to be enjoyed with thanksgiving. The prohibitions only apply to that which harms us. We are thus free to enjoy life to its fullest in Christ. Let us give thanks to the Lord, enjoy His good gifts and live the abundant life promised to us in Christ (Jn 10:10).

Pray that we will live such joyful abundant lives that non-believers will be attracted to Christ.

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 21, THURSDAY

1 Ti 3:14-4:16

Setting An Example In Godliness

1 Ti 4:12

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Tim 4:12

The opinions of the young are not usually taken too seriously in Asian society where those 'who have eaten more salt than they who have eaten rice- hold sway. What can believers who are young in age do to earn the respect of the older people and more importantly, a hearing for the Gospel within such a culture? How can they be good ministers of Christ?

A good minister of Christ must know the word of God and live it daily in order to earn the respect of others. He has to be taught and trained in the application of God's word in all areas of life. He has to be able to teach the word effectively to others.

That was quite a tall order, especially for a young person like Timothy, but he would not be alone. God will give special ability through His Holy Spirit to enable His children to live up to His high calling.

The danger is to be distracted by godless myths and old wives' tales or idle talk that brings no benefit. The antidote is to cultivate godliness in both speech and conduct. Timothy was not to be cowed by the enormity of his assigned task but to persevere and be diligent in its execution. Time will prove the skeptics wrong and they will be won over if we persevere and make progress in living out the word of God.

***Godliness is living for God and sharing His word.
Pray for all young Christians especially those who teach God's word,
that they will set good examples for others to follow.***

There are fundamental doctrines in the Christian faith that cannot be compromised. These truths include the fact that Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary and that His birth was witnessed by the angels. Jesus preached the good news of salvation and many believed in Him and were saved. He was the Son of God. Finally, He was crucified, died and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven in glory.

But Paul warns us here that in the last days, some will give up their faith and follow deceiving spirits that lead them astray. These deceiving spirits are demonic. The false teachers come up with man-made rules that forbid marrying and abstention from certain foods. This is contrary to God's Word for everything created by God is good and is to be received with thanksgiving.

False teaching often originates from charismatic leaders who are able to persuade their followers to do or abstain from doing certain things that have the semblance of making their adherents pure and holy. False teaching can take many forms or disguises but the end result is disillusionment, death and destruction. Any teaching that does not align itself with the Word of God must be rejected. Only obedience to God's Word can truly set us free and give us the abundant life.

The antidote to false teaching is vigilance and knowledge of the Word of God.

OCT 22, FRIDAY

1 Ti 5:1-6:2

The Right Way to Care for Others

1 Ti 5:17

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tim 5:8

A common fear among many Asian parents is that once their children become Christians, they would stop being filial to them and not care for them in their old age. It is like losing a son or daughter to the church. This fear arises out of the many bad examples they have seen or heard from their friends who have 'lost' their children. However, the truth is that becoming a Christian should make you a better son or daughter than before your conversion.

There is no room for individualism in God's family. Those who live selfishly slander the Name of God. We are admonished to care for others, especially our own relatives (v 8). This is completely in tune with our traditional Asian values of looking after our extended family members and the needy in our midst.

Loving others practically does not mean just giving handouts indiscriminately because this will foster indolence, causing more damage in the long run. We help those who are really in need by providing for them; we encourage the rest to work to support not only themselves but others as well. This will ensure that relationships run smoothly, family members do not harbor resentment against the church and the Name of Christ is upheld. Purity and respect for each other in relationships are very important to this end.

***Pray that we will treat one another, our relatives and friends,
with love and respect so that Christ's Name is honored.***

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OCT 22, FRIDAY

1 Ti 5:1-6:2

Widows, Elders & Workers

1 Ti 5:17

Paul gives practical advice on how the members of Christ's body should conduct their relationships with one another and how the church should care for their widows and elders. All relationships among the members of the body of Christ must be based upon mutual respect, love and absolute purity. We are all members of God's family.

The Bible is very mindful of the special position and needs of widows. It is the responsibility of their children or relatives to take care of their needs. Where there is no other source of help, the church must step in. Widows are encouraged to abound in good deeds and warned against gossiping and idling. Young widows are encouraged to remarry, raise a family and manage their homes. In this way, no room is given to the devil to tempt or trip them.

Elders who are responsible for the affairs of the church are to receive double honor, particularly those involved in preaching and teaching. If anyone has a complaint against an elder, it is to be supported by two or three witnesses. If proven to be true, they should be rebuked and disciplined.

Paul reminds us that God's workers must be remunerated fairly. A laborer deserves his wages. It is never an excuse for the body of Christ to remunerate its full-time workers with minimum wages on the grounds that they are serving God. We must be wary of applying double standards. God's workers have needs like everyone else and are not immune to inflation. The church can show their appreciation by giving love gifts on special occasions, sharing necessities and provisions, sponsoring their children's education and making adequate financial provision upon their retirement from service.

Do something this week to encourage either a widow, elder or full-time worker.

A woman had been maligned and misrepresented by an envious co-worker. She was frustrated because her attempts to confront her in private had only made matters worse. So she decided to swallow her pride and let the matter go. She said, "I'm glad the Lord knows the true situation." She expressed a profound truth that both warns and comforts.

Paul pointed out that nothing can be concealed forever (1 Tim 5:24-25). This serves as a solemn warning. For example, a news report told about a highly respected person who was arrested for crimes he had been secretly committing for years.

Yet the fact that nothing can be hidden can also be a great consolation. I have known people who never held a position of honor, nor were they recognized for their service. After they died, however, I learned that in their own quiet way they had touched many lives with their kind words and helpful deeds. Their good works could not remain hidden.

We can hide nothing from God—that's a solemn warning! But it's also a great comfort, for our heavenly Father knows about every encouraging smile, every kind word, and every loving deed done in Jesus' name. And someday He will reward us.

By: Herbert Vander Lugt

***Be strong and to the will of God be true, For though your book of life be sealed,
God knows what lies ahead awaiting you, He knows when it should be revealed. —Anon.***

Neither vice nor virtue can remain a secret forever.

OCT 23, SATURDAY

1 Ti 6:3-21

The Money Trap

1 Ti 6:6

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Tim 6:10

Money, money, money! Asian society, in particular, envies and looks up to the rich. While its usefulness cannot be denied, there is a dark side to money. If wrongly handled, it can lead us away from God and bring much grief into our lives. We are warned against using religion for financial gain which is all too common in this money-mad world. Those who do so twist God's truth into false doctrines that promote controversies and strife while enriching themselves. Beware of these conceited preachers who are only after your money to finance their luxurious lifestyles.

The antidote to greed is godliness with contentment. Our basic needs can be easily met but if we are not content with that and want more, we open ourselves to temptation. Many have backslidden and pierced themselves with multiple griefs because of their eagerness to accumulate more money. We cannot take any of it with us when we die, so money should be used to bless others instead of being hoarded.

We can make money our master or our servant. If money is our master, then God will be displaced from His throne in our lives and we will suffer the consequences of our foolish choice. We need to be delivered from greed in our lives before we can deal openly and generously with others to promote peace instead of strife.

Pray that we will not be greedy but be grateful for all that God has given to us.

P.R.A.Y

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OCT 23, SATURDAY

1 Ti 6:3-21

Trading Treasures for Ashes

1 Ti 6:6

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment ...In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 1 Tim 6:17, 19

Nearly 300,000 people died and thousands were displaced in the devastating tsunami on December 26, 2004. The tragic event is a grim but timely reminder to us not to put our hope in wealth or the things of this world. Our real hope should be in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

There are things that last for eternity and things that do not. We, like Timothy, are urged to hold on to the things that last: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. There are also things like uncertain wealth and earthly treasures that are not meant to be held tightly but to be released to bless others. In doing so, we shall lay up treasure for the coming age and truly live the life that is life indeed.

Unfortunately, many of us get it wrong by valuing things the other way round. We eagerly pursue the tangible and temporal and sacrifice the unseen and spiritual because we want immediate gratification. We thus shortchange ourselves of that which God wants to bless us with most richly. We end up not being able to enjoy His rich gifts as well as miss out on what He has in store for us beyond this brief life on earth.

There are certain things to hold on to and other things to give away so that we can be blessed and be a blessing to others. Make your own lists of what to hold on to and what to give away.

In the workplace, the conduct and attitude of a Christian employee must be above reproach. He should accord full respect to his employer regardless of whether he is a believer or not so that God's name will be honored and respected. In practical terms, it means honest hard work, integrity, loyalty and being able to work alongside others as a team. On the other hand, if the employer is also a believer, the Christian employee should not take advantage of the fact that they all belong to God's family and be over-familiar or lackadaisical. In fact, he is to serve better as the beneficiary of his service is a fellow believer.

Timothy is again warned against false teachers who stir up controversies and arguments with the motive of financial gain. In contrast, true gain is contentment brought about by godly conduct and behavior. If our physical needs for food, shelter and clothing are met, we should be contented. How true it is that we brought nothing into this world and we will bring nothing with us when life ends. People who aspire to get rich face all sorts of temptations that can destroy them. Money is needed and essential in the conduct of our daily lives but the love and overwhelming desire to get rich can cause even believers to abandon their faith. One of the greatest enemies of the Christian faith is materialism.

You cannot love both God and money; either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other (cf. Luke 16:13).

Count your blessings, name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

OCT 24, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Titus 1 - 3

We know very little about Titus. Just that he was a Greek by birth and that he had been with Paul as early as the time when Barnabas went to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch (Gal 2:1). Over time, Titus earned Paul's trust and represented him in the matter of the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:16-24).

Paul also called on Titus to deliver his 'corrective' letter to the Corinthians. Hence, it was no surprise that Paul left him in Crete to deal with the false teachers there and to strengthen, correct and stabilize the churches.

Crete is an island in the Mediterranean, situated south of Greece and Asia Minor on a north-south line bisecting the Aegean Sea. The Cretans had a nasty reputation attributed to them by a quote from the poet Epimenides (1:12). Paul, however, applies the quote not to all Cretans but specifically to the false teachers present in the Cretan church.

Paul left clear instructions about the careful selection and appointment of church leaders (1:5-9), about the damaging effects of false teaching (1:10-16), and especially about working out Christian teaching and ethics in the church (1:5-6), in the home (2:1-15) and in the world (3:1-11).

I have found John Stott's commentary in the BST series and Philip Towner's commentary in the IVP NT Commentary series, particularly helpful.

OCT 25, MONDAY

Tit 1:1–2:15

Our Public and Private Personae

Tit 2:11–14

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5

If we are honest, we will admit that basic character flaws, besetting sins and addictions are still very much part and parcel of our lives. Fears and anxieties continue to trouble us. Complete faith and trust in God elude us. Our private personae very often differ from our public personae. Yet the elders whom Titus was to appoint in Crete had to be blameless! This point is repeatedly stressed (6a, 7a). Who can thus, qualify?

However, the Greek word used, *anekletos* does not mean flawless or faultless. Rather it means 'without blame', or 'unaccused'. That is, elders must be people of 'unquestioned integrity'. Their lives are to be such that they leave no reason for people to accuse them of any wrongdoings. In particular, elders need to be blameless in their marriage and family life. This is one area where their private life at home must match public expectations. If elders cannot manage their families, how can they manage God's family? Further, they are to be blameless in their character and conduct. Again, private and public personae must match. Finally, in view of the need to counter false teachers, elders must be blameless in their doctrinal beliefs. They must have the gift of teaching to encourage believers and to refute false teaching. Calvin clearly understood this dual role of pastors. He wrote: 'A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.'

In contrast, the false teachers were rebellious people. Their character matched the poet Epimenides's description of Cretans as liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons. Most destructive, however, was their false teachings which were strongly denounced.

The glory, honor and holiness of God and the purity of the church in terms of character and teaching cannot be compromised. Under the constant threat of false teachers and their teaching, Paul's strategy was to increase the number of true teachers. We will know them by their character and true teaching, which are in line with apostolic doctrine.

***Sound teaching and a blameless life are inseparable.
Let us resolve to put godly, blameless elders in our churches!***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 25, MONDAY

Tit 1:1–2:15

Sound Lives and Doctrines

Tit 2:11–14

You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine. Titus 2:1

There should be no dichotomy between theology and ethics, between what we believe and the way we behave or live our lives. Hence reading and studying the Bible ought to lead to change and transformed lives. The trouble is that our knowledge grows at the speed of a jet plane, while our lives change at the pace of the bullock cart.

To prevent doctrine and duty from becoming disconnected, Paul asked Titus to give detailed duties and responsibilities to various groups in the church.

Men and women in a particular age group have different temptations, opportunities and failings from those in another age group. The older men may have the tendency to be grumpy, bossy and self-centered. Paul urged them to show the character appropriate to their senior status which would make them worthy of respect. In particular, they should show soundness or maturity, especially in the areas of faith, love and endurance.

The weakness of older women, freed from the responsibilities of caring for their families, is to misuse their tongues, for example, to slander others. Instead of indulging in unwholesome activities, they should actively seek out younger women and mentor them to be good wives and mothers.

Young men are urged, above all, to have self-control. In these days of easy access to internet pornography and increasing promiscuity, young men need to develop self-discipline to be pure before marriage and to be faithful after. In particular, Titus being a young man himself, is to set the young men an example in everything (v 6b).

The last group addressed, the slaves, are the most marginalized group. They have no rights. They can be forced to serve, but Paul urges them to serve willingly from the heart. In this way teaching about God their Savior may be attractive to their masters. For the same reason, whether we are young or old, slave or free, we must make sure that nothing prevents us from living upright lives that will impact others for eternity.

May the people around us see the soundness of our lives as well as our beliefs.

Titus may not have been under attack by false teachers within the church but he was nevertheless ministering in a hostile environment. Paul expected Titus to guard against both the Judaizers and pagans. Paul agreed with the general assessment that Cretans were con artists. It would be difficult to know when they were telling the truth and safest to assume that they were not. Planting the gospel of truth in such soil required careful tending! Titus needed to be certain of his actions, his decisions, and his teaching.

False teachers from the circumcision group taught that the Gentiles had to obey all the Jewish laws, rules and rituals before they could become Christians. Paul, however, identified this brand of false teachers as rebels, idle talkers and deceivers. Compare that with Paul's list of qualifications for Cretan church leaders in 1:7-8. What they taught was not the trustworthy message of the gospel (v 9) but their own ideas. Their goal was not to glorify the Lord and build His church, but to make money. False teachers were to be sharply rebuked that they might repent and turn to sound doctrine and true faith.

Whatever our roles are in the local church, we are bound to encounter someone whose teaching or ideas contradict the Scriptures. If the teaching proves to be unscriptural, the church should prohibit that person from teaching until the matter is dealt with (v 13). Our soul becomes a filter through which we perceive goodness or evil (v 15). Whatever you fill your mind with will affect the way you think and act.

Turn your thoughts to God and His Word, and you will discover more and more goodness even in this evil world.

OCT 26, TUESDAY

Tit 3:1-15

Christians in the World

Tit 3:5

Remind the people ... Titus 3:1

Remind. This is one of Paul's favorite methods of encouragement. In Philippians 3:1 we read, 'It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.' Most of the time we already know what we ought to do. What we need are constant reminders.

The Cretans had been under Roman rule since 67 BC and had continuously tried to throw off the Roman yoke. It was not easy for them to submit and to pray for their rulers and authorities. Many Asian Christians find it equally difficult to submit to their totalitarian and unjust governments. A radical change in mindset and attitude is required. True repentance is costly.

However, as Christians, we do not give the state unconditional allegiance. If our duty to God clashes with our duty to the state, then our loyalty to God must come first. Nonetheless, the state's authority has been delegated by God (Rom 13) and it is thus, the Christians' duty to submit to the state.

Paul further addressed the way Christians ought to relate to people in society at large. We are not to slander and not to be quarrelsome. We are to be considerate and show true humility.

The logic behind how we should conduct ourselves in the world is clear. As John Stott points out in his commentary: 'Remind them to be conscientious and considerate citizens, because (Greek: gar) we were ourselves once anti-social, but He (God) saved and changed us.' Our experience of God's salvation, Paul reminded Titus, gave us the incentive and encouragement to commend others to be socially involved as well. This account of salvation is recounted in verses 4-7.

Finally, Paul concludes the letter with a list of things for Titus to do. Titus was to avoid profitless controversies and pointless theological arguments. He was to discipline difficult divisive people and if necessary, after giving appropriate warnings, to excommunicate them. Christians in general should be dedicated to good works. In the final analysis, unlike the Cretans depicted by Epimenides, the Cretan Christians are urged to live productive lives.

Are we leading productive lives for God? What changes do we need to make?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 26, TUESDAY

Tit 3:1-15

Obey the Government

Tit 3:5

Paul discussed Christian behavior in the context of government and society. He reminded the Christians that they once shared the same lostness that marked the lives of those around them. But Christ came to earth to provide grace and mercy, salvation and the Holy Spirit. He took those who were unable to save themselves and made them heirs according to the hope of eternal life (v 7). As the believers awaited the return of Christ and His government (2:13), they had to live under worldly authorities. Paul explained how believers in Crete could best do that - by subjecting themselves to government rulers and authorities and by obeying civil laws.

The quality of our earthly citizenship reflects the confidence we have in our heavenly citizenship. Because we are citizens of the eternal kingdom, we can live with hope and serve people in the earthly kingdom. However, we should never allow the government to force us to disobey God. If we disobey the government, it should be in order to follow our higher loyalty to God.

Martin Luther says, 'Titus is a short epistle, but it contains such a quintessence of Christian doctrine, and is composed in such a masterly manner, that it contains all that is needful for Christian knowledge and life.' We were all born into sin that leads to a certain death (v 3). Because of His mercy (v 4), God saved us (v 5). Jesus took the punishment we deserved and justified us before God (v 7). Christ offers us the opportunity to be born into His spiritual family. If we come to God by faith, we inherit eternal life through Christ.

The Lord saves His people out of clear, unmixed, undiluted mercy and grace, and for no other reason. (C. H. Spurgeon)

As Titus proceeded with the task of planting and nurturing the church, Paul reminded him that he would encounter resistance. The aging apostle Paul summarized the key points of the faith that Titus was to communicate. Titus must lead in such a way that the truth should not be compromised by arguments, curious teachings or conflicts over power. Some people in the church would not listen and follow even when they were patiently and repeatedly corrected. These people would lead others astray and cause divisions in the church. Titus was not to tolerate their behavior. He would have to put those people out of the church. Paul ended his letter with several personal notes. He was not entirely finished with his instructions for Titus's work, but Paul had some duties he wanted Titus to do for him.

Paul emphasized 'good works'. While good works cannot save us or even increase God's love for us, they are a true indication of our faith and love for Christ. Paul did not make this optional. Service to others is a requirement. Paul also warned Titus to avoid the false teachers' debates and petty quarrels. Those who refused to be corrected should be put outside the fellowship. A local church cannot modify its doctrine for every new idea or to accommodate every person's viewpoint. A church cannot get to the important work of evangelism and service to others if the theological base is shaky or if the church is embroiled in theological controversy. This is one of Paul's last letters and marks the end of his life and ministry.

For practical guidelines on church leadership and problem solving, carefully study the principles found in this letter.

Overview Of 2 Timothy 1 - 4

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was again a prisoner in Rome, in chains for preaching the Gospel (2:9). A number of his co-workers had deserted him in fear and he knew his martyrdom was near.

Paul wrote his last letter to his dear son in the faith and missionary partner, Timothy, who was pastoring the church in Ephesus. Often considered his last will and testament, 2 Timothy is more personal than 1 Timothy as Paul pours out what is closest to his heart to his friend. He longed to see Timothy one last time. 'Come', he says, 'before winter. And please bring my cloak and my books' (4:13). A prisoner he might have been but Paul meant to keep learning, to keep going till the very end!

The greater part of this letter concerns Paul's charge to Timothy. Paul had finished the race and was ready to pass on the baton to Timothy. His protege, however, was of a timid nature, wary of facing challenges. Paul saw beyond that to his genuine faith, trustworthiness and his untapped potential. Though anxious about placing the heavy responsibility of carrying on his work on young Timothy's shoulders, Paul knew he had no one like him (Phil 2:20).

So, Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful and urged him to guard and preach the Gospel in the face of opposition from false teachers. He did not leave Timothy a lot of methods and techniques to follow but a role model - that of himself. Paul had fought the good fight and won.

Like Timothy, let us look to Paul's example, take to heart his teaching, his good counsel and his words of encouragement as we continue in our Christian race.

OCT 27, WEDNESDAY

2 Ti 1:1-18

Be Not Ashamed

2 Ti 1:12

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 2 Tim 1:8

According to sources that monitor the persecution of Christians worldwide, more Christians were martyred for their faith in the last century than in all the centuries combined. In some Asian countries, persecution also takes the form of forced conversion to another religion.

All who love the Lord will face persecution in one form or another. How we respond is what matters. Paul's message is clear - do not be ashamed, rather be prepared to suffer (v 8). Have we sometimes been ashamed of the simple Gospel and the crucified Christ? Have we equated health, wealth and success with God's favor, and suffering with shame?

Timothy, Paul's timid young protege, must have felt anxious and afraid when Paul was imprisoned. Was the Gospel worth the suffering? Paul's reply was an unashamed 'Yes!' He was a prisoner of the Lord, not Caesar (v 8). He was on death row for preaching a Gospel that gave LIFE (vs 9-10) and above all, he knew that his God was absolutely trustworthy (v 12). Are we like Paul, courageous in our convictions? Or are we like Timothy, in need of the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome our fears and testify boldly to the Gospel?

Onesiphorus is a fine example of one who fearlessly and unashamedly stood by a believer in prison and ministered to him. May we be like him.

***Pray for persecuted Christians, especially in North Korea, Laos, China, Indonesia and Pakistan, that God will strengthen and encourage them as they stand firm in their faith.
Pray also for ourselves that we will not be ashamed to confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior when persecution comes.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 27, WEDNESDAY

2 Ti 1:1-18

Spurred On by Encouragement

2 Ti 1:12

Paul is full of thanksgiving to God as he remembers Timothy. As Timothy's father in the faith, Paul makes it a point to pray for him regularly. Distance separates them and Paul longs to see Timothy again so that his joy may be complete. There are different ways of encouraging young believers to continue in their faith. They can be nurtured in God's Word and given guidance and counsel along the way. Paul keeps in touch with the young believers and upholds them in prayer. Helping a young believer to grow in spiritual maturity is as important as leading the person to the Lord.

Timothy had the privilege of a godly upbringing through his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. It is indeed a joy and privilege to be brought up in a Christian home where godly influence and values are passed on from one generation to the other. For many of us who are first generation Christians, the onus is on us to establish godly values in our homes. Our children and young people are also looking to us as role models. How do we fare in this respect? The spiritual legacy we leave behind far outweighs the material legacy we pass on to the next generation.

Nevertheless, each generation has to make its own decision to follow the Lord Jesus. Paul reminds Timothy that he has a spiritual gift and that God's endowments are to make him strong, loving and self-controlled. Timothy is reminded to fan into flame the gift God had imparted to him when Paul laid his hands on him. God endows us with gifts that are meant to bless others. We need to discover our spiritual gifts and use them to edify the body of Christ.

Encourage and pray specifically for one fellow believer in the Lord today.

Paul exhorts Timothy not to be ashamed to bear witness for the Lord. Neither is he to be ashamed of Paul who is imprisoned for the sake of the gospel. The gospel has brought salvation and a life of holiness solely by the grace and will of God. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, has destroyed death and given us eternal life. Paul is convicted that God appointed him to be the messenger, apostle and teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He knows the One in whom he has placed his confidence and he is certain that the work God has entrusted him to do is safe in His hands until the day of His return.

Down the centuries to the present day, countless Christians have been persecuted for believing in Jesus Christ. The Lord Himself was rejected and persecuted, and His disciples will not be spared. This has not hindered the spread of the gospel or cowed believers. On the contrary, the church of Jesus Christ has grown and multiplied on account of persecution and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. Persecution purifies and strengthens the Church and marks out those who belong to Jesus.

Paul reminds Timothy to guard the sound teaching that he had received from Paul, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Paul remembers with gratitude the faithfulness of Onesiphorus' household who encouraged, helped and refreshed him, in contrast to Phygelus and Hermogenes who deserted Paul as they were ashamed of associating with him, a prisoner. The unsung heroes of the faith are those who suffer persecution on account of following the Lord Jesus. Remember the persecuted brethren in prayer and material support.

Identify with fellow believers who are suffering for the sake of the gospel by praying for them today.

OCT 28, THURSDAY

2 Ti 2:1-3:9

Be Approved by God

2 Ti 2:2

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Ti 2:15

Asians have become extremely brand conscious. For the rich and famous, nothing less than a Versace, Jimmy Choo, Luis Vuitton and the like will do, though for some of us Malaysians, the 'Superbrands' seal will do just as well! But what does it mean to have God's seal of approval?

Paul wanted God's seal of approval upon Timothy. He had to stand out as the approved workman amidst the false, by the truth he taught (vs 8-13) and the way he lived (vs 3-6, 20-24). Truth and Character - they have to go together because good people who teach bad doctrine endanger the church, and without character, even great exponents of the truth lack credibility.

In Ephesus, false teachers, probably inspired by the Gnostics (who considered the body as evil), claimed there was no future bodily resurrection of the dead. Their ungodly argumentative spirit further divided the church. Paul's plea to Timothy is twofold: handle God's truth with care and correct your opponents in love.

God's approved workman has a heart that is open and eager to find out what the Scriptures actually say (Acts 17:11). We should never twist God's word to support our views or our lifestyle. Nor should we squabble with those in error but gently instruct them, for the goal is to bring them to repentance and truth (v 25). Clearly, God's approval rests on the godly workman who handles God's word correctly and imparts the truth with grace.

How successful have we been in speaking the truth in love to someone holding on to a false teaching?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 28, THURSDAY

2 Ti 2:1-3:9

Be Aware of Terrible Times

2 Ti 2:2

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 Tim 3:1

Many Christians see the deadly Asian Tsunami of 2004 as another sign that we are living in the terrible last days. To the early Christians 'the last days' meant their own time because they expected the soon return of Jesus Christ.

Our newspapers remind us daily that we are surely living in terrible times. Paul, however, was more concerned about the deception within the church. People appear to be godly but they neither know God nor His transforming power in their lives. Lovers of self rather than lovers of God, they behave as badly as they please (vs 2-4). Indeed, terrible times will come when unbelieving persons profess the faith but deny its power (Matt 23:27-28, Titus 1:16).

Deception, manipulation, novelties, great promises - all tactics still used by people who prey on the most vulnerable to gain followers for their false religion (v 6). It is sad but true that weak and insecure women are easily taken in by these smooth talkers 'always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth' (v 7). Could this be a fair comment on people today too, who go from meeting to meeting, learning from all kinds of preachers but never coming to conviction or commitment?

Paul, in effect, was warning Timothy of a powerless and permissive form of 'Christianity' that will deceive many people. Only an unshakeable knowledge of God's truth and obedience to Him can keep us from going astray in these terrible times.

If we have clear evidence of wrongdoing or deception in the church, would we do something about it?

The apostle Paul urges Timothy to remain strong in the Lord, just as Paul had faithfully taught Timothy the Word of God. Timothy had the responsibility to teach others who will in turn pass on the teachings. It is vital for us to invest time and energy to teach the Word of God faithfully to our generation. They, in turn, have the responsibility to instruct the next generation. This process is perpetuated to safeguard the purity of the gospel.

Timothy is reminded that to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, he needs to be single-minded. Three analogies are given. **Like a soldier**, he has to concentrate on military training and not get entangled in civilian affairs. **Like an athlete**, he has to train diligently, run the race and compete according to the rules to win. Finally, **like a farmer**, he has to work hard to till the land in order to enjoy the fruits of his labour.

The fundamental belief of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. As Paul and the early disciples preached about the resurrection of Jesus, they were ridiculed and imprisoned. But God's Word cannot be fettered. Through their endurance and suffering, many people came to know Jesus Christ. To die in Jesus means that we shall also live with Him. If we endure hardship on account of our faith, God will honor us by allowing us to reign with Him. If we deny Jesus, He will also deny us. However, if we are faithless, He will remain faithful because that is the essence of God's character. May these truths comfort those who suffer for the sake of the gospel.

***In what ways are you distracted from following Jesus?
Confess this before the Lord and ask Him for help.***

OCT 29, FRIDAY

2 Ti 3:10-4:8

Be a Role Model

2 Ti 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. 2 Ti 4:7

When Brother Yun, the Heavenly Man, came to Malaysia, thousands flocked to see the man whose faith in Christ had triumphed in the midst of cruel persecution. I believe the people who overflowed Brother Yun's meetings were actually longing to see a role model, a Christian who had walked the talk, who had done heroic things in an age where heroes are found mainly in comic books.

Paul was a hero, a role model who could boldly say, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). In his final charge to Timothy, we see why we should emulate him:

- He accepted persecution and suffering as part of the godly Christian life (vs 10-11).
- He recognized all Scripture as the God breathed, life-changing word of God (vs 16-17).
- He believed in proclaiming the Gospel with great urgency, in view of Jesus returning as Judge, and the growing fascination in myths, like The Da Vinci Code (vs 1-4).

If we were to write our own epitaphs, what would we say? For Paul, the most fitting epitaph would certainly be his own words: I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. The persecutor turned preacher had fulfilled the mission that began on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). Now, as Paul looks forward to his heavenly reward, he throws us a challenge to follow his example (v 8b).

Encourage the young people in your church to follow the example of great heroes of the faith, rather than movie stars and singing idols!

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 29, FRIDAY

2 Ti 3:10-4:8

Paul's Charge To Timothy

2 Ti 4:7-8

Paul was a shining example and role model for Timothy. Timothy was well acquainted with Paul's teaching, conduct, faith, long suffering and persecutions in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.

We are reminded that Christians who follow the Lord Jesus should expect to be persecuted. Suffering must be on account of our faith in the Lord Jesus and not because of our own sinful conduct or foolishness.

The warning here is that imposters and deceivers will intensify their deception in the last days. Timothy is exhorted to remain steadfast in the faith and to hold on to what he had been taught as a child by those godly teachers who made known the Holy Scriptures to him without compromise. The teaching of God's Word releases faith and salvation. The Word of God is precious because it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is useful for teaching the faith and correcting error, redirecting the course of a man's life and training him in right living so that the man of God will be competent for every good work. There is no short cut to spiritual maturity.

Knowledge of God's Word comes through diligent study, careful and systematic instruction by competent teachers and investment of time and resources. A spiritual diet based solely on Sunday School lessons and the Sunday sermon is manifestly inadequate. Yet many Christians get by on such a paltry diet and remain malnourished throughout their Christian lives. Many of us are prepared to invest time and resources on other pursuits but not the study of God's Word. It is no wonder that the church is generally weak, lacking in discernment and receptive to all kinds of teaching not founded on the Word of God.

What steps can you take to study the Word of God more seriously?

Paul continues to charge Timothy to be prepared to preach the Word of God faithfully at all times. A faithful preacher of God's Word should not be afraid to correct, rebuke and encourage where necessary. However, he should exercise much patience when doing so.

The norm today is not bold, uncompromising preaching from God's Word but rather weak, diluted preaching that seeks to entertain and please the hearers. Preaching no longer confronts man with the problem of sin and his response to the cross of Jesus Christ but rather, seeks to soft peddle sin and offer an easy discipleship. In our gospel messages, we offer a God who heals all our diseases, eases our sorrows, prospers our finances and prepares a place in heaven for us when we die. We sidetrack the issue of sin, repentance and the cross of Jesus. As a result, many Christians have shallow faith. At times, it is difficult to distinguish the church from the world.

There is a clear warning of Scriptures that in the last days, people will reject the truth and rely on teachers who will teach them what they want to hear. Sermons will be tailored to suit the hearers and thereby lose its credibility and cutting edge. Timothy is exhorted not to follow the easy option but to be level-headed, endure hardship and do the work of an evangelist.

Paul had served his Lord and Master ever so faithfully so that he could affirm with confidence that he had fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith. The Master will reward him and other faithful servants with the crown of righteousness.

***Are you fighting the good fight of faith daily?
How prepared are you to give an account of your faith in Jesus Christ?***

OCT 30, SATURDAY

2 Ti 4:9-22

Be a Real Winner

2 Ti 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 2 Tim 4:18

Reality TV shows are here to stay, judging from the number of people who passionately follow every episode. Obviously, people enjoy watching ordinary people in extraordinary situations. It was reported that Malaysia's own reality show *Explorace* had more than 3.4 million viewers watching the teams' every move as they raced to complete their tasks.

The real reality race, however, is the one that we are in - the race that we are exhorted to run with perseverance, our eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb 12:1-3).

Paul had finished the race. But his finishing line was in prison. If we go by the standards of this world, Paul was a loser. Here he was, in a dark dungeon, lonely, cold, deserted and betrayed - a prisoner facing certain death. But didn't Paul once claim, 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor 12:10)? And now he proves it by putting his whole confidence in God and drawing upon His strength to see him through his hour of trial. In God's eyes Paul was a winner (v 8)!

The reality is that we are running an endurance race, strewn with obstacles. The temptation to quit and take it easy, like Demas, is great (v 10). Thankfully, wrong turns along the way do not disqualify us if we turn around as Mark did (v 11; Acts 15:38). And it is not the many tasks we accomplish nor the circumstances in which our life ends that get us into the heavenly kingdom. It is our steadfast faith in the Lord.

How are you faring in the real race of life?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

OCT 30, SATURDAY

2 Ti 4:9-22

Be a Real Winner

2 Ti 4:18

In his ministry as an apostle, evangelist, church planter and teacher of God's Word, different individuals had impacted Paul's life in a negative or positive manner. Paul was very down-to-earth and people-oriented. He deeply appreciated the help and encouragement of fellow believers in his ministry and remembered each of them by name. Doing God's work involves teamwork, partnership and cooperation.

Different people have played crucial parts in our spiritual journey with God – introducing us to Jesus Christ, teaching us God's Word, nurturing, praying, encouraging and supporting us. God brought them into our lives to enrich and strengthen us so that we may, in turn, do the same for others.

Special mention is made of John Mark and Alexander the metalworker. Mark had since redeemed himself after Paul had earlier found him to be undependable. A dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning the suitability of Mark as a worker had resulted in each going their own way (Acts 15:38). Paul now specifically requested for Mark who had proven useful in ministry'. We should not be too eager to write off people who disappoint us as they may yet prove their worth if given a second chance. On the other hand, Paul warned Timothy about Alexander the metalworker who opposed the message of the gospel. We, too, need to be on our guard against potential troublemakers.

Paul had been brought to court once to present his defense. He had no advocate or supporting witnesses. All had deserted him out of fear of associating with him and being implicated and charged with him. Paul freely forgave these people. However, he was quick to testify that the Lord was faithful throughout and had stood by him and delivered him.

Give thanks to God for those who have played a part in your spiritual growth.

After being diagnosed with terminal cancer, 47-year-old Randy Pausch returned to Carnegie Mellon University to deliver a final lecture to colleagues, students, and friends. The professor of computer science thought that perhaps 150 people might show up. Instead, the 400-seat auditorium was packed. For an hour, Randy opened his heart to them in a humorous, insightful, and moving farewell that was focused more on living than dying. Within weeks, the videotaped lecture had been seen by millions on the Internet and later became the seed of a bestselling book. Those facing death often have an unusually clear perspective on what is truly important in life.

The apostle Paul's last farewell has inspired countless followers of Christ through the centuries. "The time of my departure is at hand," wrote Paul. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:6-7). Paul's instruction to Timothy spans the ages to challenge us as well. The letter begins and ends with God's grace (1:2; 4:22) and in between is a celebration of the unceasing faithfulness of God.

A message from the dying can give purpose to the living. Paul's triumphant finale, "To Him be glory forever and ever" (4:18), is a message we can all live by.

By: David C. McCasland

***Do we live our lives for what will last, Or for what will fade away?
Are we striving for the world's praise, Or for Christ's "well done" one day? —Sper
If we are ready to die, we are ready to live.***

OCT 31, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 Peter 1-5

The recipients of this letter of Peter were mainly Gentile believers scattered throughout Asia Minor. They were suffering persecution. Since many of them were new believers, Peter was especially concerned that they conducted themselves in a manner glorifying to God in the face of anti-Christian hostility. He called them to personal holiness, to have mutual love for one another, to grow in their salvation, to practice humility in the church and to resist persecution.

Peter's exhortation to all believers to be good testimonies for Christ in a non-Christian society touches on matters of good deeds, good citizenship, submission and relationships. These are especially relevant for Asian Christians who are mostly a minority in largely non-Christian societies. He appealed to the elders to be good and willing shepherds of God's flock (5:1-4).

Peter was aware of the fact that although they were innocent they were going through suffering. This had caused believers to question their faith. He urged them to follow the example of Christ and 'continue to do good' (4:19). In closing, he encouraged them by assuring them that their suffering would end and the God of grace would restore, strengthen and call each believer into eternal glory in Christ. May this assurance be ours too as we hear God speak through Peter.

NOV 1, MONDAY

1 Pe 1:1-2:3

Living Hope

1 Pe 1:23

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3b

The Bidayuhs of Sarawak tell the story of a child named Matiarui who waits in vain for his grandmother to come home from a fishing trip. Sadly, she never does and is found dead in the river. Until he died, he continued to hope that his grandmother would come back to life and return to him.

For the Christian, hope is the glorious anticipation of spending eternity with God in heaven. It is based on the fact that Jesus our Saviour is risen from the dead (v 3). Life after death is a certainty for us. This is made possible through Jesus Christ. This is unlike Matiarui's hope that was based merely on his deep longing for his grandmother's return.

Hope that is based on the certainty of fulfilment is faith. Faith purified by trials is refined faith. It results in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed (v 7). Believing and loving the Lord without seeing Him physically is the witness of this faith by the indwelling Holy Spirit (v 8). It is this faith that leads to the salvation of the soul.

This redemptive plan and the manner in which it was to be fulfilled were eagerly awaited by the ancient prophets. Generations came and went and prophet after prophet prophesied, but that hope lived on because of the certainty of its fulfilment. The prophets ensured with greatest care that the search for this fulfilment lived on (v 10). It was not only the prophets but also the angels in heaven who longed to have a glimpse at what was planned for us through Jesus. There is no greater hope than the hope we have in Jesus.

When trials and difficulties are over and my days have come to an end, let my hope in You, that Living Hope, draw me ever closer to You, my Saviour and my Friend.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 1, MONDAY

1 Pe 1:1-2:3

The Odd One Out

1 Pe 1:23

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. 1 Peter 1:15

I know a construction contractor who deals with various government departments. He has considerable admiration for one particular government servant. He describes this man as one who is 'straight and honest, uncompromising in his work standards and with no desire for favours. 'He is one of a kind, the odd one who stands out from all the rest.

What the world regards as 'odd,' the Bible regards as holy (vs 13-15). Holiness is not passive. It involves the active preparing of the mind, the discipline of self-control and the hope of glory in Jesus Christ. The decision to do right begins with the mind and then the right action follows. It involves the will and a deliberate action plan to live righteously. Just as we plan to succeed in any business we are involved in, so must we plan to succeed in righteous living. It requires a very clear and well-defined road map. This would mean being the odd ones who stand out. It would involve sacrifice, many inconveniences, and to some extent, even threats to our lives. As I struggle with these issues in my life as a politician, I have discovered the importance of self-control, a very important aspect of holiness (v 13). This means being constantly directed from within by the Holy Spirit, rather than being controlled by outside circumstances.

The discipline of holy living was the key to Christian witness in the early church and it still is as vital today. In many Asian countries, hostility towards Christians still exists. Believers may feel they are 'strangers' in their own country. This is rightly so as we are instructed to 'live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear' (v 17). Believers who build their lives on God's word will certainly have a different outlook to life. The world with all its vainglory will fade. Only the 'enduring word of God' will last forever (vs 23, 25).

***It is the humble and regular submission to the word of God daily
that will enable us to make an impact in society.***

Lord, grant me strength to live a life worthy of Your Name.

Teach me to think Your thoughts, talk Your talk and walk Your walk.

Think about how you would feel if you had won the first prize in a competition you did not even enter. Upon receiving the prize, you realize it is what you have been needing all the while.

This is how we should experience the mystery of the gospel (vs 20-21). Remember that Jesus was chosen before the creation of the world to redeem us.

When God created us. He knew the consequences of what it would mean to give man freedom of choice. It is not possible to fully fathom the whys and wherefores of a mighty Creator from the perspective of a finite being. The secret things belong to God (Deut 29:29). However, what should become increasingly clear is that this gift has been bequeathed to us. the lowly scum of the earth who have betrayed God's trust and love.

In marriage, we give ourselves fully to our spouses even before we fully know them. In business, we may enter into legal contracts without examining all the risks. Yet we take our time, we deliberate and we doubt the God who loves us perfectly. How do you think God feels? We may not be in a position to make a decision about how businesses or governments are to be run. But we have complete freedom to decide how we will respond to God and to worship Him. We can start by heeding His call to be holy (vs 13-16) and Peter's letter gives us plenty of clues as to how to do just that.

***Thank You, Lord, for giving us a living hope in You. I pray I will continue to lean on
Your Word and make it the main constancy in my life.***

NOV 2, TUESDAY

1 Pe 2:4-3:7

From Rag to Riches

1 Pe 2:9

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God: once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10

In April 1983, I attended an Irau (Orang Ulu word for Easter Convention) in a longhouse (Long Keseh) along the Baram river, in Sarawak. It was a most memorable occasion. I met with Christians from the various ethnic groups of the Orang Ulu tribe. The Penans (a nomadic tribe), walked for two days to Long Keseh. The evening worship service was an experience of the awesomeness of God's power and love. The same Bible passage we read today was expounded to them.

In the mid 1920's, missionaries from Australia came to witness to the tribal peoples of Sarawak. The missionaries found them living in the upper reaches of the Lawas-Trusan River, Baram River and the Rejang River in utter poverty, and stricken with diseases. They were in bondage to superstition and were drunk from their own locally brewed rice wine.

The mighty work of God changed all that. The verses in today's Bible passage gave them hope, filling them with the joy of being forgiven. God's word set them free from many fearful bondages. They discovered the power and victory available to them in Jesus' Name. Today, their church, the Evangelical Church of Borneo, is one of the fastest growing and also one of the largest churches in Malaysia.

More than anything else, it is the message of the Gospel that has the power to transform the lives of people. This transforming power has changed the lives of not just many individuals but also people groups. The many tribes in Sarawak who turned to Christ bear testimony to the power of God's word. Their spiritual transformation has in turn transformed them academically, socially, politically and materially. We now see people from these native tribes of Sarawak in prominent positions in politics, academia, business and the corporate sector, including Malaysian Airlines.

Those who trust in Him 'will never be put to shame' (v 6). More than this, they have the privilege of being 'a chosen people', called out of darkness into His wonderful light to worship Him (v 9).

The transforming work of the word of God is an ongoing work. May we experience this transformation daily so that we may decrease and He may increase in our lives.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 2, TUESDAY

1 Pe 2:4-3:7

Our Public Image

1 Pe 2:9

Your beauty should not come from adornment... Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 1 Peter 3:3-4

One of the key issues of living in a society is the matter of public image. This is even more important for us as witnesses for Christ in an unbelieving world. Whether we are government leaders or ordinary citizens, people are always observing us. Employers do it to check out which of their workers are loyal and submissive. Husband and wife relationships often come under scrutiny and can become a subject of conversation either because it is a harmonious and loving relationship or one that is heading for the rocks. Our public personae is not very different from who we are as persons.

In a world that is driven by showmanship, charisma and the desire for recognition, the plea to cultivate a 'gentle and quiet spirit' seems out of place. But that is what the Holy Spirit who indwells us wants of us. If we, in spite of being Christians, seek to portray a public image that goes down well with the world, we will become fragmented in our inner selves. Then the world will have no use for us.

The 'gentle and quiet spirit' is a spirit that submits. For the Lord's sake, we submit to authorities to portray obedient citizenship (vs 13-15). As a witness to their employers, workers are urged to be submissive and loyal (v 18). This is to the extent of receiving unjust and unfair treatment (v 19). Wives are called to submit to their husbands even if they are unbelievers in order to witness to them (3:1). All this would require sacrifice. The sacrifices made by our Lord Jesus provide sufficient motivation for us (vs 22-24).

Lord, may my life reflect the inner strength and beauty of Your work in me.

Do you still wear your old, worn and tattered clothes when you have new clothes hanging in your closet?

If we are convinced that Jesus has given us a new life, we should get rid of our old one. It would not do to put new wine into old wineskins, as Jesus told John's disciples (Matt 9:17). It would only destroy both the old and the new. In embracing the new covenant, Peter encourages us to put on the new self by putting away the old attitudes and habits which are harmful to others. Note that we are not able to destroy them but we are to avoid them by turning away from our sins. Our change must come from within, even as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

We are living stones with the power of God in us. Our power does not come from crystals or any other created non-living matter (New Age beliefs). We take heart that Jesus is the capstone which unbelievers reject but in whom believers trust as a sure foundation (7). We then become people-stones which make up the church, and are presented to God as a holy priesthood (2). We follow the example of Christ and we build on Him. How then are we to be distinctly different from others who do not believe? By not fighting with our neighbors and not retaliating even when our churches have been burnt down and our families massacred. Our brethren in Indonesia have shown us the way.

***Would we be able to withstand suffering and not hit back?
Lord, give us the grace to reflect Your beauty when it counts,
not just when things are going well.***

NOV 3, WEDNESDAY

1 Pe 3:8-4:11

Remember Gethsemane

1 Pe 3:15

It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17

As I read this passage, I recall the many prayer letters that seek urgent prayer for many Christians facing persecution in different countries. In many Asian homes where family ties and religious commitment are very important, becoming a Christian is tantamount to rebellion. Besides this, there are many countries that legislate anti-conversion laws. Those who become Christians pay a heavy price for seeking the truth. But these believers know that no amount of unjust treatment they receive will ever match what Jesus had to endure at Gethsemane (vs 17- 18).

As a young Christian in a secondary school more than thirty years ago. I was mocked for bringing my Bible to school. I was alienated and friends whom I knew as friends distanced themselves from me. I suffered rejection and loneliness. This was early training on Christian discipline. I learned to stand up for what was right and tried to be a good example for Christ by helping a number of very poor students. The ISCF (Inter-School Christian Fellowship) became a good training for Christian living and a sanctuary for me and other students like me. As a group we learned to pray for the big bullies of the school.

Today, as an adult involved in politics, I have found it to be a magnified version of the power play I experienced in my secondary school years. We are subject to manipulation, public slandering, unjust comments, 'surat layan' (anonymous letters) by the opposition.

My four principles have remained the same: *stand for what is right, help the poor, be an example of good character and pray for my enemies.*

Lord, lest I forget Gethsemane when I am subject to unjust treatment, draw my eyes away from myself. Help me focus on what You, the sinless One, had to endure at the hands of evil men.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 3, WEDNESDAY

1 Pe 3:8-4:11

Live For God

1 Pe 3:15

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms, 1 Peter 4:10

This passage reminds us that there are two ways we can live our lives. Either we live it in the flesh or we live it in the Spirit. Living in the flesh during Peter's time was characterized by 'debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry' (v 3). Whether we have indulged in one or more of these vices, we all have a past that we must not revisit however much we are tempted to do so (v 4).

Self-gratification is the goal of those who live in the flesh. They may appear to be enjoying life when, in truth, they are in bondage to their sinful desires and unable to break free from them. Furthermore, a time will come when they will have to 'give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead' (v 5). Things are not getting any better, a sure sign that the 'end of all things is near' (v 7). This gives us all the more reason to live as the Holy Spirit wants us to. As members of the Body of Christ, this would mean:

- Being clear minded and self-controlled so that we can pray (v 7b)
- Loving each other deeply (v 8)
- Offering hospitality (v 9)
- Using whatever gifts we have received to serve others

We live either for ourselves or for God. When we live for ourselves, we destroy ourselves. When we live for God, we bring glory to His Name (v 11) and our own lives will be joyful and meaningful.

***Lord, grant that I may learn to live for You and to say no to the desires of the flesh.
And as I live in obedience to Your Spirit, let me serve others so they too may desire to live for You.***

Was your first encounter with Christianity all sugar and spice? Were you promised all things nice?

We are reminded that victory in suffering comes from a living hope in the resurrected Christ. Followers of Christ will experience suffering as Peter did. In doing good, we should expect to suffer even at the hands of those we are trying to help. Whenever we give a reason for the hope we have in Christ, we run the risk of being ridiculed and mocked. This, however, should not deter us from obeying the Lord because we are identifying with Christ in His suffering.

We are not called to put on outward garments that will announce our faith in Jesus but we are told to circumcise our hearts so that we will live in the will of God (4:2). When we suffer, let it be for doing what is right and good (v 14). Whatever good we do, we are to do it for Christ. If we suffer for our own wrong deeds, we are merely reaping a just reward for our sins. But when we suffer for doing what is right, then we are walking in the steps of our Master.

***In our eagerness to convert people, let us not just present that which is nice.
Suffering is part of it all.***

NOV 4, THURSDAY

1 Pe 4:12-5:14

Suffering - Count It A Joy

1 Pet 5:7

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13

Nothing affects us as seriously as suffering. The effect of it can be physical pain, mental agony, emotional hurt or stress. Becoming a Christian does not mean we are safe from suffering. In fact, this passage suggests that we should expect it merely because we are Christians (v 19). Peter's readers were suffering because they were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. Since Jesus Himself was persecuted, Peter urged them to count it a privilege to be chosen to walk the same path of suffering (v 16). He also added that there was nothing to be gained by suffering for wrong (v 15).

In Asian culture, suffering is seen as a punishment from an external superior force. Amongst the Bidayuh tribes of Sarawak, for example, in the days when medical and health services were not easily available, any form of illness would be traced to some evil spirit. The witch doctor would be called in to appease the evil spirit and thus remove the 'curse' believed to be causing the suffering. A similar procedure would be used to invoke evil spirits to cause suffering upon an enemy or rival.

Eph 6:12 tells us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We cannot discount the role evil spirits play where suffering is concerned. They darken the minds and blind those who persecute Christians. While those who have reviled us will be judged (vs 17-18), we can look forward to a joyful reunion with the Lord when we behold His glory (v 13).

Pray for those who persecute Christians in different parts of the world.

Ask the Lord to intervene in their lives so that they turn away from living in bondage to Satan and accept Him as their Lord and Saviour.

Pray also for those who are persecuted that the Lord will grant them strength to endure.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 4, THURSDAY

1 Pe 4:12-5:14

Humility In Service

1 Pe 5:7

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 1 Pet 5:6

Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi were two leaders who have greatly impacted their countries. I believe they had one thing in common - humility. In their endeavor to lead their countries, they lived exemplary lives that have become lasting legacies. They identified with the poor, the exploited and the slaves.

Addressing both the elders and the other members of the church, Peter advised them to humble themselves for the simple reason that 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble' (vs 5-6). Those of us who are leaders in Christian ministry should take special note of this advice (vs 1-4). We are to serve, not because we must but because we are willing. Gain of the monetary kind or any other kind should be the last thing on our mind. Neither should we serve because we want to 'boss' people around; rather we should serve as good examples to the people we lead. Our eagerness to serve must stem from the fact that we are serving the 'Chief Shepherd' whose rewards, unlike worldly rewards, are everlasting.

The virtues expected of a Christian leader are not often seen in today's working world. Undergirding all these virtues is humility. We are to 'clothe' ourselves 'with humility toward one another' (v 5). Uniforms are clothes we wear in order to symbolize a common identity. All uniformed organizations have specific uniforms that portray the symbol of that organization. Christians have an invisible 'uniform' that they must clothe themselves with, and that 'uniform' is humility.

In our generation, humility in service has been best exemplified by Mother Teresa. No amount of words can describe the magnitude of this woman's heart. Her view of her work is best described in her words: 'In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do things with great love.'

***Do you feel that whatever work you are doing is not making much of a positive difference?
Take comfort in what Mother Teresa said: 'We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.'
All work, big or small, done in a spirit of humility is valued by God.***

Do we look at outward signs to indicate the health of churches or do we also look within? In the marketing world, statistics of growth play a crucial role in selling the person, the product and the producer. Numbers beget numbers. Even in church we sometimes suffer from a numbers game. We measure the success of a church by the growth in numbers alone. Most churchgoers tend to follow the crowd. Too often we hear of table-thumping at church meetings and the loudest voice winning votes in church. The marks of a church should be an attitude of humility and trust, whatever the numbers may be. But sadly, this is lacking in many of our churches today.

Church-goers look for good teaching, a vibrant community and interesting programs. I have yet to meet someone coming to church to serve like a shepherd. Perhaps we have become so urbanized that the idea of a shepherd is not easily understood. We are more familiar with the salesman. Today's reading directs us to look again at the substance in our church, not the style of a church. Are we marked by humility and trust in the Father, as Jesus our Great Shepherd was?

Lord, help me to be humble and to trust You as a sheep trusts its shepherd.

Overview of Jude

The writer of this letter, Jude, is believed to have been the brother of Jesus and James. It is a very short letter. Bible scholars believe that Jude was planning to write a longer one 'about the salvation we share' (v 3) when he received news of false teaching corrupting the faith of believers (v 4).

He thus quickly penned this short letter to them to warn them about these teachers. Using Old Testament references (vs 5-7, 11), he tells his readers that these teachers are marked out for destruction. He also quotes from two Jewish writings, 'Assumption of Moses' (v 9) and the 'Book of Enoch' (vs 14-15), to strengthen his case against these false teachers.

The false teaching had to do with the grace of God (v 4). The false teachers were trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them the license to sin since their sins would not be held against them. Jude argues strongly against this teaching, reminding his readers about the judgement handed down to those who dared to take God's grace lightly.

Jude urges them to 'build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit' (v 20). This is good advice for us today, for at every turn, books/ movies are being released that challenge the authenticity of Scripture.

NOV 5, FRIDAY

Jud 1:1-25

Don't Test God

Jud 1:20-21

I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 1:5

God is not Santa Claus. Santa Claus is a figment of someone's imagination so whether you are 'naughty or nice' it does not matter. God, on the other hand, is real. He is holy and righteous. If you think you can sin as much as you like and still get away with it, you are mistaken. Jude conveys this message to his readers.

False teachers had 'secretly slipped in' (v 4a) to the church while pretending to be believers. They joined in all their activities, including their 'love feasts' (v 12) that were held regularly with the Lord's Supper in the early church. At the same time, they were poisoning the church by telling them that being saved by grace gave them the license to sin since their sins would not be held against them (v 4b). Jude shows this teaching to be false by quoting incidents from Old Testament times where people who attempted to test God - the false teachers were advocating this - were severely punished.

Starting with the Israelites who, after God had delivered them from Egypt, were punished by death for their unbelief (v 5), he goes on to Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that were destroyed because of the people's sexual sin (v 7). Next, he speaks of Cain's sin of murder, Balaam's sins of betraying his position as a prophet and Korah's sin of rebellion against God-given authority (v 11). Jude chose these examples to show that the false teachers were guilty of these very same sins and would receive the same severe punishment. He also cited the case of the disobedient angels who were punished (v 6) to show that if angels could be punished, what more, mere human beings like us?

From Jude's description of these false teachers (vs 4, 8, 10-13, 16) they seemed to have been arrogant, immoral and self-indulgent. They claimed superior knowledge and did not respect God-given authority. We are to avoid such people and their teaching. If we cannot avoid them, we must 'contend for the faith' (v 3) that we know to be true and expose them for what they are.

False teaching has to do with power and control. In many countries in Asia where there are fast growing churches, false teachers are becoming increasingly prevalent. Pray that Christians will endeavor to be equipped with the doctrines of the faith, and be firm about following Christ so that no false teacher will be able to get a foothold in any church.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 5, FRIDAY

Jud 1:1-25

Antidote For The Poison

Jud 1:20-21

Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Jude 1:21

How are we to counter the poison of false teaching? Jude gives us some suggestions.

- We are to build ourselves up in our faith (v 20a)
This means we are to regularly study God's word, rightly interpreting it so that we can tell truth from error.
- We are to devote ourselves to prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit (v 20 b). Without spending daily private time with God it is impossible for us to grow in our relationship with Him. As we worship Him, confess our sins, share needs - both ours and that of others - listen to Him, receive His blessings and His strength to fight the enemy, we will grow to love Him more. We will then treasure with all our heart the life we have in Him. When our relationship with God becomes as precious as this no false teaching will influence us.
- We need to always keep in mind the imminent return of our Lord Jesus (v 21)
When we keep vigilant, nothing will distract us from Him.

How are we to respond to those who have doubts about their faith with the release of books and movies like the 'Da Vinci Code'? Jude mentions two responses (vs 22-23). When people are open to listen to us, we must patiently point out to them the error of the false teachings. As for others who are more deeply involved, we must do everything in our power to snatch them 'from the fire' being careful not to be seduced also by the false teaching.

However many the false teachers, and however convincing their false teaching, God is fully 'able to keep from falling' those who put their trust in Him (vs 24-25). And that is what we must do!

***What a privilege it must have been for Jude to grow up in the same household as Jesus!
But don't forget - Jesus is our Brother too (Heb 2:11) and we belong to the Household of God.
What a wonderful privilege! Never give it up.***

Jude assures God's people that they have a powerful Shepherd who, unlike the 'shepherds who feed only themselves' (v 12), would lovingly keep them from falling and present them before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy (v 24). He switches from the despondent subject of the apostate masqueraders to a triumphant doxology.

This Shepherd God is the firm anchor of every believer's life. He forgives and cleanses so completely that the believer in Christ stands as a blameless offering at His throne of grace. By faithful abiding in Christ, the believer may anticipate the joys of eternity. Meanwhile, the believer must know what to steer away from (v 18) and what to establish in his life (vs 20-21).

Right attitudes are essential to help others (v 22). Do not be harsh with those who doubt. Would gentle correction and instruction be a way of showing mercy? There is an urgency displayed in the call to 'snatch and save' (v 23). Do we sometimes stand passively by the side and watch others go the wrong way? The exhortation to show mercy (v 23) is repeated. Memories of God's mercy extended to us at so many points in our lives should propel us to show mercy to others. 'Mercy there was great and grace was free; pardon there was multiplied to me!' The Doxology reminds us that it is God who keeps us from falling. Let no one boast of his own strength.

Spend time to thank the Lord for keeping you ail these years.

Overview of 2 Peter

The key theme of this epistle is theological orthodoxy. Peter writes as a concerned pastor with a compassionate plea for the believers to grow in Christian maturity and to guard against false teachers. The purpose of this letter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return.

This letter has three main thoughts:

The True Knowledge of Christian Belief

Christians must match their Christian calling and resources with growth in practical holiness. The historical reliability of this faith is supported by eyewitness testimony and fulfilled prophecy.

False Teachers

The writer warns of their appearance in the church. Every attempt must be made to resist and refute them and not to be dragged into their immoral ways. The believers are told of the certainty of judgement on these false teachers.

The Parousia (Return of the Lord Jesus Christ) and the Final Dissolution

This is certain in spite of delay and the denials by false teachers. He exhorts them to live their lives in holiness in the light of the coming day of the Lord.

NOV 6, SATURDAY

2 Pe 1:1-21

God's Riches, Our Resources for Righteous Living

2 Pe 1:5-8

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. 2 Peter 1:3

Trials and testing are inevitable challenges to Christian living. Peter wrote this text at a time when first century Christians faced life-threatening persecution. Peter himself expected death (1:14). His parting words are neither a tearful farewell nor a stoic resignation to God's will.

There is no self-pitying, neither are there any defeatist thoughts in his mind. Rather, his letter is saturated with overflowing optimism and unwavering confidence that God's divine power had given him EVERYTHING he needed for life and godliness. He had everything he needed to stay vibrant and upright. What are these divine gifts that are so complete and exhaustive? God's gifts had so impacted Peter that even amidst severe testing and impending martyrdom, his epistle persistently echoes the triumphant note of this timeless hymn by Charles Wesley:

'Happy, if with my latest breath I may but gasp His Name:

Preach Him to all, and cry in death. 'Behold, behold the Lamb!'

God's divine gifts are Jesus and the Holy Spirit

The apostle's life is a testimony to the transforming power of his personal knowledge of Jesus' glory and goodness and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had made him a partaker in the divine nature and enabled him to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desire (v 4).

Hence, with God's richest provisions in the person and work of Christ and His precious promises of help through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are confident none can have dominion over us. Isaiah 43:1-3 leaves us in no doubt that with God in our lives we have everything we need. 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flame will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.'

Praise be to God whose tender mercy and steadfast love never ceases

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 6, SATURDAY

2 Pe 1:1-21

Christ's Return, Our Glorious Hope & Heritage

2 Pe 1:5-8

And I will make every effort, to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. 2 Peter 1:15

I come from a small fishing village where first generation Chinese immigrants worked very hard to accumulate wealth so that their children could have a better life. As Christian leaders and parents, it is our responsibility to leave behind a godly heritage rather than just accumulated wealth for our children.

For Peter, his glorious encounter with the divine Christ was the precious heritage he wanted to pass on. Peter was one of the privileged three chosen to witness the glorious transfiguration of Christ, the Son of the living God (v 18). What an extraordinary experience! Peter was determined that the knowledge of who Jesus is had to be passed on after his death (v 15) and he repeatedly stated his intent: 'I will always remind you (v 12) ... I think it is right to refresh your memory (v 13) ... I will make every effort to see that ... you will always be able to remember these things' (v 14).

It is of vital importance to remember God's revelation. To forget is perilous to our Christian life. Peter had firsthand experience of how easily one can 'forget' when subject to mounting pressure to deny Christ. Only when he heard the cock crow did he realize that he had already denied his Lord the third time. Hence, Peter's urgent reminders to the early Christians facing persecution not to give up but to hope in the promised return of their majestic Lord.

What is the purpose of enduring suffering if there is no future hope? Hopelessness in suffering often leads to depression and suicide. That was the doom and gloom felt by the Jews in an occupied Polish town shown in the movie, 'Jakob The Liar'. Jakob lied about having a radio, an item prohibited by the Nazis. He cleverly invented many stories that he claimed he heard from the BBC about the impending defeat of the Nazis. Jakob could not stop telling these lies because of the hope he saw rising in the captives' hearts and the light flickering in their troubled eyes. Praise be to God that Christ's second coming is not a cleverly invented story by the apostles. It is the prophetic utterance of men who spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (v 21).

In whatever circumstances we are in, we will do well to pay attention to Christ's second coming (v 19), because doing so will give us the right perspective to life.

My three children enjoy playing word games. One day, my youngest daughter asked the older siblings, 'What do you call life without growth?' 'Death, what else?!' they retorted. How aptly they answered, I thought. But moments later a fear stirred in me as I pondered what would happen if they stopped growing. They would become a monstrosity!

The apostle Peter warns us here of the danger of our lives without growth (vs 8-9), and urges us to take stock from time to time to make sure that we do not settle for a spiritual standstill. It is easy to grow stale and lose the exhilaration we once knew as a new Christian. We will do well to take note of Peter's stocktaking list, which we must add to our faith: virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (vs 5-7). If we have each of these qualities present in our lives, we will not be unfruitful, nor stumble in our walk with the Lord. Peter categorically says that if we do these things we will never fall (v 10). In saying this, he is not playing down the power and evil of the world. There are always hindrances to our spiritual development for the devil never likes growing Christians, but we do not have to be ensnared by them. God has provided us His divine power (v 3) and His precious promises (v 4) to keep us going.

Do not replace God's stocktaking list with our own, and later blame Him for the drudgery of unproductive Christian living. Instead, follow His instructions diligently. This will prevent us from becoming dormant.

When growth stops, decay begins.

NOV 7, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

NOV 8, MONDAY

2 Pe 2:1-22

False Prophets and Teachers

2 Pe 2:9

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. 2 Peter 2:1a

We need to heed the warnings in this passage about false prophets and teachers because they continue to operate today. In 2006, the best selling book and film 'The Da Vinci Code' created much confusion among many young believers. In my church, some even questioned the authenticity of the Christian faith.

Peter opens this section by declaring that false teachers are bound to appear. They appear among the people as members of the church; they work secretly, under cover, pretending to be what they are not, and they bring in their false teaching alongside true doctrine. Finally, they replace the truth with their lies. The apostle proceeds to describe fully their true nature. They are insolent, licentious, immoral and greedy. They are bold and willful. These are the rebels who dare to criticize even angels. They are deceitful in every way.

The desire for curious new things is very much a part of human nature. The same truth being said over and over by the same group of people is not very exciting. Thus, it is no wonder that false prophets attract significant numbers of followers. The danger posed by false prophets challenges church leaders to have real discernment and a firm approach to deal with such people. Church leaders have the great responsibility to teach and train new believers in the Christian faith. No room should be given to any form of doctrinal deviation and no person who propagates such deviation should be taken lightly. However, if there is genuine misunderstanding without any intention to distort and confuse other believers, such a person should be corrected with discipline and love.

But judgement is sure to come upon those whose evil intention is to mislead and destroy believers with their deviant ways. God did not spare angels when they sinned. Neither were people spared during the time of Noah. Cities, too, have faced the wrath of God - Sodom and Gomorrah are two prime examples.

***Pray for the faithful teaching of doctrine to our younger generation in churches.
Pray that our children will not be easily influenced by these false teachers or their teachings.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 8, MONDAY

2 Pe 2:1-22

Cult and Occult

2 Pe 2:9

They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor. 2 Peter 2:15

There is no explicit mention of cults or the occult in this passage. What Peter describes is what Christians today are prone to encounter in one way or another (2:1). It's a forewarning concerning the hundreds of cults that exist today. Some cults are offshoots of ancient pagan religions. They have no similarity to Christianity, and are easy to identify. Others falsely try to imitate Christianity, often using the Bible and Christian terminology, and are more difficult to distinguish. Some of the major ones are the Mormons. Jehovah's Witnesses. Christian Science. Scientology, The Unification Church and the New Age Movement (which is also occultic).

The word 'occult' refers to what is hidden, concealed, or secret. The occult involves the spirit world - the spirit world of darkness. It is particularly deceptive because the spirit world is very real and the promise of power for those who dabble in it is very attractive. Practitioners may or may not realize it but they are dealing with dark, forbidden, and evil reality. Occult practices are too many to mention. They include astrology, various kinds of 'fortune telling', witchcraft, Satanism. ESP, telepathy, the use of ouija boards, yoga and the New Age Movement which is a catchall term embracing many modern occult beliefs and practices.

Who are the people involved in the occult? They are those who have 'left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam ...' The disturbing point is that these people may also be attending church. Their double life can influence unsuspecting and naive church members and result in the devil gaining a foothold in their lives. While attending regular church services, they would also resort to going to the 'bomoh' (witch-doctor) for healing, mediums for lottery numbers and yoga classes for relaxation and exercise. They will end up in bondage to the devil.

Judgement for them is sure. We must be vigilant and fortify our hearts and minds with the historic truths of biblical Christianity and God's revelation in Christ.

Pray against the influence of all cultic and occultic practices in our homes and churches.

When Pope John Paul II visited Asia in 1999, he prayed that a 'great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent. But sharing the gospel in Asia, a region that fiercely opposes the Christian faith, will take more than just responding to God's calling. News of God's servants being kidnapped, put into jail and killed hit international headlines.

Opposition and difficulty are an inevitable part of the Christian's experience, but Peter invites us to step back and see the way the enemy exploits those difficulties. 'Know your enemy' is a watchword for Christians who engage in spiritual battles. The devil attacks by using false teachers. They are frightening men. They have no regard for others, even those they ought to respect (v 10). Their aim is to destroy the faith of Christians. They do this by their lifestyle (v 2) which combines the subtle twisting of the truth (vs 1.3) and open hostility (v 10). But take heart, faithful servants! No matter how influential and powerful the forces of evil are, and how insignificant God's faithful people seem in comparison, God knows 'how to rescue godly men from trials' (v 9). God is not inexperienced in the art of rescuing His people. He preserved Noah and Lot although they were overwhelmingly outnumbered (vs 5. 7). While there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that Christians will be immune from the testing of the world, we can rejoice that there is the great message of hope of final deliverance.

Are you faced with difficult or trying circumstances right now? Remember that God knows how to rescue you too. Just trust Him!

'The Lord gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.'
Charles H. Spurgeon

NOV 9, TUESDAY

2 Pe 3:1-18

The Certainty of Christ's Promised Return

2 Pe 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

I come from a family that used to practice ancestral worship. I became a Christian through the witness of the Christian fellowship in my school. What prompted me to accept Christ was the fear I had when I first heard of the judgement accompanying His return. When I witnessed to my mother about Jesus' second coming she said, 'Are you kidding? Trying to trick your poor illiterate mum with myths, and tales! You have wasted my money and effort to send you to school.' God is merciful! My mum was not to remain ignorant for long. She became a Christian and is now with the Lord.

God's love labors long towards us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (v 9). He may seem to be tarrying in returning but the promise of His return is as solid and as evident as this existing world which was brought into existence by His word (v 5). And it was God's prophetic word that forewarned the destruction of the ancient world (v 6). It is therefore no light matter that by the same word the present heavens and earth will be destroyed.

When is this Terrible Day in God's timetable? The eternal God is outside of time. He is not confined by it. 'But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day' (v 8). What matters most is that in His love for mankind, He will keep the door of grace and opportunities for repentance open for as long as His patience endures. God is abounding in patience and slow to anger but the day of His wrath will surely come. And the manner in which it comes is as frightening as it is unexpected and unannounced. Since it will come like a thief in the night (v 10), let us be watchful.

Dear Lord, disturb us if we have fallen in love with the things and comforts this world offers and have forgotten Your imminent return and our calling as Your servants.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 9, TUESDAY

2 Pe 3:1-18

New Heaven, New Earth

2 Pe 3:9

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. 2 Peter 3:1 3

It appears that there was much confusion among the Christians to whom Peter was writing. It was, first of all, due to the false teaching of the false prophets. Secondly, the delay in Christ's second coming had caused them to become restless and impatient. Then, there were also those who were thinking that 'since things are coming to an end, let's live our lives as we wish.' All this had caused a disturbing trend in the church and people were living carelessly.

Peter thus pleaded with them to live holy and godly lives. Such a commitment was possible because of the glorious promise of a new heaven and a new earth. They were to make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God as they awaited the fulfilment of this promise.

The earth is filled with destruction, wickedness, evil, hatred, violence, immorality and everything else that pleases its master, the devil himself. We yearn for a better earth and this longing will be fulfilled when the earth is renewed and made fit as a dwelling place for God and all His saints. But for now we have to persevere and not lose heart or falter in our faith, keeping before us the glorious hope of spending eternity with Jesus.

Dear God, draw us close to You and fill us with the grace and knowledge of Your Son, Jesus Christ as we patiently await His return.

When you are ten years old, you don't think much about the future. That's why it is so difficult to explain to my son the long-term benefits of struggling through mathematical formulas and practicing the piano. While I am trying to convince him of the need to prepare for his future, his mind is set on enjoying the present.

All of us have this tension in our lives. It is easier to enjoy the pressures of the present than to work hard preparing for the future. Peter, as he draws his letter to a close, appeals to us to live in a way that will prepare us for eternity with God (vs 11 - 12). He exhorts us to live a holy and godly life so that we are ready at any time for the Lord's return (cf Matt 24:43-44). His logic is that as this world will be dissolved (v 12) and be replaced by a new heaven and earth (v 13), we should be zealously cultivating in ourselves that which belongs to the new creation.

But many continue to live heedlessly. Moral decay, lies, deceit, adultery, greed, lust, covetousness, sexual impurities and power struggles are occurring within the very walls of our church. We cannot blame the unbelievers for not wanting to enter the church: 'Look, Christians are also like that!' (A common English expression in Malaysia.)

Since the Lord will surely come, let us heed Peter's call to build godly character into our lives (2 Pet 1:8). As we do these things, we will be prepared to meet Him.

A holy life is regulated by divine truth and faithfulness in Christian duty.

Overview of Hebrews 1 - 8

All of us come to Christ carrying with us some of our former religious and cultural traditions. No one anywhere in the world is really free from this. As Asians, for many of whom Christ is only a first or second generation experience, non-Christian attitudes and ways of thinking may be unconsciously ingrained inside us or be part of our reflex.

From the contents of this letter we can see that this epistle was written to Jewish Christians to resolve the conflict they had between following Jesus and following the Old Covenant. In Christ there is no need for believers to offer the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses but understandably this was the core of Jewish beliefs. Hebrew Christians had to deal with that. The epistle of the Hebrews helped them go to the root of how Jesus, 'God incarnate for our salvation', deals with their former religion.

In the same way, this letter shows us the essence of the Gospel and helps us see what we can keep from our culture and what we must leave behind.

It also seems clear that for Hebrew Christians, staying on as Christians involved suffering persecution (10:32-34) whereas falling back to Judaism would have removed that threat. Judaism was a recognised religion in the Roman Empire while Christianity was not. If ever today we must face loss for Christ's sake, this letter shows us how Christ is worthy and supreme above all.

Only in heaven will we know who wrote this epistle. But we know the author knew Timothy (13:23). That makes the circle quite small. It could be Silas, it could be Apollos, it could be Barnabas, it could be somebody else. It has been thought that it was Paul who wrote the letter, but most people now agree that the way it is written does not bear his mark.

We also do not know for sure when this letter was written. However, the mention of Hebrew sacrifices suggests that the temple at Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 AD was still standing. The fact that persecution had broken out suggests that it was written after the persecution of Nero in 64 AD. There is no address to tell us to whom it was written, but they were obviously people who knew Timothy and the phrase 'those from Italy send you their greetings' (13:24) suggests that the letter might have been sent to the Jewish church in Rome.

NOV 10, WEDNESDAY

Heb 1:1-2:18

Something Better

Heb 1:1-2

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Heb 1:3

Jews, even Christian Jews, felt a very strong bond to the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament as they knew it. Over generations they had become deeply convinced about God's message to them. God had called Abraham who, because he was faithful, was blessed abundantly. In the same way, the Jews or Hebrews as a people were called to be faithful to the Law through Moses. They proved unfaithful and as a nation was exiled 600-800 years after Moses. In exile, they learned repentance and developed a will never to forsake the Law again.

Now God had revealed something new. He had spoken through His Son. God's promises through His prophets of a Messiah had been fulfilled. But it was not what the Hebrews expected. The message did not contradict God's nature but it did change very deeply things the Jews held closely in the practice of their religion. How could they put aside these familiar and precious things?

The letter of Hebrews sets the stage for this by telling them they could change when they have something better. 'You have the Son of God' and that is surely something better than whatever they had before. Scripture shows us that Jesus is the Son (v 5), above all else (vs 6, 13), equal to God (v 8) and everlasting (vs 10-12).

***As Asians coming to Jesus, we too must leave behind all ties with Asian deities,
all idolatrous religious practices and ingrained superstitious beliefs.
We must put aside necromancy (consulting dead spirits) and geomancy (feng shui).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 10, WEDNESDAY

Heb 1:1-2:18

A Clear Warning

Heb 1:1-2

We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. Heb 2:1

So many people today take religion as an optional extra in life. We secure ourselves from poverty, loneliness and disease first and then seek to achieve honor, power and glory. If we live that way, we will never let what we consider the extras to disturb our inner comfort zone. Our Asian philosophy is, 'I take care of myself and my family first'. We may let truth matter but never let it matter so much as to threaten our health and security.

But today we are warned in this passage to be careful how we respond to this important message we have heard from God! How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? The Hebrews knew the seriousness of God's word to them. When they neglected their Law and went after idols, they found that the Lord who loved them was not a God of empty threats. Although slow to anger, He duly fulfilled the promises of destruction according to His word.

If God, because He loves us, shows us greater mercy by giving His Son to suffer death for everyone, how much more seriously and fearfully we should receive what we hear! A message that cost God His Son logically demands that we obey and follow, even if it causes great inconvenience, even death. Are we ready for that?

No eye has seen, nor mind conceived, what God has in store for those who love Him.

What walls around our comfort zone must we break down

if we are to take God's word seriously?

Have we given God the keys to the areas in our lives that really matter?

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Heb 2:14-15

What is this wonderful message God has revealed? It is introduced right from the opening paragraph of the letter. The Son 'provided purification for sins' (1:3), He has redeemed sinners. There is much more on this in the letter, but here the point is made that God the Son, 'shares in our humanity'. Jesus was made 'a little lower than the angels... so that He might taste death for everyone.' The point is emphasized here with three quotations from the Old Testament (vs 12-13).

Perhaps why 'the author' of our salvation needed to be made 'perfect through suffering' may feel elusive and like a mystery; but this we know: it was absolutely necessary. Three things about His being made man however are not a mystery. The first is that He might destroy Satan, 'him who holds the power of death' (v 14). Second, that He might make atonement for the sins of the people (v 17). Third, that He might help those, who are tempted because He Himself suffered when He was tempted (v 18).

Here is the Gospel condensed in brief phrases. Each of these grand themes could fill pages if we want words to fully describe them. But sometimes, like now, we should instead be quiet and let those words sink deep into us as we meditate on them. Another thing we can do is to repeat them aloud and memorize them.

***Because He himself suffered when He was tempted,
He is able to help those who are being tempted (v 18).***

***Turn to Him however difficult things may be. Turn to Him and Him alone in the face of tribulation.
Trust Him that He will act in His time even if He seems silent now.***

NOV 11, THURSDAY

Heb 3:1-4:13

The Son is Greater Than Moses

Heb 4:12

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. Heb 3:3

We are reminded that this letter was written to the Hebrews. Living just about 40 years after Jesus appeared, the early Jewish believers had a more familiar knowledge and awareness of the man, Jesus. His Gospel was told to them in stories of His encounters and conversations. But He was just a preaching carpenter in Galilee. Moses, on the other hand, was from back in time and was placed on a pedestal. He was the Lawgiver who heard the voice of God, the great champion who brought their forefathers out of Egypt against all human probabilities.

It may have already been said earlier that the Son is greater than the Law, but the writer of Hebrews needed to say again that Jesus is greater than Moses. To accept Jesus, clothed in flesh and frail as we are, as God, is hard to accept, and not just for the Jews. The church is littered with philosophies like those of the Marcionites, Docetists and Arians who tried various devices to separate the man Jesus from the Son of God.

Today, we may face philosophies that try to equate Jesus with other so-called deities. We must believe that Jesus is the only Son of the Father; begotten not made; of one substance with the Father.

Colossians 1:15-16: Jesus is the image of the invisible God... by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.
Pray that family members who do not know Jesus will open their hearts to Him.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 11, THURSDAY

Heb 3:1-4:13

Warned Again

Heb 4:12

As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." Heb 3:15

If there is one message that rings out from today's passage, it is this: Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion. It occurs in verses 7-8 and verse 15. In fact it comes up again in 4:7. The warning against unbelief is taken from the events of the exodus under Moses. The children of God had sinned and did not keep faith with God as He led them to the Promised Land. Believing Jews are now warned not to lose faith, and not to harden their hearts. If Jesus, the one greater than Moses, has been revealed, how much more must we pay careful attention.

This message surely rings like an echo of what we read at the beginning of chapter 2. We can really appreciate the Hebrew nature of this epistle. Parallelism, a feature of Hebrew poetry, is clearly evident. The passage we read yesterday of Jesus being greater than Moses echoed the message of the Son being greater than the Law. Today, the passage warning Christian Jews not to fail like the Israelites under Moses echoes the warning, 'How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?'

An important message bears repeating. A serious warning is worth saying again.

***We share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end (v 14).
What are the things in your life that can lead you to
harden your heart against the message of the Gospel?***

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. Heb 4:11

What we read today continues the message repeated for the third time: 'Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts'. The saving message of God's love is only effective when it meets with faith in our hearts. We must respond and that response is compared to entering God's rest. It is like God's rest on the seventh day because this is God's completed work of salvation. The way is now made perfect.

It is God's rest also because it is not by means of our own work or merit that we gain this salvation from God. The covenant Joshua inherited from Moses for the Hebrews required careful compliance and obedience to the law. And that required great effort and hard work.

Through the Son now, our faith holds on to the word of God, believes it and lets it take control. And this word, like a sword, penetrates every area of our lives. God's word convicts us, drives us to be holy and gives us God's rest. It is not work to satisfy some obligation or earn some reward but it is not idleness either. Faith involves action.

***Salvation rests in the finished work of Christ
Commit yourself anew to read and study His word regularly.
Ask God to apply His word thoroughly to our lives.***

NOV 12, FRIDAY

Heb 4:14-5:10

Holding Firmly

Heb 4:16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Heb 4:14

When Jesus, the Son, was presented as greater than Moses (chapter 3), He was among other things described as high priest. Here the theme is taken up again and mentioned five times.

A priest stands for us before God. His job is to act on our behalf so that we may find favor or approval before the Almighty. For this, Jesus is supremely qualified. First, He is one of us, fully human. He knows our weaknesses and is able to deal gently with us. Yet He is perfect before God because He is without sin. Second, no priest appoints himself as priest. God appointed Christ for the job. If God has given Him the role, have we any right to seek another?

The danger the Hebrew Christians, to whom this letter was addressed, faced was that they might drift away (v 14). It was not easy to be different. I am sure the Jews found comfort in observing the practice of having a priest offer sacrifices for their sins. There was a pull for the Jewish Christians to follow, what was after all, a God ordained practice. The message here for us is that there is no better priest than Jesus. Hold firm to the best. Do not let the 'good' keep you from the best.

***Let us approach the Throne of Grace with confidence - regularly, and often.
Although Christ was the Son, He had to learn obedience through suffering. (Heb 5:8)
If we are God's children will He not also perfect us through suffering?
If this has been our lot, let us count it all joy (James 1:3).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 12, FRIDAY

Heb 4:14–5:10

A Bold Entrance

Heb 4:16

One morning, Scott Long and his wife had just awakened and were lying in bed when suddenly a young fellow entered their bedroom. He walked around the bed to Scott's side.

If the trespasser had been a total stranger, his entrance would've been criminal intrusion. If he had been a friend, his entrance would've been just plain obnoxious. But it was their toddler son who had entered their bedroom, jumped on the bed, and boldly said, "I want in the middle." Scott was struck with the beauty of a child's security in knowing he is wanted.

We are welcome in our heavenly Father's presence as well. Hebrews 4:16 tells us we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." We can approach Him confidently about anything—our needs and our desires—knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7).

Writer Phillips Brooks said, "If man is man and God is God, to live without prayer is not merely an awful thing; it is an infinitely foolish thing."

Let's not be foolish and ignore the help we can find in prayer to our Father. Instead, let's approach Him with the boldness of a child who knows he is loved and wanted by his father.

By: Anne Cetas

***When we approach the Lord in prayer, We can come boldly to His throne;
His children come expectantly, For grace and mercy will be shown. —Sper
Pray as a child talks to his father.***

A men's group was discussing the reasons for living a morally pure life. One man argued that it was fear that kept him in line. Another insisted it was love. But a third man suggested that it was a love-motivated fear. Yes, he did fear the shame, the disgrace, and the punishment he might endure for wrongdoing, but worst of all was the fear of making his wife suffer. "I'd rather be beaten to death," he exclaimed, "than to see the hurt in the eyes of the woman I love."

That sheds some light on our Savior's statement, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (Jn. 14:15). If we willfully break those commandments, we will suffer loss. But it should also matter to us how God responds to our disobedience. Hosea 11:8 tells us that God the Father feels loving anguish. Because of Israel's sin, He said, "My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred."

Jesus also experiences pain when we disobey. He wept over the city of Jerusalem when it spurned His love (Lk. 13:34). And in Ephesians 4:30-31, Paul exhorted believers not to grieve the Holy Spirit by being hard-hearted.

If we consider how much pain God feels when we are disobedient, we will find ample motivation to shun what is wrong and pursue what is right.

By: Vernon Grounds

***O help me, Lord, to be afraid, Of disobeying You;
And may I bring You highest praise, In everything I do. —Sper
The highest motive for serving God is the desire to please Him.***

NOV 13, SATURDAY

Heb 5:11-6:20

Pressing On

Heb 6:10

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Heb 5:13-14

It is not good enough to just enter God's rest and remain at the entrance 'holding firm'. There is a journey to begin. We must grow from drinking milk to eating solid food.

We need to understand what God's heart is like and all that He has done for us to reach maturity. When the mind and heart change, our behavior and habits become Christlike. The road to Christlikeness is through reading, meditating on and applying God's word to our life. But here is a word of caution: We need to leave behind arguments about repentance, baptism, the laying on of hands and the resurrection as though we could come up with new ideas. Scripture is already clear on these things. Adding, subtracting or changing this foundation leads to a shipwreck of our faith.

There is real danger in getting involved in any deviant new teaching. It is the rejection of the goodness of God, shown in the Son Who is superior to all.

***Those who feed on solid food are able to distinguish good from evil.
The family shares physical food together. Likewise, the family should feed on spiritual food together. Together we can help each family member grow from drinking milk to eating solid food.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 13, SATURDAY

Heb 5:11-6:20

Being Sure

Heb 6:10

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Hebrews 6:19

The writer of Hebrews now brings to the center of his letter, topics that will occupy the next four chapters of the epistle, before he closes with his final exhortations. He has presented the Son as superior and spelled out how essential it is we receive and pursue our faith. But can we be really sure we are right?

There are 'two unchangeable things' we are told, 'in which it is impossible for God to lie'. They are not named in the next sentence, but if we read carefully asking what these are, we see they are:

- i) the oath (promise)
- ii) the blood of sacrifice (seal)

This passage is the beginning of the argument and we do not see yet how the oath, or blood of sacrifice, applies to Jesus but we are told here about the certainty of God's promises. He made a promise to Abraham and it was fulfilled. This was deep in the Hebrew soul. Even before there was the Law that came through Moses, the Hebrews had their origin in the promise to Abraham. About that they were sure.

When we study the Scriptures, we too will be fully convinced that the God who made the covenant with Abraham is, and always will be, trustworthy and faithful. It is upon the very nature of the God, who has revealed Himself and spoken by an oath, that we can be and are sure.

In Christ we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure (v 19).

Do we face skeptics and doubters who shake our faith?

Identify these issues and seek the answer to give to

'everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (1 Pet 3:15).

In the seventh century, what is now called the United Kingdom was many kingdoms often at war. When one king, Oswald of Northumbria, became a believer in Jesus, he called for a missionary to bring the gospel to his region. A man named Corman was sent, but things didn't go well. Finding the English "stubborn," "barbarous," and uninterested in his preaching, he returned home frustrated.

"I am of the opinion," a monk named Aidan told Corman, "that you were more severe to your unlearned hearers than you ought to have been." Instead of giving the Northumbrians "the milk of more easy doctrine," Corman had given them teaching they couldn't yet grasp. Aidan went to Northumbria, adapted his preaching to the people's understanding, and thousands became believers in Jesus.

Aidan got this sensitive approach to mission from Scripture. "I gave you milk, not solid food," Paul told the Corinthians, "for you were not yet ready for it" (1 Corinthians 3:2). Before right living can be expected from people, Hebrews says, basic teaching about Jesus, repentance, and baptism must be grasped (Hebrews 5:13-6:2). While maturity should follow (5:14), let's not miss the order. Milk comes before meat. People can't obey teaching they don't understand.

The faith of the Northumbrians ultimately spread to the rest of the country and beyond. Like Aidan, when sharing the gospel with others, we meet people where they are.

By: Sheridan Voysey

In simple terms, how would you explain the gospel? How can you avoid expecting people who aren't believers in Jesus to think or behave as you do?

Jesus, thank You for reaching me in ways I could understand.

NOV 14, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

NOV 15, MONDAY

Heb 7:1-8:13

Melchizedek - Priest & King

Heb 7:25b

Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. Heb 7:3

Not being Hebrews and not being steeped in the Torah or Law we may find ourselves totally lost with this reference to Melchizedek. We are keen to go on and know more about being sure about our faith but instead run into this detour.

We are taken back 2,000 years before Jesus and told of how Abraham meets this 'king of righteousness- who was also priest of God Most High. He stood apart from Abraham and all the other kings who were on one side or the other in war. He blessed Abraham and received from him a ritually significant offering. Neither he nor his people are ever mentioned again.

In Abraham's day there were no other priests of God. Israel's descendants who were to be priests were not yet born. Yet God planned this encounter to show that even the great Abraham needed a priestly mediator.

In this passage, the meaning behind Melchizedek's appearance is not yet discussed but here is a priest unlike the sons of Levi, one mysteriously sent by God. There is a reference to Melchizedek in Psalm 110, which is a prophetic psalm significantly referring to the Messiah as a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

God always provides the way for us to go to Him.

Our minds cannot grasp the majesty of the immortal and invisible God, nor can we approach Him acceptably. We need a mediator and no one fits the role better than Jesus to be our priest.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 15, MONDAY

Heb 7:1-8:13

Jesus The Perfect Priest

Heb 7:25b

But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Heb 7:24-25

Although we know the heart of our faith is the transformation of our lives by the word of God and the working of the Holy Spirit, attending Sunday worship and Christmas and Easter celebrations undoubtedly play a big part in our Christian lives. In the same way, although keeping the Law was the daily expression of Jewish faith, the temple sacrifices were major events for the Hebrews.

Anyone raised on the Old Testament would feel the importance of the priest, whose role was instituted in the Law. The priest offered sacrifices to God as prescribed. Not just anybody could be a priest. The Law stated he had to be a descendant of Aaron and Levi. So now in declaring how Jesus is a superior priest to Aaron's sons, the writer of Hebrews tells us two things about the superior institution of Jesus' priesthood. The first is that He is a priest of the order of Melchizedek, which was before and greater than Aaron. He is a priest who is also a king of righteousness and without beginning or end. Second, His appointment is not by genealogy, but it was given to Him by an oath from God, something in which it is impossible for God to lie.

Having shown us our need for a priest, the writer brings us now to consider how wonderful a priest Jesus is. Unlike other priests, Jesus lives forever and needs no successor. His sacrifice of Himself once for all never needs to be repeated.

Jesus is able to save us in every situation, because He always lives to intercede for us.

Hebrews coming to Christ had to deal with their past ties with priests and sacrifices.

As Asians, what religious ties to our past do we need to deal with?

But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. Heb 8:6

The priests offered sacrifices because it was prescribed by the old covenant. But that covenant was not good enough for salvation. With a new high priest it follows there needs to be a New Covenant. Jesus does not just take over doing what the former priests did. The terms of our relationship with God and us have been changed.

This new relationship was foretold 600 years before by Jeremiah when the Jews had broken their covenant with God again and again. They had stood at the edge of destruction. Jeremiah's prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34 is quoted here in the epistle of the Hebrews.

In essence, God said that it would no longer be necessary for people to be taught to keep a set of rules. He will write His law in human hearts. You can never make people good by telling them to follow rules. You have to make people good first before they can change their ways from evil to good. There are many religions in Asia, but none has this cure for sin.

Only Jesus saves.

**Even as God forgets our sin, have we truly left our sinful ways
so that we have also 'forgotten' how to sin?**

Overview Of Hebrews 9 - 13

In these five chapters, we are taken from the tabernacle to the coming 'lasting city'. We hear testimonies of God's people from Abel to Samuel and many others. Yet it is Christ who is the center of our attention in these passages.

We learn about the imperfect 'old' and rejoice and are exceedingly glad that we belong to the 'new'. The 'old' could never remove sin while the 'new' cleanses the conscience from guilt and thus abolishes the barrier between God and His people. The 'new' when compared to the 'old' is like substance to the shadow.

Since Jesus has purchased the new life for us, we are encouraged to live out our faith by looking to Jesus as our supreme example. He is called the mediator of the new covenant. Our duty and our part in this salvation plan are to constantly surrender to God in discipline and in trials. We are privileged to have a Father and child relationship. We look to Him, our supreme example. We worship Him who is already enthroned at God's right hand.

The only thing worth hoping for is the lasting city. As the saints in the earlier days lived in such hope, we are also exhorted to live in this sure hope because Christ has come. While we know that without faith it is impossible to please God, it is also true that without hope it is impossible to live a Christian life.

NOV 16, TUESDAY

Heb 9:1-28

How Things Were

Heb 9:27

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. Heb 9:8

Now that the way to the Most Holy Place has already been made possible to us by the death of Jesus, it is good to assess the 'old' from our position of the 'new'.

The tabernacle (later, Solomon's temple) was the place where meeting with the God of Israel was made possible. We have here a short account on the tabernacle (vs 1-5). Its description is not the main point here (v 5b). However, the items mentioned here are significant.

Next we have the rituals in the tabernacle (vs 6-7). They are temporary. They were in practice while waiting for the better to be initiated (v 8) and the right time to come (v 10b). We are able to testify to the fact that the 'fullness of time' has come (Galatians 4:4). While the rituals were performed daily in the outer room and once a year in the inner room, we have Jesus, minus these rituals, interceding for us continuously (7:25).

These rituals are considered imperfect in that they were unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshippers (v 9). This is because the true barrier to our access to God is an inward problem and not a physical one. It exists in the conscience. Jeremiah's prediction which came to be fulfilled in Christ (8:8-12) assures us of such inward purity of conscience.

***Let our access to Jesus (prayer and worship) be spontaneous
for there is no longer any barrier that keeps us away.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 16, TUESDAY

Heb 9:1-28

The High Priest Who Sacrifices Himself

Heb 9:27

For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Heb 9:24

To enter the tabernacle, whether earthly or heavenly, requires sacrifice. There was no exception when Christ entered heaven itself (v 24), the greater and more perfect tabernacle (v 11). Christ sacrificed Himself (v 26b) by His own blood (v 12).

When we speak about the heavenly tabernacle, we are speaking about things in the spiritual realm. Heavenly things are heavenly realities in the spiritual realm. It definitely cannot be man-made and is not a part of this creation (v 11). It is a greater and more perfect tabernacle (v 11). Naturally the entrance to this 'place' requires better sacrifices than those made at the earthly tabernacle (v 13).

It is the general rule that ceremonial cleansing and atonement are effected by means of blood if they are to take away the sins of the people, for 'apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness' (v 22). The 'blood' component of the ceremony is for cleansing (vs 13-14, 19, 21-22) and is ultimately necessary for forgiveness (v 22). Thus, blood is required in God's covenant with His people (vs 18, 20) so that God can forgive the sins of His people. If indeed the life of a creature is in the blood (Lev 17:11), then Christ must also shed His blood (v 12) so that we may have life. It is a new life. It is a life in Christ because it is purchased by Christ's blood.

The sacrifice of Christ was a self-offering (v 14). He did it once for all (v 26). Therefore it is eternal and effective for all people. By His one act He became the mediator of a new and better covenant (v 15).

We ought also to offer ourselves to God even as we continue to enjoy this new life.

Mary Ann believed in God and His Son Jesus, but she struggled with why Jesus had to shed His blood to bring salvation. Who would think of cleansing something with blood? Yet the Bible says, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood" (Heb. 9:22). That, in Mary Ann's opinion, was disgusting!

Then one day she had to go to a hospital. A genetic condition had altered her immune system, and doctors became alarmed when the illness started attacking her blood. As she was in the emergency room she thought, If I lose my blood, I will die. But Jesus shed His blood so I can live!

Suddenly everything made sense. In the midst of her pain, Mary Ann felt joy and peace. She understood that blood is life, and a holy life was needed to make peace with God for us. Today she is alive and well, thanking God for her health and for Jesus' sacrifice on her behalf.

Hebrews 9 explains the meaning of the Old Testament blood ritual (vv. 16-22) and the once and for all offering of Jesus that brought animal sacrifice to an end (vv. 23-26). Bearing our sin, He willingly died and shed His blood to become our sacrifice. We now have confidence to enter God's presence. How could we ever thank Jesus enough for making His sacrifice our sacrifice, His life our life, and His Father our Father?

By: Keila Ochoa

Lord, I thank You for Jesus and for the shedding of His blood for me.

I want to live my life in gratitude to You.

The blood of Christ washes away our sins.

NOV 17 WEDNESDAY

Heb 10:1-39

The New Order

Heb 10:22-25

Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. Heb 10:9

The 'second' can be established only when the 'first' has been set aside (v 9b). The 'second' is made possible by the wholehearted obedience of Christ (vs 7b, 9a). The believer's sanctification is now made possible (vs 10, 14, 16b).

Christ and His new order are the good things, which had already come. Definitely these people under the Law knew nothing of these good things where pardon, certainty and peace dwell. The Law was but a shadow (v 1) and not the true form or the image. While they had the annual reminder of sins (v 3), we have a daily reminder of the imputed holiness, righteousness and the very presence of God (v 17, Rom 8:15).

John the Baptist declares that Jesus is 'the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world'. David also prophesies: 'A body you have prepared for me' and 'I have come to do your will, O God' (vs 5b, 7b). These are fulfilled in Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry respectively. All our sacrifices will come to nothing unless they are living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) made out of obedience and total devotion to God. This has to originate from our inward cleansing by Christ's sacrifice (v 10) and our secured and consecrated position, which Christ has already provided (v 14).

'It is done.' We must keep proclaiming this truth. There is no more remembrance of sin (v 17) as compared with the old covenant where there was an annual reminder of sins (v 3). Further, we now have the will and power to obey God because His laws are now in our hearts and minds (v 11) and not on stone tablets.

***The new order, accompanied by the Holy Spirit,
has made obedience (and sanctification) possible (Rom 8:15).***

P.R.A.Y

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NOV 17 WEDNESDAY

Heb 10:1-39

In The Hands Of God

Heb 10:22-25

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Hebrews 10:31

What the apostates did and thereby called judgment on themselves, we must not do. What the apostates did not do, we must do. Let the former be a warning and the latter be our motivation. Take note of the four 'let us' in verses 22-25 and act on them regularly. The 'new and living way' is already open to us. We are able to discern that we are now living in the 'last days' and we are given every knowledge of the things that we must do and the things that we must not do. The apostates rejected God's truth (vs 26-28); spurned God's Son (v 29a) and despised God's Spirit (v 29b).

We must take heed and be steadfast and joyful in suffering (vs 32b, 34). This is in line with God's will. As we continue in such manner, we must always remind ourselves that the Lord is not slow in keeping His promise (v 37b, 2 Pet 3:9). We must also realize that despite all the trials that befall us, it is primarily faith that pleases God (v 38b).

We have believed and are saved. Now we obey because we have been saved. We are always in the hands of God.

***May we always discern the hand of God in our life
knowing all the time that His mercy is great (2 Sam 24:14).***

Nowhere in the Bible does it say we must have our names on a church membership roll to be saved. That doesn't mean, however, that joining with other believers in a local church is not vital to our spiritual growth. Gathering regularly for worship and instruction encourages love for others, good works, and mutual accountability (Hebrews 10:24-25).

I read an interesting article some time ago that compared a Christian without a church to . . .

- a student who won't go to school
- a soldier without an army
- a citizen who won't vote
- a sailor without a ship
- a child without a family
- a drummer without a band
- a ballplayer without a team
- a honeybee without a hive
- a scientist who does not share his findings with his colleagues

If you have been neglecting one of God's greatest provisions for your spiritual growth, find a church that believes and teaches God's Word and start attending faithfully. Take time to get to know others and let them get to know you. Ask God to help you find ways to serve others.

Don't be a churchless Christian.

By: Richard DeHaan

***I love Thy church, O God!
I prize her heavenly ways—
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,
Her hymns of love and praise. —Dwight
Seven days without church makes one weak.***

NOV 18, THURSDAY

Heb 11:1-40

Living Faith

Heb 11:1

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. Heb 11:13

Faith can be described as living the future in the present. It is God's word that makes the future as real as the present. Promises and rewards belong to the future. Obedience, sacrifice, endurance, conviction, certainty, assurance, hope and joy belong to the present.

Let us consider those who have been faithful and be encouraged. Abel's better sacrifice revealed his devotion. Enoch pleased God. Noah heeded God's word with holy fear and obedience. Abraham was the father of the faithful. Even Sarah was considered faithful though she seemed to have wavered.

Let us live as sojourners and aliens in this world and seek always to please God (v 6). We too are certain of what we do not yet see (v 1 b). We are mere strangers on this earth in the same way as Abraham, who considered himself a stranger (v 9).

Let us fix our eyes constantly on our heavenly destination (v 16). By faith we know that it is a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God (v 10).

Let us keep the faith till the end (v 13a) and imitate the apostle Paul who 'kept the faith till the end' (2 Tim 4:7).

Let us learn from Abraham's greatest test. While we know that heaven is real and God's promises are real, we know also that trials and testing will come our way. Abraham faced the greatest test of his life in the sacrifice of Isaac. How could God's command clash with His promise? Nevertheless, Abraham, as the father of faith, obeyed and was rewarded.

When faced with the severest trial of your life, hold on tightly to God's promises.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 18, THURSDAY

Heb 11:1-40

Faith Works

Heb 11:1

God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect Heb 11:40

By faith and through faith these heroes of faith conquered fear (v 23), sharpened their vision (v 27), recognized their dependence on God, overcame difficulties, endured and accepted suffering with trust and confidence. Yet they belonged to the 'imperfect' old order (v 28). On the other hand we, who have received the new order (vs 39-40), must make it a point to remember that they and we together belong to the same divine plan.

Moses knew precisely what he wanted. He considered God's will and His eternal plan of greater value than the treasures of Egypt and was faithful till the end. Moses was sure of what he hoped for and looked ahead to his reward (v 26b; 11: 1a). He saw the invisible and was certain of what he did not yet see (v 27b, 11: 1b). Simeon, on the other hand, partially saw it (the arrival of the Messiah) and was exceedingly glad (Lk 2:30).

We ought to bow before the Almighty God. His mighty deeds include the judgment on the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea and the fall of Jericho (vs 28-30).

Among the other heroic feats (vs 32-34) we also see fearlessness in facing death because they knew that they were going to a better place. To die is gain (v 35b, Phil 1:21). The world was not worthy of them (v 38a). They looked to the eternal city. We do not only have everything accomplished for us. we also have the reality of the Holy Spirit in us.

We who belong to the new order ought to all the more live by faith and through faith achieve even more (Jn 14:12).

During a discussion of The Lord of the Rings movie trilogy, a teenager said he prefers his stories in books rather than movies. When asked why, the young man replied, "With a book, I can stay there as long as I want." There is something to be said for the power of lingering in a book, especially the Bible, and "inhabiting" the stories there.

Hebrews 11, often called "the faith chapter" of the Bible, mentions many individuals by name. Each of these people traveled a road of difficulty and doubt, but many of them chose to obey God. Scripture describes those who lived by faith in this way: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth" (v. 13).

How easy it is to rush through our Bible reading without pondering the people and events in the text. Our self-imposed time schedule robs us of going deeper into God's truth and His plan for our lives. Yet, when we are willing to stay awhile, we find ourselves caught up in the real-life dramas of people like us who chose to stake their lives on God's faithfulness.

When we open God's Word, it's good to recall that we can stay as long as we want.

By: David C. McCasland

***Father in heaven, thank You for Your written Word
and the examples of people who lived by faith.
Help us to follow You as they did.***

Linger in God's Word and you'll find stories of faith.

NOV 19, FRIDAY

Heb 12:1-29

The Father's Discipline

Heb 12:2

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Heb 12:9

Without discipline it is impossible to live a Christian life. We need discipline to run the race (v 1), to fix our eyes on Jesus in our struggle with temptations and weaknesses (vs 2, 4), to endure (v 7) and to submit (v 9). Rejoice and be exceedingly glad when you are being disciplined for it is from our Father in heaven and it is for good purposes (v 10).

Our response to discipline must be one of contemplation and understanding, seriousness and submissiveness in enduring. Discipline is bound to cause pain but in order for us to endure, we must know that it is for our own good and part of our personal pursuit of holiness, righteousness and peace. We must obey and not resent or rebel.

Jesus is our supreme example and therefore inspirer in that He learned obedience from what He suffered (5:8). We must be able to see in Jesus a devoted servant and a patient sufferer. While the Old Testament saints could inspire us (v 1b), it is Jesus alone who is able to help us. He always lives to intercede for us (7:25b). Let us then rid ourselves of all ensnaring sins (v 1b), be serious and wise (vs 5-6, Prov 3:11-12) in our Christian walk and daily make every effort to obey the Lord. Let us not be childish, immature, and irreligious like Esau.

***Christian discipline comes naturally
out of a Father and son relationship,
and if we submit, we shall live!***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 19, FRIDAY

Heb 12:1-29

The Basis For Worship

Heb 12:2

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. Heb 12:28

We do not belong to Sinai. We belong to Zion. We do not fear because we belong to the new order, which cannot be shaken. We look at Sinai and rejoice that we have witnessed its fulfilment in Zion. And we worship the Lord.

Moses and the people of Israel met God at Mount Sinai (vs 18-21, Exo 19-20). God's holiness and majesty were displayed dramatically. Though these may be unfamiliar to us we must always remember to come to God in a reverent manner.

Zion was a fortress in Jerusalem, the city of David (2 Sam 5:7) which was the earthly dwelling place of God during David's time. But we have with us the heavenly (or the spiritual) and not the earthly Jerusalem (v 22). We do not have the city of David but the city of the living God whose majesty is seen in the thousands of angels (v 22). The angels are ministering spirits (1:14) but then we will be worshipping God with them (v 22b). We come to Jesus, the judge and also the mediator of this new covenant. Abel's blood cries in protest while Jesus' blood cleanses all our sins and we are being presented clean and made holy.

While the heavenly Jerusalem is in the future (v 26) we are confident of receiving it (v 28). Our attitude should be one of gratitude and reverence. Let us lead a life of worship.

***Our destiny is clear and until then there is only one thing to do:
worship God and obey Him.***

In 1952 Florence Chadwick attempted to swim 26 miles from the coast of California to Catalina Island. After 15 hours, a heavy fog began to block her view, she became disoriented, and she gave up. To her chagrin, Chadwick learned that she had quit just 1 mile short of her destination.

Two months later Chadwick tried a second time to swim to Catalina Island from the coast. Again a thick fog settled in, but this time she reached her destination, becoming the first woman to swim the Catalina Channel. Chadwick said she kept an image of the shoreline in her mind even when she couldn't see it.

When the problems of life cloud our vision, we have an opportunity to learn to see our goal with the eyes of faith. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews urges us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith" (12:1-2). When we feel like quitting, this is our signal to remember not only what Jesus suffered for us but what He now helps us to endure—until the day we see Him face to face.

By: Dennis Fisher

***Dear Father, sometimes the challenges of life seem insurmountable.
Help me to fix my eyes on You and trust You.
I'm thankful You are bringing about Your good purposes in me.***

We can finish strong when we focus on Christ.

NOV 20, SATURDAY

Heb 13:1-25

Christ Does Not Change

Heb 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Heb 13:8

The changeless character of our Lord Jesus Christ affirms and encourages us to live a life of brotherly love, hospitality and contentment.

We have to persevere in love (v 1). Love needs perseverance as much as faith needs perseverance.

Hospitality (v 2), when fully displayed, results in love, kindness and compassion and we do well if we heed Christ's words: 'He who receives you receives me' (Matt 10:40-42). Further, make it a point to identify with the suffering members of the body of Christ (v 3).

Sexual immorality and love of money belong to the same category as the sin of covetousness (vs 4-5, Exo 20:17). A greedy person can never be happy, but the opposite of covetousness is contentment. 'However, this carefree contentment is not an irresponsible improvidence; it springs from an intelligent trust in God and acceptance of his promises' (vs 5b-6; Bruce, NICNT, page 374).

Every church has a beginning and a past and it is good to remember its pioneers of faith. If you have been long in the church, you would know someone who has faithfully completed the race. We should always emulate what they have done and thank God for them.

As we consider the past and the present and look towards the future (and frequently with fear), the changelessness of our Lord Jesus Christ stabilizes us. He is the past sacrifice, a present intercessor and the coming and final consummation.

***The earth may quake and the mountains tumble,
but fear not for our God is our ever-present help (Psa 46:1).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 20, SATURDAY

Heb 13:1-25

Our Lasting City

Heb 13:8

For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Heb 13:14

While the 'old city' (Jerusalem) has rejected Jesus (v 12a), we now look forward to the 'new Jerusalem', the heavenly city that is to come. Meanwhile, we must identify with Jesus to 'suffer outside the city gate'. We need to come out of our 'shelter' and 'safety' and to serve, worship, obey, submit and pray (vs 13-19).

Physical and material things such as ceremonial food and the earthly altar are of this world. We have the sacrifice of Christ signifying our 'altar' which speaks of faith and grace. And by faith we are receiving a city which is to come (v 14b) and it is unshakeable (12:28).

As the Jews felt secure inside the camp (Judaism), likewise, the followers of Jesus may feel secure in their comfort zone and dare not venture out to do great things for God. Therefore, we must constantly have the 'coming city' in view and continually worship Him and offer our sacrifice of thankful praise (v 15). This is to be accompanied by our unreserved and unashamed witness in acknowledging His name (v 15b) and in compassionate service (v 16).

There is no obedience without submission and vice versa (v 17). Whether leader or follower, we are all ultimately accountable to Jesus and we serve to please Him. A request for prayer is a sign of humility and dependence on God (vs 18-19). More so when we know that He is a God who gives peace and love (v 20). He is able to equip us (v 21) if only we will let him.

***The sooner a man realizes his mortality,
the sooner he looks to the city that is to come.***

When I think of all the wonders of God's magnificent creation, I am especially awed by the giant sequoia tree. These amazing behemoths of the forest can grow to around 300 feet tall with a diameter that exceeds 20 feet. They can live over 3,000 years and are even fire resistant. In fact, forest fires pop the sequoia cones open, distributing their seeds on the forest floor that has been fertilized by the ashes. Perhaps the most amazing fact is that these trees can grow in just 3 feet of soil and withstand high winds. Their strength lies in the fact that their roots intertwine with other sequoias, providing mutual strength and shared resources.

God's plan for us is like that. Our ability to stand tall in spite of the buffeting winds of life is directly related to the love and support we receive from God and one another. And then, as the writer of Hebrews says, we are to "do good and to share" (13:16). Think of how tough it would be to withstand adversity if someone were not sharing the roots of their strength with us.

There is great power in the entwining gifts of words of encouragement, prayers of intercession, weeping together, holding each other, and sometimes just sitting with one another sharing the presence of our love.

By: Joe Stowell

***Lord, thank You for entwining Your strength
into my life. Lead me today to someone
who needs the love of shared strength from
resources that You have given to me.***

Let the roots of God's love in your life be entwined with others who need your support.

NOV 21, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 John 1 - 5

The writer of this book is John the beloved disciple of Jesus. This book is one of his three letters written to the Christians of the early Church. He is also the author of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

Bible historians tell us that John was an old man when he wrote these books. He was concerned that heresies seriously distorting the truths regarding the person and teaching of Jesus were springing up and spreading. He took up his pen to refute such lies. He was writing as an eye-witness. He testified that he knew this Jesus personally. He ate and lived with Him for three and a half years. He heard His teaching, saw His miracles, and stood beneath the Cross and he touched the Resurrected Christ. Now, as an eye-witness, he maintains that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Messiah and He is the Son of God.

In this letter, John wrote to refute certain wrong teachings. He did not spell out the exact heresies, but generally we can conclude that these wrong teachings denied that:

- Jesus is the Christ
- He is the pre-existent Son of God
- He came in the flesh to provide salvation for all

2,000 years later, these heresies still prevail. From time to time we hear reports of some 'church leaders' (2:19) proclaiming that Jesus was a mere human religious teacher. They may even deny that humans have sinned against God.

Christians, take heart: Christianity is grounded firmly on accounts written by eye-witnesses (Lk 1:2, Jn 20:3 1, 2 Pet 1: 16).

In this Book, John instructs us to love God, love His commands, love our brethren and to love not with mere words but with action. Becoming a believer is not only to believe in the correct doctrines but to live out these beliefs in an appropriate lifestyle.

Loving God must lead to obeying God's commands and loving one another.

NOV 22, MONDAY

1 Jn 1:1-2:14

I Know Jesus

1 Jn 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

John's declaration (vs 1-4)

'I personally know this Jesus! I saw Him in action with my own eyes. I touched Him with my own hands. What I saw and what I heard convinced me beyond a shadow of doubt that this Jesus lived as a man. He lived more than a godly life: in fact, He is God.'

When events are erroneously presented, eye-witnesses step forth to refute the lies. Serious distortions of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ were spreading. This caused John to take a stand in the witness box. He gave his personal experiences with Jesus. He declared Jesus is the Christ, the pre-existent Son of God. This gives us confidence that when we read John's three Epistles, the book of Revelation and the Gospel, we know these are written by an eye-witness.

When we sin (1:5-10)

Do Christians sin? All humans have inherited the tendency to sin. All have sinned. And when we receive Jesus, we walk in the light. When we come near the light our sins are exposed: we are sinners and we have sinned. We cannot deny this.

Sin is serious but there is a solution (v 9)

God provides help. Read this assurance in verse 9: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' God did not only forgive our sins. He also wiped out the records. We become righteous in Christ and need no longer live in guilt. This is because Jesus Christ has paid the price on the cross to obtain pardon for our sins.

In the next nine days as you read 1 John, be reminded that you are reading a letter from a man who had lived with the Lord Jesus when He was on earth.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 22, MONDAY

1 Jn 1:1-2:14

Love Your Brothers and Sisters

1 Jn 1:9

Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

1 John 2:10

Ted is bitter. All his past labor in the church seems to have been in vain. Sok, the new leader, has changed everything without even the courtesy of consulting him. He is still smiling but can no longer relate to Sok like a brother any more. Ted is not living in the light.

Believers are children of God. If we live in the light, we obey God's commands. His command is this: love your brothers (and sisters too). Someone confessed: 'It is easy for me to love the world, but it's people that I can't stand.' San was broadcasting Christian messages into a third world nation. She developed a very tender spot in her heart for the listeners. Then she visited the country and came back in dismay. It took her a long while to regain that love. She had met rude, deceptive and godless people.

We must not hate our siblings. We may not hate, but we may harbour bitterness or dislike, or we may despise other Christians. This is walking in darkness. Is there someone in the fellowship that you cannot love? Read verses 9 and 11.

Verses 12-14 are a summary of the qualities of all believers, young and old. The apostle John tells them that they ought to know that their sins are forgiven, they have overcome the evil one and they are strong in the Lord because God's word lives in them. What is true for John's original readers is also true for us.

Lord, please forgive our sins and help us to love with Your love.

In today's passage, three groups of people stand out: children, friends and brothers. The apostle John uses these terms to describe the new community of believers that is part of the household of God. Christ Jesus is the founder member of this community of faith and everyone who believes in His finished work on the Cross may claim life-long membership. The hallmark of every member in this community is godly living, that is, a life that is characterized by love for one another (v 10). John calls this a new command of love in which there is no room for hatred. The mark of a true disciple of Jesus is one who is able to love others (Jn 13:34-35).

We are challenged today to come into this bond of love. Then God and His Beloved Son, Christ Jesus will reside in us and enable us to walk according to the dictates of love. Only such love can overcome the consuming ravages of hatred for those who have wronged us. The question today is: Should I give myself to loving God and my neighbours despite the temptations and difficulties that besiege me? Am I ready for Jesus to give my life a new direction ... a new focus?

***Loving God, help me to receive Your love, and to model
my life after the example set by Jesus.***

NOV 23, TUESDAY

1 Jn 2:15-3:10

Do Not Love The World

1 Jn 2:15-16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15

Newcomers into the workforce may find their colleagues difficult to handle. Some misunderstand the above Scripture as instructing Christians to avoid contact with the society outside the church walls. They then avoid the 'evil' world, and stay in the 'safe environment' inside the church.

When John wrote to warn the Christians not to love the world, he was not contradicting his own words in the Gospel 'God so loved the world ...' (Jn 3:16). In this passage, the world implies the world system, a system that operates without godly principles. The world lusts after physical pleasure, desires everything seen and takes pride in possessions (vs 2:16). The world that God loves (and we are to love) is the world that He created which includes people.

When we walk in the light, we will not be envious or desirous of the world's view of materialism. Our world view changes:

*'Things I loved before have passed away
Things I love far more have come to stay
When I give my heart to Jesus.'*

However, we must not avoid the world outside of the church walls. We are commissioned to go into the world to be the salt and light. God's people should be equipped and encouraged to minister to people in their offices, classrooms, homes and neighborhood. We should note that Jesus has set the example (Lk 19:7). See also His instructions for eating and drinking with pre-believers (Lk 10:7).

Love people but not the system of the world.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 23, TUESDAY

1 Jn 2:15-3:10

Antichrist

1 Jn 2:15-16

Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 1 John 2:18

'Bishop confesses Jesus is no god, resurrection is a fairy tale!' Headlines blare. Reporters love to interview so called 'church leaders' especially near the Easter season and gleefully splash such distortions across their tabloids. Christians need not be dismayed by these blasphemous modern heretic 'church leaders'. John has forewarned us about them.

John mentions two kinds of antichrist: the antichrist and many antichrists. The former is the Antichrist—the one predicted by prophecies: 'the abomination that causes desolation' as in Daniel 11:31 and the 'man of lawlessness' described by the apostle Paul in 2 Thes 2:1-12.

In this passage, John identified the many antichrists as false teachers who spread heresies. They deny that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. In a later portion, John adds that these antichrists also denied Jesus Christ is come in the flesh (4:2).

They denied that the man Jesus and the Eternal Son was fully God and fully man. They denied the incarnation: God becoming man and living among His creatures in order to bring salvation to them.

It is especially sad when the false teachers have come from the 'church'. John the apostle stated that they really do not belong to the people of God (v 19). He reminded the believers to remain faithful to his teaching and not be misled.

Pray that God will keep us faithful to Biblical truth. Pray for misguided 'leaders' that God will convict them of their wrongdoing and bring them back to the truth.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! 1 John 3:1

'Look! We are children of God!' We can almost hear this elderly apostle's exclamation coming through the pages. First, God saved us; then we are fully accepted and become children of God. Children of God! With it comes all the wealthy inheritance of the Heavenly Father's blessings. This love should vitalize us and propel us to a new level of identity, maturity and purity.

Oliver Twist, the beggar boy in Charles Dickens' classic, was brought into a rich man's mansion and treated as the young heir. What awesome wonder and joy! But that's nothing compared to our position in Christ. We are children of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ, given the rightful inheritance of all heavenly blessings. To fully appreciate our inheritance, read Eph 1: 18-23.

In Jesus there is no sin. Jesus has overcome evil and He has put the seed of righteousness into us and taken away our sins (v 5). But do Christians still sin? Unfortunately, Christians still sin (1:8-9). The difference is no one born of God will continue to sin, because Jesus the First-Born in the Family has put the seed of righteousness inside us. And the craving to sin will fade away (v 9). The good news is: staying away from sin does not depend on our determination and self effort. Concentrate on being a child of God, continue your walk in the light and the desire to sin will fade away.

Do not spend time just fighting temptation. Instead, draw close to God, walk in the light, focus on your rich inheritance as a child of God.

NOV 24, WEDNESDAY

1 Jn 3:11-4:6

Do Not Hate

1 Jn 3:18

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 1 John 3:23

Love. The apostle of love returns to this subject repeatedly.

'Love my brothers/ sisters? Easier said than done! But there are some that I just cannot love. Don't tell me to love Tim. He has hurt me badly. Not once, but repeatedly.' Lum was putting up a strong resistance to his cell leader's teaching on John's letter. Some of us may feel that John's call for us to love is not realistic. There are some people whom we just cannot love.

We need to understand that love is a command. We love not because people are lovable or we 'feel' like loving them. There are people who have really hurt us and treated us unfairly. These traumatic incidents have left bitter roots inside our hearts. So, before we can love, we must remove the bitterness. The remedy is forgiveness. Release forgiveness. Tell God in obedience to His command, you forgive the person and you do not want to be bitter anymore. When bitterness is removed through forgiveness, love comes supernaturally. It may take time but let the Lord work in you.

Don't hate! Cain murdered Abel because he was jealous of the latter's righteousness. He is a bad example; do not imitate him. Walk in the light and emulate Jesus' love. Jesus so loved us all that He laid down His life for us. Follow Him, walk in the light and love your brethren. Love must not be done with mere words. Love is action (Ja 2:15-17). When we love, our prayers are answered. We love because we are commanded to love. We love as an act of our will. When we start to love, the feelings will follow.

Lord, I cannot forgive because he / she has hurt me so deeply. But because You want me to love, so in obedience I release forgiveness to him/her. Now Lord I obey Your command to love him / her. Please create opportunities for me to show love to him/her.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 24, WEDNESDAY

1 Jn 3:11-4:6

Test The Spirit

1 Jn 3:18

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1

Not all supernatural signs and wonders are of God. Evil spirits can counterfeit the Holy Spirit's activities. Just as there are false teachers, there are also false prophets and false miracle workers. All spiritual activities must be tested (the Greek word 'test' includes 'examine', 'discern').

This is the test: only God's Spirit will acknowledge that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This can be a test to discern if a supernatural manifestation is of the Holy Spirit. Once, with confirmation from another leader, I had the occasion to test if a manifestation was of the Lord. I asked the question, 'Is Jesus Christ come in the flesh?' The reply clearly confirmed that it was an evil spirit that was causing the manifestation.

This test can also be used to examine teaching we hear. In China, a woman was preaching. She maintained that in the name of love it was permissible for a married man to court a young lady in her church. The question was put to her, 'Is Jesus the Christ, God come in the flesh?' She retorted, 'Of course not. Jesus is just a man, a good religious teacher.' Hence a false teacher was exposed.

While John reminds us to be aware of demonic supernatural powers, we need not fear them for the Holy Spirit who is in us is far greater in power than all other spirits. Evil spirits are no match against the power of God.

Praise God for His love, power and authority.

In today's competitive and self-centered world. Christians are commanded to show the world what love is. This very unique quality of brotherly love for one another is easier said than done. O how we have to struggle when relating to someone who has hurt us or betrayed our trust! So often we feel more alienated than loved! Yet God has shown us through the exemplary love of Christ Jesus for us, that even while we were sinners He died for us. So, despite the fact that we might have been wronged, we are called upon to forgive and love our neighbors.

With Jesus as the supreme example of this love, we are told to share our possessions with those in need and to put this love into action to testify to the truth (v 19). Such action will 'set our hearts at rest' (v 19).

When we love one another as He has commanded, then we truly live in Him (v 24). A missionary lady in India forgave the murderers of her husband and two sons and this beautiful act of forgiveness drew many more Indians to faith in Jesus. This is God's love set in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

When was the last time the Spirit urged you to pray for those who have harmed and wantonly used you? Lord, give me a forgiving and loving heart that my life may reflect Your wonderful, transforming love.

NOV 25, THURSDAY

1 Jn 4:7-5:21

Love Again and Again

1 Jn 5:11-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

Mary and Joyce are senior staff in a university administrative office. A strong sense of rivalry exists between these ambitious ladies. Joyce has become a believer. She struggled with this command of Jesus to love. Memories of past incidents of their combative behavior still hurt. One day, she decided to obey God to love. God provided an opening. On her way out of the office, she saw Mary. Joyce smiled and said softly, 'Good night, Mary.' The dark spirit of hurt fled. Subsequently, a restored friendship led Mary to Jesus Christ. They are now both loving sisters in Christ.

Love again and again. The apostle of love is never tired of exhorting us to do so. Legend has it that when John, old by now, was carried to different places, he was always heard murmuring, 'Dear children love, love. Dear children love one another.' As we read his letter written to rebuke heresies, we hear this word 'love' being repeated constantly.

We love because God first loved us by sending His Son to us. When we receive His salvation, love lives in us. With His love in us we cannot but love. When we love one another, we complete the circle of His love (v 12).

As we show love to our fellow colleagues or neighbors it demonstrates His love. This makes the people understand His love. On the other hand, heed this warning! If we do not love we do not know God (v 8). Anyone who does not love his brethren, whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (v 20). This is a command: whosoever loves God must also love his brother.

Lord, make me a blessing by sowing love everywhere I go.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 25, THURSDAY

1 Jn 4:7-5:21

Two Statements, Three Testimonies

1 Jn 5:11-12

He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 1 John 5:12

Two Statements (vs 1-5)

Jesus is the Christ

If we cannot and do not place our faith on this solid certainty we are not children of God. Only correct belief produces spiritual birth and a relationship with Christ as personal Savior.

Loving God must lead to Obedience to His commandments

Love that leads to obedience is the main focus of the apostle John.

Three Testimonies of Jesus' Divinity (vs 8-12)

The Doctrine of Incarnation states Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God. In those days, such a claim of divinity was punishable by death. The apostle made that claim for Jesus. He then provided three eye-witness incidents to substantiate his claim. He called them the testimonies of Water, Blood and the Spirit.

Water

At the water baptism of Jesus beside the River Jordan, a voice from Heaven declared: 'This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased' (Matt 3:17).

Blood

At the foot of the Cross, the Roman centurion who was the chief execution officer saw the blood of his condemned prisoner flowing down the probing spear which pierced His heart. He acknowledged, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' (Mk 15:39).

The Holy Spirit

He is the Spirit of truth and revelation. When Christians hear the truth, it is the Holy Spirit who moves in our hearts to accept and receive the truth. It is the witnessing of the Holy Spirit that leads us to believe in Jesus.

This prompting of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of man, the historical fact of Jesus' water baptism and the crucifixion, form a three-fold witness to the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

Lord, please help me to rejoice in my salvation. Let me be grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit who reveals this truth to me, so that I acknowledge You as my God, my Savior.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

The apostle John sums up his purposes for writing: that his readers may know Jesus and have eternal life. Eternal life is not to be enjoyed only in Heaven. There are privileges while we are still on earth:

- We can approach God in prayer, confident of an answer, provided we ask according to His will.
- God forgives our sin when we confess it (1:9). We can also restore fallen brethren by prayer.
- Persistence in intercession for family and friends will be rewarded. My wife began praying for her father when she was 14 and he accepted Christ as his Savior at the age of 90!

John closes with three essentials:

- Christians do not continue to sin
- Christians are to live godly lives
- Christians know the true God

His final instruction, 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols' (v 21) was not prompted by concern that his readers would worship figures of wood and stones. He was warning them to keep away from the false presentation of a distorted and unreal Christ.

Father, thank you for inspiring the apostle John to write this letter.

Please keep me pure. Help me to walk in the light and to obey Your commandments.

Overview of 2 & 3 John

Both epistles were written by John, the beloved disciple. He was one of the sons of Zebedee and together with his brother James were referred to by Jesus as the sons of thunder (Mk 3:17). From the Gospels, we can learn something about this man. He was full of energy, hence, the word 'thunder' was applied to him. He tended to be intolerant (Mk 9:38), vindictive (Lk 9:54), and ambitious (Mk 10:35-37). We can also deduce from his first epistle that John would have learnt the lessons on love from being in the Bible School of Jesus Christ during the three years he was with Him (1 Jn 3:14-18).

We need to read these epistles as letters written to people - 2 John to a lady and her children and 3 John to Gaius. Both epistles were written for believers - 2 John to warn against heresy and association with false teachers and 3 John to teach Christian hospitality. In 2 John, the main theme is a discussion on truth and error where the word 'truth' appears five times in the thirteen verses. Interestingly enough, the word 'love' also appears five times. In 3 John the focus is on three people namely Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius.

Today, we seem to have lost the art of letter writing in the midst of the advance of technology. The computer and the mobile phone are able to send messages to people. Yet, these modes of communication can sometimes be impersonal, as compared to a handwritten letter. As we study these two epistles, may we be helped regarding how to stand in defense of our faith when encountering false teachers (2 John) and how we can be a friend to other Christians in the true sense of the word (3 John).

NOV 26, FRIDAY

2 Jn 1:1-13

Truth Is A Person

2 Jn 1:6

... because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever. 2 John 2

In our world today, truth can be so relative or diluted through compromise. It is good to be reminded by John that truth lives in us and will be with us forever (v 2). This happens when a person realizes that Jesus is the only truth showing us the only true God. and we accept Him into our life as Savior and Lord. We know without a shadow of doubt that there can be no real truth except what is found in the Christian faith. Someone might argue that all religions lead to God. What then is our response? We hold fast to the truth that Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life concerning God (Jn 14:6).

When we know this truth in the Person of Jesus Christ, then it follows that we will desire to love others in the Body of Christ. This is God's command (vs 5-6). Yet the reality is that we do not see this happening in our churches today. The reason could be that most of us only give lip service to the truth.

The opposite of truth is falsehood and lies. As it was during John's time, so it is today that people deny the truth that Jesus came 'in the flesh' (v 7). The Jesus that John knew is the same Jesus who ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God (Heb 1:3). His human and divine natures are inseparable. If we do not hold fast to this teaching, we stand to lose the rewards for our hitherto faithful service. The stern warning follows that we are not to welcome people who spread lies about the Person of Jesus into our homes. Their one aim is to try and cause us to stumble in our Christian lives (vs 10-11).

Read verse 12. Is there someone you know who has been led astray from the truth of the Gospel? Perhaps a face-to-face meeting carried out lovingly will help draw the person back to Jesus.

P.R.A.Y

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NOV 26, FRIDAY

2 Jn 1:1-13

Stay In The Light

2 Jn 1:6

In this short letter the apostle John highlights two things, namely:

- love as the basis of our relationship with God and our relationship one with another; and
- the doctrine of the incarnation - that Jesus Christ the Son of God has come in human flesh.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6). All who belong to Jesus will walk in the truth of His Word. The command in God's Word is that we are to love one another just as Christ loved us and laid down His life for us. Love for God is more than a profession of our lips or an emotional response. It is evidenced by solid obedience to His commands. And God's command is that we conduct our relationships on the basis of God's love for us.

John then lays down the doctrine of incarnation - that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. He warns us of the deceivers and the antichrist who do not acknowledge that Jesus Christ has come in human flesh. The Gnostic heresy was that the Son of God did not become flesh but that He temporarily came upon the man Jesus between his baptism and crucifixion. The doctrine of incarnation is central to the Christian faith for the Son of God became man and offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for the remission of sins. The doctrine of incarnation cannot be compromised. John also warns against providing food and shelter for these false teachers who denied that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

What is the evidence of our love for God?

The story is told of a king who had a silver bell placed in a high tower of his palace early in his reign. He announced that he would ring the bell whenever he was happy so that his subjects would know of his joy.

The people listened for the sound of that silver bell, but it remained silent. Days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, and months into years. But no sound of the bell rang out to indicate that the king was happy.

The king grew old and gray, and eventually he lay on his deathbed in the palace. As some of his weeping subjects gathered around him, he discovered that he had really been loved by his people all through the years. At last the king was happy. Just before he died, he reached up and pulled the rope that rang the silver bell.

Think of it—a lifetime of unhappiness because he didn't know that he was warmly loved and accepted by his loyal subjects.

Like that monarch, many lonely souls live out their days without the joy of knowing they are loved and appreciated by others. Do you know people who need an encouraging word? If so, tell them how much they mean to you. It may be just what's needed to bring joy into their lives.

By: Richard DeHaan

***Someone gave me a cheering word,
Of which I was in need,
And faith was bolstered once again,
By just that tiny deed. —Sheldon***

The human spirit rings with hope at the sound of an encouraging word.

NOV 27, SATURDAY

3 Jn 1:1-14

Truth and Conduct

3 Jn 1:11

We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. 3 John 12b

When John wrote this letter, the Gospel had already spread throughout the Roman Empire and he was probably the only one of the original apostles left. It was of utmost importance to him that the truth of the Gospel be maintained and passed on to the generations to come. But he also knew that this would mean nothing if not translated into Christian conduct.

In this passage we read about Gaius whom John greeted as 'my dear friend, whom I love in the truth' (v 1). Gaius was not only true to the Gospel in belief but also in behavior. He had opened his home to visiting evangelists from John and provided for their needs although they were strangers to him (vs 5-7). Thankfully, there are still many people like Gaius today. The question is, are we one of them?

Demetrius was another example of a good Christian testimony (v 12). Not only was he faithful to the truth of the Gospel, he lived it out in his life - 'well spoken of by everyone' (v 12a).

Diotrephes, the third person mentioned was, however, a disappointment as a Christian. He was obviously very influential but he was using his influence for evil rather than good (v 11). He was hostile towards the apostle John and the 'brothers' sent by John to strengthen the church. Diotrephes slandered them and even put out of fellowship members of the church who wanted to welcome them (vs 9-10). He was self-centered rather than Christ-centered, wanting to exercise control at all costs. It must have been difficult for Gaius to endure the opposition he faced from Diotrephes. But the situation would not continue unchecked. John promised Gaius that and urged him to continue his good work (vs 9, 11, 13).

Again, we see that John ends this letter (vs 13-14) in the same way as in his second epistle (2 Jn 12) with the desire to see Gaius and talk face to face.

***Pray that we may seek to follow the examples of Gaius and Demetrius.
If there are traces of Diotrephes in us, let us come before God and seek His forgiveness.
May our conduct reflect our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 27, SATURDAY

3 Jn 1:1-14

Wanted : Men Like Gaius

3 Jn 1:11

Where there are people, there will be problems. Conflicts in church are nothing new, for the church is made up of sinners who are being changed by God into His likeness.

Hot water will soon reveal the quality of the tea. In 3 John, the occasion of testing was the arrival of an evangelistic team sent by John.

Gaius was known for his 'double faithfulness'. Firstly, he was faithful to the truth (v 3) and walked in the truth. This meant that he held fast to the Word of God and obeyed the commands in God's Word.

Secondly, he was faithful to what he was doing for the brothers in Christ (v 5). Note his wholehearted response to the ministry of the visiting team. His conduct was motivated by obedience to God's Word and his love for the brothers. Gaius' inner life was so shaped by God's Word that his soul was in good health (v 2). He had a generous spirit and a warm heart expressed by his hospitality and support for the servants of God. Such a life will always bring a good report (v 6) as members who have been blessed by him thank God for his life and service.

In contrast was another brother Diotrephes, a church leader. He indulged in idle and malicious gossip about the evangelists. He did not welcome God's servants or showed hospitality. Worst still, he prevented others from welcoming the evangelists.

The thrust of John's plea was that we are to imitate what is good and not what is evil. Acts of goodness originate from God while acts of evil originate from the evil one.

How do I support and encourage God's workers?

Bob and Evon Potter were a fun-loving couple with three young sons when their life took a wonderful new direction. In 1956 they attended a Billy Graham Crusade in Oklahoma City and gave their lives to Christ. Before long, they wanted to reach out to others to share their faith and the truth about Christ, so they opened their home every Saturday night to high school and college students who had a desire to study the Bible. A friend invited me and I became a regular at the Potters' house.

This was a serious Bible study that included lesson preparation and memorizing Scripture. Surrounded by an atmosphere of friendship, joy, and laughter, we challenged each other and the Lord changed our lives during those days.

I stayed in touch with the Potters over the years and received many cards and letters from Bob who always signed them with these words: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 1:4). Like John writing to his "dear friend Gaius" (v. 1), Bob encouraged everyone who crossed his path to keep walking with the Lord.

A few years ago I attended Bob's memorial service. It was a joyful occasion filled with people still walking the road of faith—all because of a young couple who opened their home and their hearts to help others find the Lord.

By: David C. McCasland

Thank You, Lord, for the people who have encouraged me to keep walking in Your truth. May I honor them by helping someone along that road today.

Be a voice of encouragement to someone today.

NOV 28, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Revelations 1 to 3

The word 'revelation' comes from the Greek word apokalupsis, meaning an unveiling. Revelation is the only book in the New Testament representative of a kind of literature which was very common between the Old and New Testament period called apocalyptic literature. It was the product of the indestructible Jewish hope that God will come again in judgment and restore His people to their rightful place in His kingdom. Thus it dealt with the events that would happen before this comes to pass and is entirely composed of symbolic language so that it would be unintelligible to the outsider.

Traditionally, Revelation is accepted as written by John the apostle of Jesus. He was exiled to the island of Patmos during the time of Emperor Domitian and it was there that he received Jesus' revelation for His church. The church was going through a terrible period of suffering and persecution under Domitian and more was yet to come in the future. It was during such a time that Jesus' revelation came to encourage, rebuke and to exhort His people to hold firm till the end. God still reigns in power and glory, and He promises that they would reign with Him if they remained faithful till the end.

John begins with a brief prologue (1:18) where he states that the origin of his work is Jesus Himself. The revelation is not about Jesus but from Jesus for the seven churches in Asia to show them what was to come. Commentators believe that although John was writing to the seven churches, the message is also to the whole church because the number 'seven', regarded by the Jews as the perfect number, runs all through the message of Revelation.

Every letter finishes with the words: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' The Spirit is still speaking to every church in every generation, including ours, if only we will pay heed and listen to Him.

NOV 29, MONDAY

Rev 1:1-20

Love Divine All Love Excelling

Rev 1:8

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Rev 1:5b-6

Karl Barth, the great German theologian, was once asked this question, 'Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?' This man, who had written tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put on paper, replied, 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'

At the end of his greetings to the readers of his letter (vs 4-5a), John broke into a doxology of praise to Jesus Christ. Why was John so swept up in his praise to Christ? To John, everything goes back to Jesus' love for us. It was because He loved us that He went to His death and became the faithful witness (v 5a), the supreme 'martyr' (the Greek term for 'witness') who died to free us from our sins. It was because He loved His people that He was giving His revelation to encourage them to remain faithful to the end.

Jesus loves us - that is the message of the Gospel and of the book of Revelation. That was the message that resonated in the lives of Barth and John. What comes to your mind when you hear these words: Jesus loves you and has freed you from your sins by his blood?' We need to regularly remind ourselves of what our life was like before we knew Christ - what He has freed us from and where we are now - and thus remind ourselves of how much He loves us. It is only in living lives overflowing with gratitude to Him, constantly remembering that He loves us, that we can keep faithful through our life's journey, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

'Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me?'

Why don't you spend some time to reflect on your life before you became a Christian?

What has Christ set you free from? Then take some time to thank and praise Him for loving you so much and for giving you this new life in Him.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 29, MONDAY

Rev 1:1–20

The Messenger and The Message

Rev 1:8

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches." Revelation 1:9-10a

There is a piece of Native American wisdom that says, 'No man can criticize another man until he has walked for a day in his moccasins.' Or to put it another way, a person can speak with greater authority on an issue when he has gone through that experience himself.

To be a messenger worth listening to, one must be a person who has lived out his message and has earned the right to speak. John introduces himself in his letter not by any official title, but as the hearers' brother and companion in suffering. He had earned the right because he had experienced all that his hearers were going through. He had suffered persecution, been banished to Patmos and most likely punished with hard labour there. Yet, with patient endurance he was still holding on to his faith and looking in hope towards the kingdom promised to him by his risen Lord.

John's message to the churches was to hold on to their faith and persevere till the end. What better messenger could Jesus send but John himself, who had earned the churches' trust and respect through the life he lived. He was faithful and steadfast even in the face of extreme suffering.

What about your life? Does your life reflect the message that you speak to others, whether it be in small or big things? Have you earned the right and the authority to speak into people's lives? When you ask for commitment, have you first committed yourself? When you speak about love, how much have you loved? Unless we are people who live out our message, our lives will never make much difference to the people around us.

Take some time to reflect on one area in your life that God might be showing you that you are not living out what you are expecting of others.

Talk to Him about what He would like you to do and how you can live out that change.

What's the greatest activity we can spend time doing? Worshiping God! Worship is not repeating hasty, routine petitions or listening to mood-inducing music. Worship is the experience of being "lost in wonder, love, and praise," as Charles Wesley wrote. It's awe that inspires adoration.

My first sight of the Grand Canyon left me speechless. The friend who had driven me there appreciated my reaction and stood silent beside me. I gazed in awe at this magnificent spectacle and thought, This is a glimpse of God's majesty. But my awe, by itself, was not worship.

My reaction is different when I come face to face with Jesus in the Scriptures. Awe changes into adoration as I behold Him in all His beauty. What grips my soul? His unsullied purity: "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). His unrivaled wisdom: "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:46). His unbounded pity: "When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion" (Matt. 9:36). And His overwhelming majesty: "He was transfigured before them" (Matt. 17:2).

As I see Jesus in the Gospels, my awe changes to adoration. I bow in worship and exclaim with Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

By: Vernon Grounds

***Behold Him there! The risen Lamb!
My perfect, spotless righteousness;
The great, unchangeable I AM,
The King of glory and of grace. —Bancroft***

True worship of Christ changes admiration into adoration.

NOV 30, TUESDAY

Rev 2:1-17

At What Cost

Rev 2:7,11,17

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance ... Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Revelation 2:2a, 4

Sometimes in our desire to do what we think is right in God's sight, we can become censorious and unable to tolerate the weaknesses or faults of others. In our self-righteousness, we become oblivious to the fact that our critical attitudes and actions are hurting the body of Christ. That was what happened to the church at Ephesus.

It was not easy to be a Christian in Ephesus. By far the greatest and wealthiest city in Asia, Ephesus was also the center for the worship of the goddess Artemis, and a notorious centre of pagan superstition, crime and immorality. The Ephesian church had to work hard to remain faithful to Christ, and to maintain the purity of the teachings of Christ. Paul had already forewarned the elders that 'savage wolves' would come in and distort the truth (Acts 20:29). However, somewhere along the way in their quest to maintain orthodoxy, they had either lost their love for their fellow Christians or their original devotion to God and enthusiasm for their faith (v 4). Their dedication and hard work were still there, doctrine was preserved but the love was gone. Heresy-hunting had killed their love for one another - orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of their fellowship.

Sometimes in our overzealousness to protect the faith, or our preoccupation with rules and forms, we tend to lose sight of the feelings of our brothers and sisters for whom Christ also died. They become 'enemies' to be straightened out, 'unspiritual' members to be corrected, rather than people to be nurtured and to walk alongside with. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are on the same side, precious to the same Lord who died for us.

We need to hear again Christ's call to us to remember, to repent and to love again as we used to do in the first place (v 4b).

Why don't you spend some time to pray about this for yourself, for your church, as well as other churches that you know of where there is a need for greater love and unity amongst their members?

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

NOV 30, TUESDAY

Rev 2:1-17

At What Cost

Rev 2:7,11,17

The Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, England, has a painting of a Roman soldier faithfully standing guard in ancient Pompeii. The painting was inspired by an archaeological discovery in Pompeii of an ashen-encased Roman soldier in full military gear. The volcanic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 covered that city in lava, capturing the people and their culture in a moment of time. The painting Faithful Unto Death is a testimony to the sentinel's continuing vigil even as his world was being engulfed in fiery death.

The church at Smyrna—a first-century congregation that suffered persecution for Christ—was challenged to be faithful unto death. Their spiritual commitment had not gone unnoticed by the Master (Rev. 2:9). And for the suffering that was to come, Jesus offered this encouragement: “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested . . . Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (v.10).

The Lord understands what we are going through now and what we will face in the future. Though there's suffering in this world, He promises eternal life to His children. In His strength we can be faithful unto death (Phil. 4:12-13).

By: Bill Crowder

***Though the stress and strain of life
My thread of faith may break,
The cable of God's faithfulness
No storm can ever shake. —Anon.***

Our faith may be tested so that we may trust His faithfulness.

She called herself a worrier, but when her child was hurt in an accident, she learned how to escape that restricting label. As her child was recovering, she met each week with friends to talk and pray, asking God for help and healing. Through the months as she turned her fears and concerns into prayer, she realized that she was changing from being a worrier to a prayer warrior. She sensed that the Lord was giving her a new name. Her identity in Christ was deepening through the struggle of unwanted heartache.

In Jesus's letter to the church at Pergamum, the Lord promises to give to the faithful a white stone with a new name on it (Rev. 2:17). Biblical commentators have debated over the meaning, but most agree that this white stone points to our freedom in Christ. In biblical times, juries in a court of law used a white stone for a not-guilty verdict and a black stone for guilty. A white stone also gained the bearer entrance into such events as banquets; likewise, those who receive God's white stone are welcomed to the heavenly feast. Jesus's death brings us freedom and new life—and a new name.

What new name do you think God might give to you?

By: Amy Boucher Pye

***May I live out my new identity, sharing Your love and joy.
Show me how You have made me into a new creation.***

Followers of Christ have a brand-new identity.

DEC 1, WEDNESDAY

Rev 2:18-3:6

Wake Up

Rev 2:19; 3:1b

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. Rev 3:1b-3a

Socrates said at his trial for heresy that the unexamined life is not worth living. He was on trial for encouraging his students to challenge the accepted beliefs of the time and to think for themselves. If we do not take time to examine our life and the life of our church, we can wrongly assume that things are going on well when in actual fact they might not be.

Like its city, Sardis, which had grown wealthy but had sunk into moral decadence, the church also had all the outward trappings of life and activity but had sunk into spiritual death. Unlike the other churches, it was not facing any danger from Caesar worship or persecution and slander from the Jews, or even heresy from within. With nothing to spur them to be vigilant, the people grew content with their normal church life with all the right forms and activities of religiosity. Jesus, however, warned the church to wake up and to be watchful.

That was what their city had failed to do, twice in its history. Thinking they were impregnable, the people failed to be vigilant and had fallen into enemy hands. Jesus thus called the church to remember and to examine themselves to see how they had fallen short and to make amends. They could not afford to delude themselves into thinking that everything was fine.

The New Testament emphasizes the need to be watchful as Christians. Unless we take time to examine our lives and the life of our church, we can easily be lulled into a false sense of complacency.

**Which areas of your life need to be revived or strengthened?
What will you do about it?**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 1, WEDNESDAY

Rev 2:18–3:6

What's Wrong?

Rev 2:19; 3:1b

The 17-year-old young man is nearly everything a parent could ask for in a son. He is loving toward his siblings. He chooses good friends, and he shows concern for those who are not part of his inner circle. He does his share of the work at home, and he holds down a parttime job, while keeping up his grades.

There is one problem though. He seems to become a different person when he gets behind the wheel of a car. One day he pulled out of a parking lot with such carelessness that he almost ran into two people standing by a parked car. What were his parents supposed to do about this? Should they overlook his recklessness in light of all his good qualities? Or should they confront him with this flaw in his character?

In Revelation 2, the Lord addressed the problem of disobedience in His children. Even if most areas of our Christian life are in line with His will, this doesn't mean He will overlook those that are not. The point at which we knowingly disobey God is exactly where our faith needs to be reexamined. Our Father is patient and understanding, yet He takes our unfaithfulness seriously.

In the matter of spiritual growth, the issue is not just what I am doing right, but what I am doing wrong.

By: Mart DeHaan

***Consider what you're doing right— Thank God for His direction;
Consider what you're doing wrong, Then make complete correction. —Hess***

Sin will add to your trouble, subtract from your energy, and multiply your difficulties.

It happened more than 30 years ago but it still hurts. During a period of spiritual rebellion, I ran into a young man I had introduced to Christ. He was stunned to discover that I had walked away from the Lord and was no longer the person he had known. It is one of my most regretted experiences, and I still pray for an opportunity to make it right with him.

During those wandering years, I would have fit in comfortably as a member of the First Church of Sardis (Rev 3:1-6). My dilemma, like theirs, was that people thought I was the person I used to be.

The risen Lord confronted the church in Sardis: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God" (Rev 3:1-2).

Their reputation for being alive didn't match reality. They were spiritually dead. But there was still hope. The Lord told them to wake up and fan the spark of spiritual life still in them. "Hold fast and repent," He warned (v.3).

Pretending to be what we aren't is a heavy burden to bear. Our Lord calls us to lay it down, repent, come back to Him, and live.

By: David C. McCasland

***O Lord, return to me Your power
That once by grace I knew;
Forgive the sin that grieved Your heart,
And help me to be true. —Anon.***

No matter how far you've run from God, He's only a prayer away.

DEC 2, THURSDAY

Rev 3:7-22

Holding On

Rev 3:20

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no-one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Rev 3:11-12a

The city of Philadelphia had an interesting custom to honor its citizens. When a person had served the state well or when he had left behind a noble record as a magistrate, priest or public benefactor, the city would erect a pillar in one of the temples with his name inscribed upon it. All who came to worship in the temples would see and remember him. When Christ promised to make the person who stands firm to the end a pillar in the temple of His God, the church understood what He was saying - God would accord them the highest honor when they meet Him face to face.

Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia was all praise. In the later days when Islam swept across Asia Minor, Philadelphia stood for many years as a bastion of Christianity. When it fell, it was not because of weakness or lack of courage. It fell because it was betrayed by the Christians of Byzantium who were jealous of its honor. The Philadelphian church did not have much strength (v 8) but with what little it had, it kept faithful. That was all that Christ required of them and He praised them for it. He did not ask or expect of them what they could not give.

If Jesus were to write a letter to you now, what would He say? If He were to write to your church, what would He say? The Philadelphians had little strength but they persevered in faithful obedience (v 10). How are you responding in the face of the difficulties or issues that you or your church members are going through? Or even if there are no issues, are you still 'hot' and not 'lukewarm' like the Laodiceans?

Read through the passage again slowly and hear the Lord's words to you.

Write a letter to yourself in the words that Jesus might say to you.

And respond to Him accordingly.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 2, THURSDAY

Rev 3:7–22

Hold On

Rev 3:20

A cowboy friend of mine who grew up on a ranch in Texas has a number of colorful sayings. One of my favorites is “It don’t take much water to make good coffee.” And when someone ropes a steer too big to handle or is in some kind of trouble, my friend will shout, “Hold everything you’ve got!” meaning “Help is on the way! Don’t let go!”

In the book of Revelation we find letters to “the seven churches in the province of Asia” (chs. 2–3). These messages from God are filled with encouragement, rebuke, and challenge, and they speak to us today just as they did to the first-century recipients.

Twice in these letters we find the phrase, “Hold on to what you have.” The Lord told the church at Thyatira, “Hold on to what you have until I come” (2:25). And to the church in Philadelphia He said, “I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown” (3:11). In the midst of great trials and opposition, these believers clung to God’s promises and persevered in faith.

When our circumstances are harsh and sorrows outnumber joys, Jesus shouts to us, “Hold everything you’ve got! Help is on the way!” And with that promise, we can hold on in faith and rejoice.

By: David C. McCasland

***Lord, we cling to Your promise, expect Your return,
and hold on with confidence as we say, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”
The promise of Christ’s return calls us to persevere in faith.***

It’s easy to think of God as a divine fly-swatter, just waiting for you to land so that—whap—He can nail you for your sins. But that’s not what we see in Revelation 2–3 in His letters to the seven churches. The pattern of the letters demonstrates God’s loving heart for wayward people.

Jesus began many of these letters by affirming the good things His people had done. This shows us that when we do what is good and right, the Lord is pleased.

But Jesus is also concerned about the faults in our lives. His commendation in these letters was often followed by clear words of reproof. And while it’s not comfortable to hear Him say, “Nevertheless I have this against you” (2:4; see vv.14,20), He reveals what needs to be changed in our lives to keep us from self-deceit.

This moves us to the real heart of the matter—repentance. When the Lord told these churches to repent, He was revealing His love for wayward saints. His goal was not to condemn but to restore them to intimate fellowship with Him.

And don’t miss the fact that each letter ends with a specific promise for the “overcomers.” Clearly God desires to reward those who live lives that are pleasing to Him.

What’s He saying to you today?

By: Joe Stowell

***To live a life that pleases Christ, It’s crucial to obey His voice;
When He reveals our sin to us, Repentance is the wisest choice. —Sper
Repentance restores and renews our intimacy with the Lord.***

Overview Of Revelation 4 - 22

Many Christians are reluctant to get into the book of Revelation while there are some who cannot get out from the book! Yet the Bible would be incomplete without it. God's story has a definite ending. The world is much more than the present situation that we are living in. There will be a new Heaven and a new Earth at the end of history.

This knowledge is reassuring to all of us who live in a fallen world. The world's economic and political systems have no answer but merely provide 'band-aids' to mend the brokenness in society and the environment. Only the promises in the book of Revelation offer the final solution when there will be no more tears, pain and death. There will be a happy ending after all in the long-drawn drama of world history. Our 'super hero' Jesus Christ will win in the end!

The book of Revelation does not gloss over the disasters and tragedies which will take place. In fact, many of the prophecies have come to pass and more will occur. Christians need not be ignorant of or surprised at the forthcoming events. We should prepare ourselves, keeping our faith strong, and be ready to face any eventuality. Tribulations will come, great and small, whether one believes the 'rapture' will occur before or after the Great Tribulation. Praise the Lord if we are taken out of the Great Tribulation, but it would be foolish if we are not prepared for it. We have the assurance that the Lord Almighty will see us through.

The book of Revelation has led to considerable controversy among many churches and Christians especially when attempts are made to interpret literally the various prophecies. Many of the descriptions are symbolic and the meanings of the numbers and visions have been subjected to various interpretations. We need not be bogged down by trying to decipher many of the symbols and numbers. We can remain faithful by relying on the plain understanding of the underlying messages that God is wanting to inform and warn His children.

John wrote that much blessing will come to those who read the book of Revelation. May God bless us all as we read His word.

DEC 3, FRIDAY

Rev 4:1-11

Glory to the Lord God Almighty

Rev 4:11

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Rev 4:11

Have you ever seen some wonderful scenery and then tried to describe what you saw? Even poets and artists can hardly do justice to describe or paint, for example, the panoramic beauty of a sunset over the mountains. How much more difficult it was for John when he tried to describe the splendors of Heaven with its multifaceted dimensions of visions and sounds.

Before John was told 'what must take place after this', he was given a glimpse of the awesomeness of the dwelling place of the Almighty God. Human words could barely give an adequate description to the overwhelming grandeur of Heaven. So, John had to use imperfect descriptions: he wrote of the glitter of precious stones, the myriad colours of the rainbow and the shekinah glory accompanied by flashes of lightning as well as blazing lamps together with thunderous sounds.

The majesty of the Lord God deserves the continuous worship of all His creation. This is symbolized by the twenty-four elders representing the people of the Old and the New Covenants and the four living creatures representing all that God has created.

It is proper for us to first acknowledge the Creator of all beings and the Controller of our world's history. The famous songwriter Fanny Crosby had a dream in which she saw heaven. In spite of her blindness, she was able to glorify God in the more than 8000 hymns she wrote. We should be continually praising and worshipping the Lord Almighty.

***History is HIS STORY - all glory and honor and power unto HIM.
Let us reflect on the amazing wonders of the heavenly realm.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 3, FRIDAY

Rev 4:1–11

Holy, Holy, Holy

Rev 4:11

“Time flies when you’re having fun.” This cliché has no basis in fact, but experience makes it seem true.

When life is pleasant, time passes all too quickly. Give me a task that I enjoy, or a person whose company I love, and time seems irrelevant.

My experience of this “reality” has given me a new understanding of the scene described in Revelation 4. In the past, when I considered the four living creatures seated around God’s throne who keep repeating the same few words, I thought, What a boring existence!

I don’t think that anymore. I think about the scenes they have witnessed with their many eyes (v.8). I consider the view they have from their position around God’s throne (v.6). I think of how amazed they are at God’s wise and loving involvement with wayward earthlings. Then I think, What better response could there be? What else is there to say but, “Holy, holy, holy”?

Is it boring to say the same words over and over? Not when you’re in the presence of the one you love. Not when you’re doing exactly what you were designed to do.

Like the four creatures, we were designed to glorify God. Our lives will never be boring if we’re focusing our attention on Him and fulfilling that purpose.

By: Julie Ackerman Link

***Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity! —Heber***

A heart in tune with God can't help but sing His praise.

Once during her reign, England’s Queen Victoria listened to a chaplain preach a sermon about the second coming of Christ. Those near the royal box noticed that the queen’s eyes were filled with tears.

When the service ended, she asked to see the chaplain alone. Seeing her great emotion, he asked why she was so moved. She replied, “Because of what you said about the coming again of the world’s rightful King, I wish still to be here when He returns that I might lay my crown at His blessed feet!”

There are many incentives for faithful service that involve both our acts and our motives. These rewards, which are designated as “crowns” in the New Testament, are to be earned by those who have first received the gift of eternal life.

Perhaps you’re saying, “I would never expect to be rewarded for what I do for Christ.” Have you considered what you may do with any crown you receive on that day? There will be no trophy cases in heaven; no gloating over earthly accomplishments. Redeemed sinners will have the transcendent joy of casting their crowns before the throne and saying, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power” (Revelation 4:11).

By: Paul Van Gorder

***Crown Him with many crowns,
The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
All music but its own! —Bridges***

Heaven’s crowns are not for keeping but for casting at Christ’s feet.

DEC 4, SATURDAY

Rev 5:1-14

Worthy Is the Lamb

Rev 5:9-10

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Rev 5:9

Important legal documents are always stamped and sealed to certify their authenticity, to be revealed only by authorized officials. The scroll with seven seals that John saw is thought to be the title deed to the ownership of the created world. This world is being reclaimed by the Lamb who is now glorified in Heaven with All-Power and All-Wisdom and All-Presence as symbolised by the seven horns, seven eyes, and seven spirits.

It is obvious that the one who is worthy to redeem the title deed of the creation is the Lord Jesus. He is the sacrificial Lamb whose body was broken and whose blood was poured out. We are now redeemed from our sins and appointed as royal priests to serve our God and to reign with Him on earth. All the suffering on the cross had not only been rewarded at the resurrection but also proven that Christ more than deserves His role as the new ruler of our world.

It is heartening to know no people group will be left out. In his vision, John saw peoples from all nations praising the Lord in all the languages of the world. No special racial group or nation has been singled out. The redeemed humanity has been set aside as saints; offering constant prayers filling golden bowls of incense, they, together with hosts of angels praise the Lamb forever and forever.

***Come let us sing, 'Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is Your Name
for it's Your Blood that cleanses me and gives me Life.'***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 4, SATURDAY

Rev 5:1-14

Praiseworthy

Rev 5:9-10

The Grand Rapids Symphony Orchestra and Symphonic Choir were presenting their annual Christmas concert. Near the conclusion, they were joined by the 4,000 members of the audience in singing, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King." I got chills when we sang the words, "And heaven and nature sing."

Despite the magnificence of that moment, it was but a faint shadow of the praise that will be raised to the Lamb in heaven. Jesus is worthy of the adoration and praise of all beings: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Revelation 5:12).

In Revelation 5, we read John's description of a widening circle of praise to the Lord. It begins with "four living creatures and the twenty-four elders" (v.8). They are joined by angels numbering "ten thousand times ten thousand" (v.11).

But that's not all. Every creature in heaven, on earth, and in the sea will one day sing, "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (v.13).

You don't have to wait for that day to sing praise to the Lamb. He is worthy of your praise right now!

By: David C. Egner

***Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains, Repeat the sounding joy. —Watts***

Praise is the overflow of a joyful heart.

Helen Roseveare, an English missionary physician in the African Congo, was taken prisoner by rebels during the Simba Rebellion in 1964. Beaten and abused by her captors, she suffered terribly. In the days that followed, she found herself asking, "Is it worth it?"

As she began to ponder the cost of following Jesus, she sensed God speaking to her about it. Years later she explained to an interviewer, "When the awful moments came during the rebellion and the price seemed too high to pay, the Lord seemed to say to me, "Change the question. It's not, 'Is it worth it?' It's 'Am I worthy?'" She concluded that in spite of the pain she had endured, "Always the answer is 'Yes, He is worthy.' "

Through God's grace at work within her during her harrowing ordeal, Helen Roseveare decided that the Savior who had suffered even death for her was worthy to be followed no matter what she faced. Her words "He is worthy" echo the cries of those surrounding Jesus' throne in the book of Revelation: "In a loud voice they were saying: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!' " (5:12).

Our Savior suffered and bled and died for us, giving Himself entirely, so that we may freely receive eternal life and hope. His all deserves our all. He is worthy!

By: James Banks

***How does Jesus' death and resurrection prove He's greater than any circumstance you face?
In what ways will you tell Him He's worthy today?***

*You are always worthy to be worshiped, Jesus!
Please help me to live today in Your presence with a grateful heart.*

DEC 5, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 6, MONDAY

Rev 6:1-8:5

No More Tears

Rev 7:9

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev 7:14

Christians in the West have many different interpretations of the prophecies in the book of Revelation. However, many believers who live in Asian countries where they are constantly under persecution will find one great purpose in what had been revealed to John. Many have experienced many of the consequences of the disastrous events described as the Great Tribulation such as wars, famines, diseases and death (as graphically depicted by the four horsemen). Not surprisingly, many of the victims are crying out to the Lord for judgment and vengeance (6:10) for the suffering they had gone through because of the word of God and the testimony they had faithfully maintained (6:9). Christians are being martyred even today in many Asian countries.

Many believers continue to hold on to the faith because of the numerous promises in the Bible, especially those written in the book of Revelation. They know that one day a great multitude will come out of the Great Tribulation (7:14-17) and be washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They will stand before the Heavenly Throne, never to hunger or thirst again, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. What comfort! What joy! They may not escape the tribulation but they will not die in vain for their faith.

We can pray and hope that we be spared from the disasters of the Great Tribulation but we should be prepared. Then when troubles and suffering come upon us, we shall remain as faithful as the martyrs, both in the past and the present. As the seventh seal is being opened we wait in meditative silence.

**Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength
be to our God forever and ever. Amen**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 6, MONDAY

Rev 6:1–8:5

Talking To the Rocks

Rev 7:9

Rocks don't usually get the benefit of human conversation. Not many people walk by and say, "Hi, Rock. How ya doin'? Get around much these days?"

The day is coming, however, when people will not only talk to rocks, they will cry out to them. It's described in Revelation 6, when the sixth seal of God's judgment is opened. During the first four judgments, the four horsemen of the apocalypse ride forth. When the fifth seal is opened, the martyrs in heaven ask God how long until their deaths are avenged.

When the sixth seal is broken, a mighty earthquake shakes the earth, and violent celestial disturbances involving the sun, moon, and stars take place (vv.12-13). World leaders and ordinary citizens cry out to the rocks and mountains, "Fall on us and hide us from . . . the wrath of the Lamb!" (v.16).

This passage is describing the future day of God's wrath when He will punish the nations for their wickedness. "Who is able to stand?" asks the writer (v.17). The answer: "No one."

God is compassionate and patient (Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4). But one day His wrath will be unleashed with such fury that not even the rocks will be able to hide those who deserve His just punishment.

By: David C. Egner

How To Avoid The Wrath Of God

Admit to God that you are a sinner (Romans 3:23).

Believe that Jesus died for you (1 Corinthians 15:3).

Call on the living Christ to save you (Romans 10:9).

To escape God's wrath, embrace God's love.

In the comic strip BC, a cave man stood before a rock labeled "Exchanges." He complained to the person in charge of exchanges, "My calendar watch won't budge." The other man replied, "I don't wonder. I'm not too choked up about moving into the next year myself."

We can all understand his pessimistic outlook. Tomorrow often does look dark. But the real question is: "What lies beyond midnight?"

John, the writer of Revelation, was in exile on the Island of Patmos. He wrote to people threatened with persecution for their faith. They probably weren't too eager to move into the future.

To help them, and us, face what lies ahead, John painted a picture of our ultimate future. In the presence of God, Christians will "neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat" (Rev. 7:16). And "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (v.17). What comfort that holds for us!

Someone has noted, "The only thing we know about the future is that the providence of God will be up before dawn." As we face what lies ahead, we can count on that. Hope in the God of all our tomorrows provides optimism for the future and gives strength for today.

By: Haddon W. Robinson

Children of yesterday, heirs of tomorrow,

Look at your fabric of labor and sorrow;

Seamy and dark with despair and disaster,

Turn it, and—lo! The design of the Master. —Lathbury

Even in the bleakest times, Christians have the brightest hope.

DEC 7, TUESDAY

Rev 8:6-9:21

Woes and More Woes

Rev 9:6

The rest of mankind that were not killed by the plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands, they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. Rev 9:20-21

Many people often wonder how a loving God could impose such severe judgment on the world and its population as described so tragically in Revelation. There will be such great destruction to the land and vegetation, to the seas and its creatures, and to the poisoning of many people until even the skies will be shaken.

Those people who are not under God's protection (9:4) will be inflicted with such pain that they will prefer to die. The instruments of suffering described as scorpions from the Deep seem to resemble the weapons of mass destruction, led by their leader called the Destroyer. The metal horses described could also be visions of the modern machines of warfare which John, living 2000 years ago, vainly tried to describe with his limited knowledge. Much of the destruction will be caused by the devil and evil men bent on war and destruction.

Even with such ominous warnings, the people will still refuse to repent from their evil, immoral and idolatrous ways. Our God, who is All-Loving, is also HOLY and JUST. Unrepentant evildoers who continue to commit their nefarious deeds will not go unpunished.

**Let us remember that our God is good.
He tempers His perfect Holiness with ultimate Love.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 7, TUESDAY

Rev 8:6–9:21

Unshakeable

Rev 9:6

We live in the age of the atomic bomb—an age of fear. The usually calm leaders of science and diplomacy are shaken and frankly pessimistic about the future. It is remarkable that some modern-day scientists have taken over the preachers’ prerogative and have become prophets of doom!

Professor Otto Hahn, intimately associated with the splitting of the first uranium atom, warned that just 10 cobalt-hydrogen bombs could “destroy all life” on this planet!

Man has created an atomic Frankenstein with the destructive potential to fulfill all the cataclysmic judgments prophesied in such Bible passages as Revelation 16:17-21, or the equally fateful words of Revelation 8:7-9, “A third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. Then . . . a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.”

In an age like this, only one thing is guaranteed to be unshakable. There is only one place to put our confidence—the Word of God—knowing that it “will by no means pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Have you built your spiritual house on the Bible’s abiding truths?

Sin is more than a bad decision made at the moment.

Most of the time, sin stems from a pattern of behavior we aren’t addressing. It’s rare that we don’t know something is sinful or recognize we were entertaining sin. Most of the time, we know better. We just refuse to be honest with ourselves or those who will hold us accountable.

How many times have we told only half of a story or sugarcoated our actions to avoid being told we were in the wrong and at fault for what happened? The more we excuse our behavior or overlook where we are, the more second nature sin becomes.

This is what happened to the people in Revelation 9.

Revelation 9:20-21 says, “The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

Their sin didn’t happen overnight. It was a pattern of behavior developed over time. They avoided accountability, and it led to destruction.

We can move past our sin if we’re willing to confess our sin to other believers and change our behavior. James 5:16 says; “admit to one another that you have sinned. Pray for one another so that you might be healed.”

God sent someone to heal all of us from sin. His name is Jesus, and His death on the cross paid for our sins: past, present, and future. If you’ve asked Jesus into your heart, you don’t have to live in sin anymore. If we admit that we’ve sinned, Jesus promises to forgive our sins and give us a new beginning (1 John 1:9).

Reflect:

1. **How have you seen sin leave long-term effects on your relationships? your finances? your walk with Jesus?**
2. **Is there anything in your life you know does not honor Jesus and needs to change? What is it?**

DEC 8, WEDNESDAY

Rev 10:1-11

Sweet and Sour Words

Rev 10:10

"There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Rev 10:6-7

The final plan of God will be fulfilled very soon. Throughout history numerous warnings have been given through the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures. In the last days, stronger warnings will be sounded. Yet many people will not repent. God's patience will be stretched to the limit even as His mercies 'endureth forever.'

God still has one more revelation of the little scroll which He has sent through another mighty angel for John to receive, read and meditate on. John has to digest its meaning and then to continue to prophesy and warn the people, especially the rulers from many nations.

Like John, many of us may find the word of God sweet at first when we first read it. However, when we really understand the implications and when we realise that we have to obey and respond to God's word, we may find it difficult to digest. Yet it is not enough to just taste the sweetness of His word. We need to act on it. Like John, we have to share God's word by sharing the Gospel with our friends. We have to advise and warn others of God's holiness and judgment of sin.

**Let us continue to read the word of God and understand its meaning and implications,
until we are moved to act on them.
Be doers of the God's word and not just hearers of it.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 8, WEDNESDAY

Rev 10:1–11

How much do you need to know?

Rev 10:10

Have you ever watched a movie and at the end of a scene you think to yourself, “What just happened?” You either rewind and replay to try to make sense of the events, or you turn to someone and ask them to explain.

That’s probably how John felt in Revelation 10. An angel appears, speaking loudly and holding an important scroll. When he goes to take notes, he’s told to stop. When he’s handed the scroll, he’s told to eat it.

The content of the scroll is never revealed, but what we learn from this exchange is important. It wasn’t time for Jesus’s return, but He would be coming soon. There will be no more delay, and the mystery of God will be accomplished (Revelation 10:6-7).

Throughout history, people have wondered about the end of the world, and God reveals some of that in Revelation. We don’t get the details about when Jesus will come back or what the afterlife will entail. But we do know that God wants us to be ready (Revelation 10:11).

The best preparation for Jesus’ return is to truly examine where we’ve put our faith. If our faith and trust are in Jesus, we have nothing to fear because the end of this world means the start of forever with Him!

But if we’re looking to anyone or anything else for our peace, security, or hope, we’re investing our lives in the wrong places. That’s the reason this word was sweet in John’s mouth and sour in his stomach. For the believer, God’s word brings encouragement. But for the non-believer, God’s word is a promise of judgment that’s coming.

Reflect:

- 1. If Jesus came back today, do you know that you would go to heaven?**
- 2. Why or why not?**
- 3. Do you tend to crave details or go with the flow?**
- 4. How do you balance trusting God with the need to know everything?**
- 5. Does it give you peace to know that God understands and sees more than we do? Why or why not?**

DEC 9, THURSDAY

Rev 11:1-19

The Battle Between Good & Evil

Rev 11:15b

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Rev 11:15

The battle between good and evil will continue till the last days. The two heroes described remind us of Elijah and Moses with their great powers. They will come with the oil of anointing (two olive trees) and the light of the word (two lamp stands). They will prophesy for three and a half years. However, as throughout history, they will be opposed by the evil one from the Deep.

They will be martyred like many of their predecessors. To the unrighteous people, prophets will always be seen as a threat to their lifestyle. Thus, they will silence these prophets of doom. The fact that the dead bodies of the two prophets will be seen all over the world suggests that by that time, the international media with satellite TV will be sophisticated enough for this to be possible.

God, however, will deliver His prophets from death and will bring them back to reign with Him. The seventh, and the last, trumpet will herald the defeat of the wicked world systems and the coming of the eternal Divine Kingdom under the rule of our Lord.

The nations that have rebelled against God will face His wrath accordingly. Those who have destroyed the earth will receive the punishment they deserve. However, those who have served God faithfully and kept His holy standards will be given their due reward.

**Be not lovers of this world but look forward to the
coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.
'This world is not my home, I am just a passing through.'**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 9, THURSDAY

Rev 11:1-19

A Reason for Optimism

Rev 11:15b

One of England's distinguished statesmen, Sir Fred Catherwood, offers an insightful analysis of the world. He writes, "We look back today because we dare not look forward. We live in a violent, greedy, rootless, cynical, and hopeless society, and we don't know what's to become of it all. . . . As we stop believing in the dignity of man and woman made in the image of God, violence has risen dramatically. . . . The social pillars of society have been shaken. All down [through] the centuries, governments have had moral guidelines to tell them how to shape the social structures. Now . . . they do not know what to do."

We can take heart, however, that the Bible, as it discloses the divine plan for history's outworking, does not abandon us to pessimism. It holds out the possibility of heaven-sent revival and social renewal in the short term. And of course, it assures us that ultimately, when Jesus returns, the kingdoms of this world will become His kingdom and the kingdom of His Father (Rev. 11:15).

Our responsibility is to be salt and light in the world (Mt. 5:13-16). We are to live, work, worship, pray, and witness so that today and tomorrow our world will see the saving grace of God at work in and through us.

By: Vernon Grounds

**God holds the future in His hands
With grace sufficient day by day;
Through good or ill He gently leads,
If we but let Him have His way. —Rohrs**

You have reason for optimism if you're looking for Christ's return.

When life gets crazy, it's easy to question God. The weight of our pain and disappointment makes the enemy's lies more enticing. Instead of leaning toward God, we turn away from Him. We blame God and are tempted to walk away from our faith. How can we trust that He is in control when we are drowning in failure and defeat?

In Revelation 11, God sends two witnesses to make an enormous impact on the world. They are given the power to do mighty works and are committed to telling people about Jesus. Despite their dedication and devotion, they are beaten and left for dead. What went wrong? Absolutely nothing! The Bible says the bodies of the two witnesses lie dead in the street, but when all hope seemed lost, "they stood upon their feet" (Revelation 11:8-13).

God is in control. He already knows the outcome, and He tells John what is going to happen each step of the way. So in, those moments when life doesn't make sense, we can walk forward with the confidence that Jesus wins.

As believers in Christ, we may not fully understand why we go through the things we do, but we can be sure that we will overcome! 1 John 5:4 says, "for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."

Reflect:

- 1) **How can trusting God in your circumstance assure you the victory and peace God has promised? (Read 1 Corinthians 15:57, 2 Peter 3:9, Psalm 29:11, and Romans 15:13.)**
- 2) **What is one way you can build your faith in knowing that God is in control of your life?**

DEC 10, FRIDAY

Rev 12:1-13:1a

Star Wars in the Heavens

Rev 12:11

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Rev 12:11

We now understand the source of the spiritual attacks in our world. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, our struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. They are led by Satan who had been hurled from heaven with his fallen angels. They continue to create havoc and destruction in our world till today. In particular, he attacks the people of God and the church by falsely accusing them before our God.

The image of the devil as the dragon may be confusing to the Asians who often associate this mythological creature as 'good'. To some Chinese 'loong', may be different in origin and meaning, being associated with imperial status. Yet we should be cautious about practicing our cultural traditions and test them in the light of God's truth.

We should not try to fight the devil ourselves when we are faced with accusations from him. Neither should we surrender when our lives are being threatened. Instead, we should depend on our Lord Jesus Christ by living our lives in testimony of our faith in Him and obeying God's commandments.

In addition, we have the assurance that the faithful will be protected from the devil's reach as we shall be taken by God's angels to places of safety. We shall attain the salvation and the power of the kingdom of our God.

***Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
Put on the full armor of God to protect ourselves (Eph 6:13).***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 10, FRIDAY

Rev 12:1-13:1a

Star Wars in the Heavens

Rev 12:11

Philip Pullman is a gifted writer of fantasy books. His Dark Materials trilogy includes *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife*, and *The Amber Spyglass* and is very popular among young readers. But below the surface of these sympathetic characters and compelling subplots is a sinister purpose. The story culminates in a great war against God.

In these books, Pullman views the fall of Satan as a righteous cause for personal independence from God's "tyrannical" control. He implies that Satan's attempt to usurp the throne of God was the right thing to do!

In the book of Revelation, we read of the end times: "War broke out in heaven . . . [And Satan] was cast to the earth" (Rev. 12:7-9). That future war is being preceded by an earthly conflict on the battlefield of our minds.

We must recognize Satan for what he is—a liar (John 8:44). His strategy is to take God's words out of context and twist them into falsehood (Gen. 3:1-7). Our best defense against him is to hold firmly to the truth of God's Word (Eph. 6:10-18).

Our loving heavenly Father is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). But neither will He force our obedience. He leaves the choice to us.

By: Dennis Fisher

For further study want to learn more about spiritual warfare?

Read What In The World Is Satan Doing? on the web at www.discoveryseries.org/q1001

When Satan strikes, strike back with the Word of God.

We have a real enemy whose aim is to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). As soon as we were born, Satan began his attacks. He whispers lies and looks for opportunities to deceive us (John 8:44).

Satan knows he won't be able to attack us forever, so he's making the most of the time he's got. Revelation 12:12 says Satan "is filled with fury, because he knows his time is short."

When we put our trust in Jesus, we receive the power to overcome Satan's attacks. And one day, when Jesus returns in all His glory, He will kick Satan out for good (Revelation 12:10). In the meantime, we worship our way to victory and share the Gospel so others can overcome Satan's schemes.

When we're following Jesus and doing what He says, no attack from Satan can knock us off our feet. And when our trust is in Jesus, no attack from Satan can separate us from His love.

That's a promise from Romans 8:38-39 — "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Reflect:

- **In what areas of your life are you most likely to be tempted by Satan?**
- **When you are tempted, what are some ways that you can avoid giving in to sin?**
- **What steps are you currently taking to grow closer to Jesus?**

DEC 11, SATURDAY

Rev 13:1b-18

The Faithful & The Beast

Rev 13:10b

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Rev 13:10b

Without trying to identify the two beasts described, we are given enough information to be aware of two personalities or systems in the world. One of them (a world dictator) will be given great authority over many nations but will slander God and His angels. He will also try to attack and defeat the people of God. Yet he will receive fanatical support from those people who are not followers of Christ.

The other person or system will be able to perform many miracles to deceive mankind and lead them to pay homage to the world dictator. Both will persecute those people who refuse to bear the mark of allegiance to them. As a consequence, many will suffer from being left out of the world's economic system, even to the point of death. Even now, in many countries, these two groups of people exist, the faithful and the fanatic.

Many Christians are still being persecuted for their faith and are being deprived of their freedom of worship and the right to live normal lives.

God's faithful are encouraged to be patient and remain faithful, enduring even imprisonment and death. We must not submit ourselves to the false prophet and the beast. We need not speculate on the identity of the triple six but we know that this number indicates a human figure. We are not to bow down to him.

***Let us pray for Christians who are being oppressed by their governments
and who have been deprived of their freedom to worship and
to live their lives according to their faith.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 11, SATURDAY

Rev 13:1b-18

Where do you find your joy?

Rev 13:10b

We are more easily distracted by newness and power than we like to admit.

When the beast appears in Revelation, people worship it because they believe there is no equal. Jesus warned His followers about this long before John's vision of the beast, saying, "For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24).

Something new and more powerful shows up, and our love is tested. This happens in Revelation 13, but it also happens every day of our lives.

Every day, we hear a voice that says who we are and what we have is not enough. If we listen to those lies long enough, we'll start to believe them.

In Matthew 4:1-11, Jesus experienced the same temptation we face today. He overcame Satan's deception and lies by recalling what's true.

In the Bible, God reminds us that lasting joy, love, and contentment come from our relationship with Him. The world wants us to pursue temporary satisfaction, chasing power, and possessions that are here today and gone tomorrow (Matthew 6:19-21).

But as we read God's Word, we see that there's more to life than this world. God is building a spiritual kingdom that will last forever, one "where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal" (Matthew 6:20).

Reflect:

- ***Where do you derive your happiness?***
- ***Where does the Bible tell us we'll find lasting happiness?***
- ***What things other than Jesus are you pursuing to find joy?***
- ***How can we avoid being led astray?***

DEC 12, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 13, MONDAY

Rev 14:1-20

The Redeemed 144,000

Rev 14:12-13

"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." Revelation 14:1

On Christmas Eve the focus is on the newborn baby Jesus in the manger in a stable in Bethlehem. He is surrounded by Joseph and Mary, a few shepherds and farm animals. In the last days, we shall all see the Lord Jesus as the Lamb on Mount Zion surrounded by 144,000 saints.

Much controversy has been raised over the number 144,000. Most of the numbers in the book of Revelation are symbolic, and thus this number more likely means a great multitude, the number being a multiple of 12 by 12 by 1000. In both instances where the number is mentioned, it is followed by the description of a great multitude from every nation, tribe, language and people.

The love of God extends to all peoples who bear the Name of Jesus, the Lamb on Mount Zion, and the Name of Father God. They will be redeemed from the earth, which in the last days will go through severe judgment. They will be called to endure with patience and to remain faithful to Jesus in spite of the temptations of the worldly Babylon and the pressure from the beast. Followers of Christ will be severely tested as to whether they will hold on to His Name or submit themselves to the mark of the evil one.

Asking the redeemed for their patient endurance implies that they may have to go through much persecution from the beast. However, there is assurance that those who die in the Lord, and who have shown their allegiance, will be redeemed and will sing a new song to the Lamb.

***"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, 'I'm redeemed, I'm redeemed!'"***
Our Redeemer lives!

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 13, MONDAY

Rev 14:1–20

Christianity isn't a magic wand

Rev 14:12–13

Many believe that becoming a Christian is like waving a magic wand over all life's hardships. Once we accept Christ, all of our problems go away, right? Wrong.

Christianity is not an immediate fix to life's problems. Christians are not promised an easy life. In fact, Jesus tells us in John 16:33 "...in this world [we] will have trouble."

So, if we are promised trouble and get no free pass to avoid hard times in life, why would we choose Christianity?

We have a choice every day to do things the easy way or to do things God's way. To obey God's commands and remain faithful to Jesus requires patient endurance, but the reward is worth the work (Revelation 14:12).

Though we aren't promised a life of ease, as Christians, we are promised a life of hope, grace, and mercy. We are promised an unconditional love from a God who will never leave or forsake us. Even in our hardest times, we can be sure that God is with us — guiding, teaching, and protecting us. He can use even the toughest situations for His glory and our good.

John 16:33 doesn't end with the fact that we will have trouble. Jesus goes on to say, "But take heart! I have overcome the world!" Christianity isn't a golden ticket to easy street, but it is the only way to access true peace, joy, and contentment. Remain faithful to Jesus Who has called us. He will enable us to live fully in the joyful life He has planned for us.

Reflect:

- ***Have you accepted Jesus' love for you? If not, what's keeping you from living in the joyful life He has planned for you?***
- ***In what areas of your life are you choosing the easy way over God's way? How does this impact your relationship with Christ and with others?***
- ***In what tough situations have you seen or are you seeing God's protection, provision, and guidance? In what ways can God take something bad in your life and use it for your good?***

DEC 14, TUESDAY

Rev 15:1-16:21

The Supreme Justice

Rev 15:3-4

"You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserved." Rev 6:5-6

On this blessed Christmas day. we all praise God for the wonderful gift of His Son who has come to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all men. While we thank God for His mercy and grace, we need to remember that the main purpose of the incarnation of Jesus is to reconcile wicked sinners with the Holy God. Yet till the very end, many have not accepted this gift and continue to rebel against God.

Many Christians feel very troubled when they read of the calamities which will fall on the earth and its inhabitants at the end time. How can a loving God impose such severe punishment, they will ask. Instead, we should ask, how can a holy God allow such great wickedness to go unpunished. A good God must see that there is justice especially for those who have been persecuted for their faith. We cry out for justice, from the police when we are robbed or cheated of our belongings. We complain if criminals are not caught and punished for the crimes they commit.

The evil perpetrators have refused to repent and continue to curse God. They deserve punishment for their crimes against humanity including God's people. They will be judged by the All-Mighty Supreme Justice and God's judgments will be true and just.

For too long, many people, including some Christians, have lost the fear of God. We would rather picture God as a kind old man. We must understand that a good God must be both holy and loving, just and merciful, righteous and forgiving. This knowledge will bring us to both worship and glorify His Holy name. All nations will come and bow before the Lord God Almighty for His great and mighty deeds.

***Let us worship God with awe and wonder, for He is good and just.
'The fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom.' (Proverbs 9:10)***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 14, TUESDAY

Rev 15:1-16:21

Just wait, things are going to get better

Rev 15:3-4

We live in a fallen world. We don't need anyone to tell us evil and sin exist. Just watch the news for 5 minutes or look back at your thoughts over the course of a day.

The hope of every Christian is that one day, evil will be eradicated and we will reign with Jesus in a new kingdom where there is no more evil, no more sin. We'll join those who went before us in singing, "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 15:3).

So why all the waiting? Peter, one of Jesus' close friends and followers, writes, "... do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:8-9).

Sin and all of its consequences show us how much we need Jesus. Without the option to do wrong, the choice for Jesus would not mean anything. It would be like an election where one person is on the ballot. God gives us the option of either serving ourselves or serving Him. He takes His time so everyone might have an opportunity to choose Him.

John 1:12-13 says that everyone who chooses God by believing in Jesus, "he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Evil is real, and we are free to choose it if we want. But only God's ways are "just and true" (Revelation 15:3). What God promises will always come to be, and it will always be good for those who love Him and follow His ways.

Reflect: ***Are any areas of your life not surrendered to God?
What do you need to give to God and trust Him to take care of for you?
When we put our trust in Jesus, all of God's promises become promises to us.
If you have yet to give your life to Jesus, what's stopping you?***

A child is pushing his mom's patience toward her limit. She says, "If you don't stop, I'm going to" Moments later, she says, "If you don't stop right this minute, I'm going to ..." Then, finally, she says, "You know I mean it, you better stop right now or"

Delivering consequences are one of the hardest parts of a parent's job. No parent enjoys it, but every parent knows it's necessary. To not follow-through would be unjust and unkind. If parents never follow through with a consequence, the child's heart never changes. Rather than learning patience and self-control, the child's sin nature is rewarded.

Rev 16 could be read as a description of a future global battle between good and evil. But it also must be read as a personal explanation of the consequences of sin. God is not making empty promises. He is serious about dealing with sin because He knows how destructive it is. God is so serious about our sin, He sent His Son to atone for it and gives us His Spirit to help us live in freedom from it. But to receive these gifts is a choice we all have to make.

The wrath poured out in Rev 16 is the consequence of refusing these gifts. With each bowl, God gives man an opportunity to repent and see Him as He really is. God cannot be loving without being just, and there will come a time when all of mankind will have to reckon with his sinfulness. God's wrath doesn't have to be our consequence. Every day that there's breath in our lungs, we have the opportunity to turn from sin and turn toward Him.

Reflect: ***What has God given you to help you turn away from sin?
What is the Holy Spirit telling you to confess and repent of today?***

DEC 15 WEDNESDAY

Rev 17:1-18:24

The Final Conflict

Rev 17:14

"They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Rev 17:14

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day. It is not named after the violent combat sport but for the box which is often kept in the church to receive Christmas offerings which are later disbursed to the poor. Yet today's reading reflects more on the end-time conflict between good and evil.

We need not try to identify the woman on the beast, sometimes called the mystery Babylon. This chapter suggests that this will be a great city or country and will dominate the world's rulers. She is associated with much immorality, addiction and idolatry and will blaspheme against God. It is a rich city which gets its wealth from unrighteous activities. Worst of all, she has persecuted and killed many Christians who bore testimony to Jesus.

She will make an alliance with the evil one, the beast, and those countries which follow him, and will make war against Jesus and suppress His faithful church. Even now, there are many such countries which continue to persecute Christian believers.

The chapter continues to say that this alliance between the 'mystery Babylon' and the beast and its followers will fall apart and there will be war between them. Evil forces will fight among themselves to destroy one another. This is already happening and it helps us to understand some of the current world events making headlines today. There are dictatorial countries which have allied themselves with religious extremists to cause much havoc and terrorism in the world, often against the followers of Christ.

Verse 14 promises that Christ with all His supreme powers will defeat His enemies in the defense of His loyal followers. What a great comfort for us all! We are not alone when our enemies attack us. We shall be defended by the Lord Himself.

***'Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone,'
says a popular song. His presence shall always be with us.
His rod and His staff shall protect us.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 15 WEDNESDAY

Rev 17:1-18:24

The Making Of A Martyr

Rev 17:14

Rev 17 describes a woman "drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Jesus told us His followers would be persecuted, and Rev 17 gives us an idea of just how bad it gets. "They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God," Jesus said (John 16:2).

Nothing solidifies our priorities more than thinking about what we would die for. Every year, thousands of Christians around the world are murdered because they confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

It's hard to predict how we might respond if asked to lay it all on the line. Peter told Jesus he would follow Him anywhere — even die for Him! But when pushed to pick a side, Peter denied knowing Jesus three times.

Roughly 33 years later, Peter really did lay down his life for Jesus in Rome. What made the difference? What made the same man who wouldn't admit to knowing Jesus boldly proclaim the Gospel and die for his Master? Jesus' resurrection transformed Peter, and it's still transforming lives today.

Peter, crushed by guilt, mourned Jesus' death and experienced His forgiveness first hand (John 21). That the grave could not hold Jesus made everything else He said worth staking his life on. That one fact and our willingness to let it change our perspective is the thing that will transform us from Jesus' acquaintances to actual disciples who are willing to die as martyrs.

Reflect:

- ***How does the thought of laying down your own life for Jesus change your perspective on your day-to-day existence?***
- ***Read 1 Corinthians 15:31. How do we prepare ourselves for something like Peter faced?***

"Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done." Rev 18:4-6

Much of the world's values are now based on materialism. People are measured by the amount of money, property and possessions they own. Some know it as the 4 C's - cash, car, condo and club membership. In Malaysia, they are the 4 M's - million ringgit, mansion, Mercedes, and mistress! The world's economy is controlled by rampant capitalistic abuses. Making money by any means often leads to exploitation and unethical practices, causing suffering to those affected. Rampant inflation, collapse of the stock market and environmental damage are often the result of such uncontrolled greed.

Increasing wealth often leads to increasing secularism in societies, taking people further away from God. It gives false pride to their status and their financial power makes them feel that they are demi-gods. Often, greed has made many people and nations callous to the needs of the poor and downtrodden.

Some Christians may fall into this trap where they rely more on their material wealth than on God's provision. We need to heed the warning so that we are not caught in an idolatrous relationship with money and possessions.

There will come a time when those who have abused their wealth will be punished for the suffering they have caused to the people they have exploited or neglected.

***Jesus said that where our treasure is, our hearts will be there also.
Let us thank God for His provisions and remain ever humble in our prosperity.***

DEC 16, THURSDAY

Rev 19:1–20:15

Wedding Banquet in Heaven

Rev 20:11–12

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." Rev 19:7

Weddings are joyous occasions in most Asian societies. Months are spent in preparation for the auspicious day. All family members and relatives are involved in the various aspects of the celebrations. In rural areas, the whole village would be a hive of activity. Much thought is given to inviting friends and relatives to make sure that no one important is left out. No expense is spared.

The Bible says that there will be a final grand banquet to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb who is the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride who is the church. The angel says, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

Let us make sure we are ready for this grand occasion. The bride shops for the best bridal gown and all the finery and accessories to match. The color of the gown is usually white which indicates purity. The heavenly bride is, however, instructed to wear fine linen, bright and clean, which is the heavenly symbol for the righteous acts of the saints.

We may not mind if we are not invited to the wedding dinners of our friends. However, we cannot afford not to receive an invitation for the heavenly wedding banquet. Let us make sure we are found worthy as guests by remaining faithful to the Lord and continuing to be righteous in all our deeds.

Let us rejoice in anticipation of the Wedding Banquet to come.

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 16, THURSDAY

Rev 19:1–20:15

Is Your Name in the Book of Life?

Rev 20:11–12

"And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books ...if anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Rev 20:12, 15

Those who have been born twice, once of water and the second of the spirit, will die only once. They, who bear the testimony for Jesus, will be resurrected first and will rule with Christ not as kings but as priests of God. This is often called the millennial reign because John mentions a thousand years. However, this number is symbolic indicating a long period of time. Those who died for the faith will be duly rewarded.

Others who have not followed Christ but who have allowed themselves to be deceived by the devil will also be resurrected, not to rule but to be judged. They will stand before the Christ who is on the throne and the books recording all their deeds will be opened. Many people think that they can commit sins in secret. They may hide these from their family, friends and from the authorities. However, all their sins are known to God and they will face the final judgment in the future.

The lake of fire was created for Satan. Throughout history, the devil has caused much evil in the world. In the end he will be destroyed together with the beast and the false prophet. They will be joined by those who have been judged and whose names are not in the Book of Life.

In countries which practise democracy, great care is taken to ensure that the names of eligible voters are in the electoral register. This is to enable them to participate in the elections to elect the new government. Yet we should take greater care to get our names in the Book of Life to ensure that we are eligible to be part of the new heavenly government led by our Lord Jesus Christ.

**When the Book of Life is opened by our Lord Jesus Christ,
will our names be in the list?**

I was intrigued by a picture of a jubilant Hitler and a cheering crowd celebrating a German victory early in World War II. At that time, many people in Great Britain were completely discouraged. Ultimately, though, the Allies celebrated victory. How different the feelings of the British would have been early in the war if they could have witnessed the final scene!

When Jesus was arrested and led off to trial, His disciples were confused and afraid (Mt. 26:47-56). Their anguish increased as they saw Jesus on trial, scourged and seemingly helpless as He hung on a cross.

They did not yet see the whole picture of their Messiah's role. Before fulfilling His role as Conqueror and King, He had to "give His life a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:28) and then break the power of death by resurrection (v.19). He had to return to heaven to be Head of the church (Eph. 1:22). One day He will return in glory and power, symbolized in Revelation 19 by His riding on a white horse (vv.11-16).

Today we see much that discourages us. The forces of evil often seem to be in control. But if by faith we look beyond the present and focus on the final scene in God's plan, we can find reason to rejoice.

By: Herbert Vander Lugt

***And for the hope of His return, Dear Lord, Your name we praise;
With longing hearts we watch and wait For that great day of days! —Sherwood
The hope of Christ's coming can keep us going.***

DEC 17, FRIDAY

Rev 21:1-27

God Dwells With Us

Rev 21:3-4

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:3-4

It is the wish of every Christian to visit Jerusalem and walk through the Biblical sites. We have the desire to feel the presence of God in the holy city. However, in the last days, John reveals that the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will descend from heaven. It will be a huge city, more than 2000 kilometers in length, width and height. It will accommodate all the millions of the citizens of the new heaven and the new earth.

There will be no more tears and suffering, no more pain or death. There will be no more thirst as there is the spring of the water of life. The city walls will sparkle with precious stones, each gate will be a marvelous glowing single pearl and the streets will glitter with pure gold.

More than all this grandeur, there will be the shekinah glory of God Himself. There is no need for a temple or any other holy building, for the Lord God Almighty and Jesus Christ will be the sanctuary. There is no need for light from the sun or the moon (or electric bulbs!) for the glory of God gives it light. God Himself will walk with us as He did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We need not fear like the Israelites who dared not see God face to face for fear of death. Many of us can feel the presence of God when we pray and worship. Greater joys are in store for us who love the Lord.

***'And He walks with me, and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known'.
- Charles Austin Miles -***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 17, FRIDAY

Rev 21:1–27

Read Backwards

Rev 21:3–4

I confess that I sometimes read the end of a book before I read the beginning. Doing so allows me to know which characters live and which characters don't. When I know how it will turn out, I'm able to relax and thoroughly appreciate and enjoy the story and the characters.

In a similar way, reading the final book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, can be an encouragement and comfort for the followers of Jesus. Time and again, Christians are called to be overcomers (1 John 4:4; 5:4; Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). We can be overcomers now and will be for all eternity.

As the apostle John talks about the revealing of the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation (21:1), he describes what the final victory will look like for those who have received Jesus as Savior. At that time, we will see the end of death, tears, sorrow, and pain (v.4). The Lord declares: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (v.7). He will dwell with us (v.3), and He will "make all things new" (v.5).

When the trials of today seem more daunting than your strength, let the Lord show you the end of the story when you will be in His presence forever!

By: Randy Kilgore

***Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the strife will not be long;
This day the noise of battle—the next the victor's song.
To him that overcometh a crown of life shall be;
He with the King of glory shall reign eternally. —Duffield
For hope today, remember the end of the story— eternity with God.***

The University of Colorado's Fiske Planetarium needed money, so its director dreamed up a comical fund-raiser. He printed brochures that offered 1,000-acre lots on the planet Mars for only \$20.

The flier read: "This land steal features pink skies, unlimited rock gardens, and not one but two moons. So peaceful, quiet, and romantic—even the natives are friendly." The literature promised, "At one-sixth the gravity of Earth, your golf game will improve immensely—drives will be six times longer. Mars will provide a world of adventure for the entire family." The gag was surprisingly successful. People across the country sent in \$20 for a deed, for space flight insurance, and for a simulated sample of red Martian soil.

If this story catches your imagination, then think about the ultimate real estate—heaven. As an expression of His love, God promised it to all who trust Jesus as their Savior. It's a real place where the Lord Himself will live with His people. There will be no tears, pain, or death, and the occupants will rejoice forever in God's everlasting goodness (Rev. 21:4).

How reassuring to know that God's free offer of a home in heaven is not a promotional gimmick! It may sound too good to be true, but it isn't. It's too good to pass up.

By: Mart DeHaan

***Contemplating the realms on high,
Afar beyond the vaulted sky,
'Tis joy to know that through His grace
We shall rejoice to see His face. —Goldwire
God opens the door of heaven to all who open their hearts to Him.***

DEC 18, SATURDAY

Rev 22:1-21

Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus

Rev 22:12

"Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Rev 22:12

Many people like to read detective stories. As the story unfolds, there will be dramatic events, interesting characters, and devious plots leading to quarrels and death. There will be many clues. Some may be misleading while others might point to the truth. There will be a lot of suspense. Finally, the story will climax, the answer is revealed and the mystery solved.

The book of Revelation is a similar story with many truths which we do not fully comprehend. There are also dramatic events and remarkable characters. However, we are not ignorant of the conclusion. We know who will win at the end!

The assurance that our Lord Jesus Christ will be coming again, and soon, has been the inspiration for many believers throughout history, especially those who are suffering under persecution. We shall be taken to the new garden where a crystal-clear river flows with the water of life that will quench any thirst. There we will see the tree of life with bountiful fruits to nourish us. Its leaves will heal the nations. God Himself will be with us.

The words of Jesus Christ are trustworthy and true. We have been given a preview of what will happen. We are told to be patient and continue to be faithful and holy. There will be rewards for everyone who bears His Name. He is coming soon to fulfil His promise. What great jubilation and celebration lie ahead!

***He is the Beginning and He is the End.
Hallelujah! Maranatha!***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 18, SATURDAY

Rev 22:1–21

Are you ready to meet with Jesus?

Rev 22:12

Life on earth is temporary. All of our lives will one day come to an end.

While we don't like to think of life ending, Rev 22 teaches us to be constantly ready. The Lord says in Rev 22:7, and again in Rev 22:12, "Look, I am coming!" Since we don't know when our earthly life might end, Jesus tells us to be ready now and to stay ready at all times.

Instead of reading the last chapter of the Bible as a distant prediction of a vague future, we should read it as a specific description of a personal appointment we each have with the Lord. Rev 22:1-5 gives us a glimpse of what heaven will be like. While this is encouraging for the future, it should also be motivating us to act now.

Rev 22:12-15 tells us the choices we make will determine what happens after this present life ends. Rev 22:14 says, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life ..." Those who have committed to following Jesus on Earth will live on eternally in heaven with Him.

The decision is ours.

Reflect:

- ***Do you know that you have "the right to the tree of life" as described in Rev 22:14? If not, your next step might be salvation.***
- ***How can you apply the teaching of Rev 22 to your life right now, to be ready to meet Jesus at any time?***

How grateful we are for the wonders of the world that God has created for us as our home in time. Though blighted with evil and pain, the earth is full of beautiful things that dazzle our senses. Early some midsummer morning, take a walk in a flower garden and absorb its beauty and fragrance. Then think about all of its loveliness—a faint glimpse of heaven's glory.

Years ago, I stood outside a cabin high in the Rocky Mountains. As far as I could see, all the peaks were snow-covered and glistening under the light of a full moon. What an overwhelming spectacle that was! Yet still, just a glimpse of heaven's glory.

Listen to the thrilling cascade of harmony in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Then imagine the rapturous sound of angelic choirs.

Our Savior assured His disciples that He would return to His Father and His eternal home to prepare a place for those who simply believe. It will be a place of such splendor that nothing on earth can compare with it.

The only requirement for entry is personal faith in Christ and His atoning death and resurrection. Trust in His sacrifice, and one day He'll welcome you into that glorious beauty and joy.

By: Vernon Grounds

***Brightest and best of that glorious throng,
Center of all, and the theme of their song,
Jesus, our Savior, the pierced One stands,
Lovingly calling with beckoning hands. —Ludlow***

Christ opens the door of heaven to those who open their heart to Him.

DEC 19, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 20, MONDAY

Isa 9:1-7

Four Clues To Who Jesus Is To You

Isa 9:6

Though their circumstances were grim, Isaiah tells Israel a Messiah is coming who will redeem everything.

Jesus is that Messiah, and in this passage, Isaiah uses four titles to describe Jesus' role and character: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus makes decisions with divine wisdom we will never understand. His insight isn't hidden from us. As a Wonderful Counselor, Jesus leads us to make wise decisions as well.

Mighty God is a nod to Jesus' divinity. Jesus is one with God. He was with God at the creation of the earth, and nothing is beyond His ability to affect.

Jesus is called Everlasting Father because, through Him, we can know God the Father. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18, NIV).

Lastly, as Prince of Peace, Jesus is the ruler whose reign will bring about peace and tranquility that never cease.

For Israel, these names would have brought joy and comfort during dangerous and unsettling circumstances. The same is true for us today.

No matter what we're going through, when we are in Christ, we can look to Jesus as our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Reflect:

- ***Of the four names Isaiah uses to describe Jesus, which one means the most to you? Why?***
- ***How have you seen Jesus fulfill each of these roles in your life?***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 20, MONDAY

Psa 89:1–52

God doesn't break His promises

Psa 89:3–4

You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: 'I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.'" - Psalm 89:3-4

Psalm 89 is Israel's response to what seemed like a broken promise. In 2 Samuel 7, God promises that someone from King David's family would be king forever. But then Babylon defeats the nation of Israel, and King Nebuchadnezzar takes over. Nebuchadnezzar is not even Jewish, much less a member of David's family.

But God's plan was bigger than Israel's political crisis. When their world was at its worst, God was at work, making a way for the most high king. Israel didn't realize King Jesus, a descendant of David, would take the throne for eternity.

Often, what we see and feel doesn't seem to line up with what God promised us. And just like the writer of Psalm 89, we plead with God asking, "How long, O Lord? Will you hide forever?"

God never leaves us, and He has not forgotten us. Christmas is an annual reminder that God's promises always come to pass. So, this Christmas, as you wait for God to fulfill promises in your life, remember His promise to David. God didn't forget His people then, and He won't forget you now.

Reflect:

- ***How has God been faithful to you this year?***
- ***Is there a promise you are waiting to see fulfilled? Tell a friend, and ask them to pray with you.***

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable." - Isa 40:28

You know that feeling when you have to wait longer than you expected to? Frustration builds as each minute passes. Soon you're wondering why you showed up at all.

Israel knew this growing impatience. They had been in exile for 70 years. And although Isaiah had told them a rescuer was coming, God's promise became harder and harder to believe with each passing day. They knew God's promise, but His words didn't seem to match their circumstances.

In response, Isaiah reminds them of God's power and might, His thoughtfulness and attention to detail. God doesn't make mistakes. But in the middle of a long wait, it sure can feel that way.

Waiting well teaches us to trust God with His plan for our lives, believing He loves us and does everything for our good (Romans 8:28).

God's plan is worth the wait, and Jesus' birth was proof of that. Jesus did more than save Israel; He saved the world. Jesus established an eternal kingdom, offering freedom from sin and a relationship with God to all who seek Him.

Whatever you're waiting for, fight the urge to rush the process. Let Christmas, the arrival of God's greatest promise, be a reminder that no one can fathom what God has planned for those who love Him.

Reflect:

- ***How do you respond when things don't go as planned?***
- ***What do Isaiah's words tell you about God's ability to change things?***
- ***Is there a situation you're waiting for God to resolve? Be honest with God about how you're feeling. And remember, Isaiah's words are true for you, too.***

DEC 21, TUESDAY

Luk 1:5-25, Luk 1:57-66

The Surprising Benefit Of Being Honest About Your Doubts

Luk 1:13-14

"... the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.'" - Luke 1:13-15

Have you ever wanted to believe God would make something happen, but the circumstances overwhelmingly pointed to "no"?

If that's you, you're not alone. When it came to parenthood, all signs pointed to "no" for Zechariah and Elizabeth. Their prayers for a child had resulted in old age and empty arms. So, when an angel showed up to tell Zechariah that Elizabeth was going to give birth, he understandably had some questions (Luke 1:18).

Zechariah was bold enough to let the Lord know he had doubts, but he wanted to believe. So, Zechariah confessed his doubt, and God used it to grow his faith.

Imagine this — Zechariah sat in silence as he watched his wife's belly grow for nine miraculous months of pregnancy, and the only person he could talk to about it was God. How much closer must Zechariah and God have been at the end of Elizabeth's pregnancy?

God doesn't call us to be certain but to act faithfully in the face of uncertainty. That's what Zechariah and Elizabeth did when it came time to name their baby. God told them his name was John, so that's what they went with (Luke 1:59-63).

Zechariah and Elizabeth were faithful to listen to God, confess their doubts, and when it came time to act in obedience, they did.

Reflect:

- ***What does Zechariah's life show you about God's patience and love for us, even in our doubt?***
- ***Have you ever doubted God then saw Him at work in your situation?***
- ***Is there an area in your life where you doubt God now? Have you told Him?***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 21, TUESDAY

Luk 1:57-80, Mal 3:1-4

The Importance Of Preparation

Luk 1:65-66

"And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, 'What then will this child be?' For the hand of the Lord was with him." - Lk 1:65-66

'Tis the season for family gatherings and work parties. If you've ever hosted a holiday party, you know preparation takes time.

Party prep isn't glamorous. But when people start laughing, singing, and enjoying themselves, the shopping, cleaning, and rearranging is worth it. Our preparation makes some of our favorite holiday memories possible.

Luke 1:57-80 describes the birth of Zechariah and Elizabeth's son, John. God had a special purpose for John's life. John was filled with the Holy Spirit so he could preach repentance and help prepare people's hearts to hear from Jesus, the Messiah who was coming soon.

John's role wasn't always the most glamorous. (Matthew 3:4 records John wearing animal skins and eating bugs.) But without John's preparation, the world wouldn't have been ready for the message Jesus came to share.

The same way John prepared people to hear Jesus' message, Advent — the season we're in now — prepares our hearts to celebrate Jesus' birth. Advent is a time to slow down and shift our focus from the hustle and bustle to the One this season is all about.

When we take the time to prepare our hearts, Christmas can go from being another stressful event to the most wonderful time of the year. May this Christmas be different as we prepare our hearts to celebrate Jesus' arrival on earth.

Reflect:

- ***How has Jesus changed your life? Where would you be without Him? When you are running low on holiday cheer, remember your answers to these two questions.***
- ***What do you need to do to make sure you're getting time alone with Jesus throughout the Christmas season?***

How many times have you looked at a situation and thought: "There's no way. This is impossible." Mary had the same thought when Gabriel came to her and said, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus." "How will this be," Mary asked, "since I am a virgin?"

Mary was young, poor, and female. All the odds said she wouldn't do anything spiritually significant. And, being pregnant by the Holy Spirit sounded just as impossible then as it does today.

It was hard to believe the prophesied Messiah would be a carpenter's son and her baby. But Mary's story doesn't end in disbelief or disobedience. Mary responded by saying, "I am the Lord's servant, Let it be to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38).

Mary had confidence in what she couldn't see. In faith, she obeyed and was part of a miracle. She knew she couldn't do what Gabriel described, but her God could do anything.

We aren't strangers to impossible situations. Many of us need Christmas miracles of our own.

God is in the business of making the impossible possible. Gabriel pointed Mary to her cousin Elizabeth's late-in-life pregnancy as proof. So instead of focusing on your circumstances, follow Mary's example and fix your eyes on who God is. Nothing is impossible with Him.

Reflect:

- **What impossible situation are you facing?**
- **Are you viewing that circumstance with faith or cynicism?**
- **What would it look like to trust God to do the impossible?**

DEC 22, WEDNESDAY

Mat 1:18-25

When The Right Thing Is Not The Easy Thing

Mat 1:21

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." - Matt 1:21

Joseph had a choice when he discovered Mary was pregnant. He could publicly divorce Mary, which would have led to Mary being stoned. Or, he could try to divorce Mary quietly.

Then, God gives Joseph a third option: Go through with the wedding.

Matthew 1:20 says, "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'"

Marrying Mary wasn't on Joseph's mind until the angel showed up. It just wasn't done. In their culture, marrying Mary required more faith than getting a divorce.

Like Joseph, we will face decisions that challenge our faith. We'll find ourselves in situations where obeying God will make us look crazy.

When that happens, remember God's words from Isaiah 55:8-9, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

What's easy is not always right. And what's right is not always easy.

When we ask God to show us the way, He does. Sometimes, He affirms what we're already thinking. But other times, as He did with Joseph, God leads us to a faith-filled option we never knew was possible.

Reflect:

- ***When was the last time you had to make a difficult choice? How did you arrive at your decision?***
- ***What decisions are you facing this week that will require greater faith? Take some time to pray and ask God what He would have you do.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 22, WEDNESDAY

Luk 1:39-45

A Blessed Life Is Not The Same As An Easy Life

Luk 1:45

"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord." - Luk 1:45

Mary's calling was a blessing, but it was also costly. She nearly lost her fiancé. She was disowned by everyone around her, and she would eventually see her son murdered. Being blessed isn't always easy, but if we keep our eyes on the Lord, we will experience the joy and fulfillment only His presence can provide.

Through Elizabeth, God reassured Mary that her radical faith was in the right place. When Mary learned Elizabeth was pregnant, she rushed to see it with her own eyes. As soon as Mary arrived, Elizabeth's baby leaped in her womb, and she told Mary, "God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed" (Luk 1:41-42).

Mary faced big hurdles, but she experienced an even bigger blessing. And though that blessing was disguised to the world for a time, He was and will be revealed in glory (Matt 24:30-31). If your circumstances are less than merry this Christmas, remember Mary's story. Remember that God is always at work, and His plan for you is good. No matter how bleak your circumstances, God has not deserted you. He is bigger than our understanding, and He loves us more than we can fathom (Isa 55:9). That truth alone gives us a reason to celebrate.

Reflect:

- ***What hurdles are you facing right now?***
- ***Are you focusing on your circumstances or the Lord, who wants to lead you through them?***
- ***What is one practical way you can remind yourself of God's love even when you don't feel it?***

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant." - Luk 1:47

The calling God placed on Mary's life wasn't something she could hide. She was carrying a child. And not just any child — the child Israel had waited hundreds of years for! Mary responded to this miracle with worship. Luk 1:46-56 is a song to God. When Mary says, "From now on all generations will call me blessed," she wasn't being proud (Luk 1:48). She was recognizing and accepting the gift God had given to her.

Just like God did something special in Mary's life, He is doing something special in each of us. He has a plan and purpose for all of us (Eph 2:10). As we discover our spiritual gifts and embrace God's plan for our lives, people take notice.

So when that happens, how do we respond? God is pleased when we accept His gifts and use them for His glory. He loves when we point the credit for our talents back to Him. That's what Mary did. Mary knew the miracle God was doing through her was a direct result of God's ability, not her own. In fact, to not recognize God's faithfulness would have been prideful because she would have been taking credit God deserved.

Pride refuses to accept God's gifts and/or takes credit for what God has done. Pride says, "I can do this on my own" or "I don't need you." In reality, it's only because of God's strength and goodness that we can do anything. One of the best ways to thank God for what He's doing in us and through us is to praise Him and use our gifts to serve Him. Allowing the great things God does through us to give Him glory instead of us — that's the kind of humility Mary had.

Reflect:

- ***What are your God-given talents and gifts? How are you using them to glorify God?***
- ***How do you respond when people comment on something you're good at?***
- ***What's one way you can celebrate what God's doing in you without making it about you?***

DEC 23, THURSDAY

Mic 5:1–5, Joh 14:27

How To Find Peace This Christmas

Mic 5:2

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” - Mic 5:2

Micah prophesies a ruler will come from Bethlehem, one who will shepherd his people and bring peace. Christmas celebrates God fulfilling this promise, but rarely do our lives reflect it. Somehow, the happiest season of all has become the most stressful season of all. We sing about peace yet rush through each day without it. But what if this Christmas could be different?

Phi 4:6-7 reminds us, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The social pressure to buy everyone a gift, go to every party, and fulfill every holiday tradition isn’t going away. We bring peace to the chaos by learning to pray before we plan. God wants to be involved in every situation, including how we celebrate Him at Christmas. Jesus is our source of peace. So, talk to Him and read His Word. Isaiah 26:3 promises He “will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.”

The prophecy in Micah is a promise to us. We, too, can enjoy the peace Jesus brings in any season of life.

Reflect:

- ***When we feel like we don’t have enough, taking time to give thanks reminds us how much we already have. What can you thank Jesus for right now?***
- ***Is the lead up to Christmas stressing you out? Take some time today to ask God how He wants you to celebrate this year.***

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 23, THURSDAY

Luk 2:1-7, 2 Co 5:1-7

Walk By Faith, Not By Sight

2 Co 5:6-7

"We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight." - 2 Cor 5:6-7

When Caesar Augustus decided to take a census, the timing couldn't have been worse for Joseph and Mary. They weren't yet married, and Mary was due any day. Bethlehem is immortalized to us now, but imagine what the journey meant for Joseph and Mary. There are many things a heavily pregnant woman wants to do, and none of them start with walking 70 miles to your soon-to-be in-laws' house.

They would be exhausted and embarrassed. They would feel others' stares and have their fears confirmed when they're told, "There's no room for you in the inn." But what Caesar meant for tax collection, God used to fulfill His Word. In making the long, dirty, and difficult journey, Mary and Joseph fulfilled Micah's promise that Israel's ruler would come from Bethlehem.

The road to Bethlehem was part of Joseph and Mary's faith journey. It's the place where they learned to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). Our faith saves us, but it's also what helps us keep going, day in and day out.

Like Joseph and Mary, all of us will face moments when the road seems too long and the cost too high. Faith is believing God's sight is better than ours. It's trusting that all things — even a long, arduous journey — are for His glory and our good.

Reflect:

- **Read 2 Cor 4:16-18, the verses just before this mention of walking by faith. What do hard times have the power to give us?**
- **Heb 11:1 says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." What are you hoping for in the coming year? What step of faith is God asking you to take?**

"And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." - Luke 2:6-7

Despite what our nativities would have us believe, Jesus' birth was not a rustic, peaceful delivery.

Stables were dark and dirty places. Generally, caves were used as stables with feeding troughs, or mangers, carved into the rock walls. This was not the royal birthplace people expected for the Messiah and king. But it was a perfect picture of the kind of life Jesus would lead.

In the 33 years Jesus walked the earth, He never shied away from messy people or situations. Promiscuous women, tax collectors, and sinners of all kinds found Jesus' love and grace readily available.

When life gets messy, Jesus' birth reminds us that God isn't afraid of a mess. He entered the world in a mess, met people in their mess, and turned person after person's mess into a message (John 4:28-30).

Reflect:

- **How have you seen God meet you in messy situations?**
- **What kind of mess are you facing today?**
- **How does it feel to know that Jesus is with you in it and wants to help you through it?**

DEC 24, FRIDAY

Isa 7:1–14, Mat 1:23

Do You Believe God Is With You?

Isa 7:14

“... the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” - Isaiah 7:14

Jesus is “Immanuel” or “God with us.” Through Jesus, God came and walked among creation. Jesus made a way to restore our relationship with God and gave us His Spirit, so we’re never without Him.

Reminders of Jesus’ birth are everywhere this time of year — in Christmas carols, church nativities, TV specials, and family traditions. But how many of us woke up today with the confidence that God is with us?

Our actions and attitudes change when we understand this truth.

Because God is with us, we can never be separated from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Because God is with us, we can accomplish His will for us (Philippians 2:13). And because God is with us, we don’t have to live with fear, worry, or dissatisfaction.

When you’re facing the heartache of Christmas without family, remember, God is with you. When you’re fretting over what the in-laws might think, remember, God is with you. And when you’re cuddled up with your kids around a fire, God is with you there, too.

It’s one thing to know God is with us; it’s another to carry this truth into each day. This Christmas, let the knowledge that God is with you lead you to love more fully, give more generously, and live more confidently.

Reflect:

- ***Where do you find it easy to believe that God is with you? Where do you struggle to believe that’s true?***
- ***How will you approach this Christmas differently, knowing God is with you?***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 24, FRIDAY

Luk 2:8-20

This Really Is Good News

Luk 2:10

"Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." - Luke 2:10

Often, what's good news for some is devastating for others.

For example, a promotion is good news if you're the one getting promoted. A surprise pregnancy is good news for the couple who has been trying for years. But when you're the one who feels passed over or the teen who isn't ready for parenthood, the same news that brought joy to others might bring you to tears.

That's part of what makes the angel's announcement so special. When the angel appears to the shepherds, he brings "good news that will cause great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). This wasn't good news for some and bad news for others. This was good news for everyone. Jesus, the promised rescuer, had arrived. Things were going to be different. And not just for some, but for everyone.

The fact that the angel delivered this news to a group of shepherds shows the kind of king Jesus would be. His kingdom wasn't reserved for the wealthy or religious elite. His kingdom is open to anyone humble enough to submit themselves to Him. No matter who we are or what we do, Jesus wants to be our king. We don't need to clean up or wait until we're of age to be part of His kingdom. The angel met the shepherds in a field at night, and Jesus meets us right where we are today. That's good news!

Reflect:

- ***What's the best news you could get this Christmas?***
- ***How does it make you feel to know that Jesus' kingdom is open to everyone?***
- ***The news about Jesus was so good the shepherds couldn't keep it to themselves (Luke 2:20). Is there anyone you need to share the good news with this Christmas?***

When you think of the kind of people God works through, who comes to mind? Matt 1 lists the people in Jesus' family tree. And while it perfectly matches Old Testament prophecies, the people in this list were far from perfect.

- Abraham followed God to an unknown land but lost faith in God's plan for his family and had a son with his maid (Genesis 16:1-4).
- Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute (Genesis 38).
- David, known as a man after God's heart, committed adultery with another man's wife then murdered him to cover it up (2 Samuel 11).
- Rahab was a prostitute (Joshua 2).
- Manasseh and Abijah were evil (2 Kings 21:1-3 and 1 Kings 15:3).

Despite their flaws, God made each of these men and women part of Jesus' genealogy. Matt 1 is proof that God accomplishes His perfect plan with imperfect people. This doesn't excuse our sin. The men and women in Jesus' family tree brought suffering to this world. People were hurt, even killed as a result of their decisions. But it does remind us that God's grace is greater than our sin.

Just like the men and women on this list, Jesus commissions us to be part of His story. As we tap into the message and the power Jesus gives us, God works through us to change the world.

Reflect:

- ***How does it feel to know you don't need to be perfect for God to work through you?***
- ***One way we receive God's grace is through confession and repentance. As you pray today, spend some time confessing sin and ask God what it means for you to repent.***

DEC 25, SATURDAY

Isa 52:7–10, Rom 10:8–15

The Most Beautiful Gift You Can Give This Christmas

Isa 52:7

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” (Isaiah 52:7).

If you’ve ever seen a runner’s feet or bathed a child who’s been playing barefoot outside, you know the beauty Isaiah describes isn’t in the feet themselves but in what they represent. In Isaiah’s day, messengers carried news from town to town.

Watchmen would see a messenger approaching in the distance and try to determine from their posture or speed if they were carrying good news.

You can imagine the anticipation and excitement building as the messenger gets closer. What will he say? What will the news be? The messenger is received like a celebrity, and when he speaks, everyone celebrates (Isaiah 52:8). It’s a beautiful moment.

When we share the good news of the Gospel, we are like that messenger. We aren’t asking people to give more or do more. We get to be the ones delivering the news, “Salvation is here!” (Romans 10:13). Jesus did all the work to save us and set us free.

Then, He gives us the privilege of delivering that message to the world. What better time than now, during the celebration of His birth, to share the hope Jesus brings.

Reflect:

- ***What makes the Gospel good news for you?***
- ***Are there people you know who need to hear the good news of Jesus? Ask the Lord for the opportunity to share it with them.***

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 25, SATURDAY

Isa 61:1-9, Luk 4:18-21

A Reason To Be Generous This Christmas

Isa 61:1

The sound of a Salvation Army bell ringing, a child's wish written in crayon hung on a Christmas tree, hot meals served to strangers on a cold day. The holidays bring many opportunities to serve others. When Jesus returned to heaven, His mission "to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives" became ours to continue (Isa 61:1).

Whether we give our money, our time, or both, giving is what Jesus wants us to do. We bless others because Jesus blesses us. We are living in the time of the Lord's favor that Isaiah describes. Favor is simply another way of describing God's approval and delight. We receive God's favor, not because of anything we've done, but because Jesus died for our sin.

God established an eternal covenant with us through Jesus. This time of the Lord's favor is now! Jesus has come, paid for our sin, and is preparing His forever kingdom. No matter our circumstances, we are blessed.

We may not have as much as someone else, but we have what we need to continue Jesus' mission until He returns. Take time to bless others through generosity. Look for opportunities in the church and in the community to serve others. As we do, people start to see there's something special about God's people, and His goodness becomes known among the nations (Isa 61:8-9).

Reflect:

- ***Read Isa 61:1-3 again. What one way can you be generous to those in need? Ask God to show you an opportunity to proclaim good news to the poor.***
- ***What's one way you can encourage someone who feels trapped or comfort someone who's struggling this Christmas?***
- ***Finally, re-read Isa 61:4. Is there anything that's been lost that God might want to work through you to restore?***

Simeon says, "...This child marks both the failure and the recovery of many in Israel, A figure misunderstood and contradicted—the pain of a sword-thrust through you— But the rejection will force honesty, as God reveals who they really are" (Luke 2:33-35, MSG).

Christmas presses us all to answer the most important question: Who is Jesus?

In Luke 2, the Holy Spirit leads a righteous and devout man named Simeon to the temple on the day of Jesus' circumcision. Simeon praises God for allowing him to see the promised Savior, then goes on to tell who this child is and how He will affect us.

What we believe about the baby in the manger reveals what is truly in our hearts. Do we see Jesus as a reason to decorate, gather friends, and feast? Or do we see Him as He really is: Savior of the world, Immanuel, Prince of Peace.

When we see Jesus as our Savior rather than a nativity character, our perspective on Christmas changes. Buying presents becomes a reminder of God's blessing instead of a burden. Gatherings go from obligations to opportunities to celebrate Jesus.

The hustle and bustle around Christmas make it easy to forget why we're celebrating. But when Jesus is at the center of our lives, everything becomes an act of worship.

Reflect:

- ***In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks Peter, "Who do you say I am?" How would you answer Jesus' question? Who do you say He is?***
- ***What is one way you can put Jesus at the center of your day today?***

DEC 26, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 27, MONDAY

Joh 1:1-14

What Happened When Jesus Came To Earth

Joh 1:1-3

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." - Joh 1:1-3

It's a common plot for Christmas movies. Girl bumps her head and wakes up in a different reality. She remembers everything, but no one recognizes who she really is.

Do you ever wonder if that's how Jesus felt sometimes? He was walking around in the world He created, but few saw Him for who He was. John 1:10 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."

Jesus was not part God, part man. He was completely divine and completely human at the same time. This is what makes Jesus' arrival as the most amazing event in all of history. The eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy God took on a human nature and lived among us!

As God and man, Jesus reveals how God thinks and how we should think. He models how to live and gives us the power to live that way. And because Jesus was God, He was without sin — making Him the only person who could make us right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In Jesus, we get a visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). For hundreds of years, people heard from God through a complex religious system. They traveled to the temple to be in God's presence. But through Jesus, we can know God fully and talk to Him anytime, anywhere.

Reflect:

- **Why is Jesus coming to earth a big deal for you personally?**
- **What's one thing you've learned about God as you've been reading about Jesus' birth?**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 27, MONDAY

Luk 2:36–40, Mat 5:17–18

What You Miss When You Only Know Half The Story

Mat 5:17

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” - Matthew 5:17

If you start watching a movie when it's almost over, you miss the significance of certain events. Sure, you could piece some things together. But more complex, meaningful exchanges are lost on you without context. The same is true of Jesus' birth. Virgin gives birth to God's Son? That's a pretty incredible turn of events! But, when we see Jesus' arrival in the context of the Old Testament, we understand why Anna “began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

For hundreds of years, Israel had been waiting for the Messiah to free them. Then, people like Anna, Simeon, and later John the Baptist, start declaring, “Jesus is that guy!” Jesus went on to do all the things the prophets described — just not the way people expected. Israel was looking for someone to overthrow Rome, but what humanity needed was rescue from sin.

Every Old Testament law was designed to teach God's people to love Him and love others. But after generations of trying, Israel discovered what God knew to be true. We are incapable of keeping God's law without His help. Jesus' death and resurrection provide a way for us to experience freedom from sin. When we believe in Jesus, we receive His Spirit, and with it, the ability to really love and finally fulfill God's law.

Reflect:

- **Does Jesus' statement that He came to fulfill the law and prophets change your view of the Old Testament? How?**
- **Imagine how Anna felt when she saw Jesus. Let her joy and excitement in seeing the Lord sink deep into your heart and guide you as you pray.**

“And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” - Matt 2:11

Jesus was probably 1 or 2 years old when the wise men arrived. Still a babe, Jesus was unable to do anything for them. Yet they were overjoyed to see Him and showered Him with gifts fit for royalty (Matt 2:10-11). The wise men celebrated Jesus purely for who He is. A miracle child and promised king. Jesus had yet to heal a single person or preach a single message. But they bowed down and worshipped Him.

God loves it when we acknowledge the good things He does for us. But even if God never did another thing for us, He would still be worthy of our worship. Worship is more than singing. Worship is a life lived for the Lord. Romans 12:1 tells us, “true and proper worship is to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”

Worship is willingly surrendering to God's plan for our lives every day. When we do, we give Jesus the greatest gift of all — a heart devoted to Him alone. The intimacy that comes from being fully known and loved by God changes us from the inside out. It causes us to lift our hands in praise and bow our heads in prayer. It gives us hope, even in hard times, and allows us to celebrate God just for who He is.

Reflect:

- **Can you remember a time when you were worshipping and felt overjoyed? Where was your attention at that moment?**
- **When was the last time you celebrated who Jesus is? Take a few minutes to tell Jesus what you love about Him.**

DEC 28, TUESDAY

Isa 53:1–6, Joh 3:16–17, Joh 20:31

Miracles Don't Always Look Like We Thought They Would

Isa 53:3

“He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.” - Isa 53:3, NLT

When rescue doesn't come the way we thought it would, we grow restless. We would love for the answer to our prayers to hit us like a bolt of lightning while rainbow confetti sprinkles from the sky, and a harp plays in the background. But often, God works in ways we don't expect and would never see coming. Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Yet, His life runs contrary to the savior people had in mind.

Israel was looking for a mighty king to deliver them. But their rescuer wasn't going to be the typical hero. He would be an ordinary person; someone they would look down on or pass over (Isaiah 53:2-3). This humble servant would be pierced, crushed, and wounded for them (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus came in humility, suffered, and showed mercy. He didn't take over by might or force or will. Instead, Jesus gave His life so we could have eternal life. What God has prepared for us is greater than anything we can imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Maybe you need healing from a chronic or undiagnosed illness. Maybe you're looking for work and wondering how you will provide for your family. The miracle you're looking for might not come in the package you expect, but it will come. God is faithful in fulfilling His promises.

When you're in a period of waiting and not knowing what comes next, sit and ponder the miracle of Jesus' birth and rest knowing that in Christ, all suffering will ultimately lead to God's glory. With God intervening on our behalf, what is there to fear?

Reflect:

- **What was the last miracle you witnessed? Did it happen the way you thought it would?**
- **How have you seen suffering and uncertainty give glory and honor to God?**
- **What miracles are you waiting for this Christmas? Share your desires and dreams with God. He loves you and wants to hear from you.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 28, TUESDAY

Isa 11:1-10

Jesus Is A Different Kind Of King

Isa 11:9

Parents and teachers. Your boss. Your boss's boss. The shareholders or the members of the board. We all have bosses — some good, some not. But what if there was a boss who was always wise, patient, gentle, kind, and faithful to keep his promises? What if that boss always had his employees' best interests at heart? And, what if following this boss and doing what he said would lead to more peace than you knew was possible?

Isaiah tells of such a man — not a boss who lords his position over us, but the Lord who would die to save us. Isaiah 11:1-10 foretells God's plan for a king to rule His people. These verses announced to God's people, "Your savior is coming! He will stand in awe of the Lord. He will be righteous and dispense justice based on obedience, not favoritism."

This kingdom would be different than anything they, or we, have ever known. This king would ask people to follow Him, not demand obedience from them. He would draw people to Himself through love, not fear. Jesus is the king Isaiah describes. And when He returns to rule and reign, "the whole earth will be brimming with knowing God-Alive, a living knowledge of God ocean-deep, ocean-wide" (Isaiah 11:9, MSG).

Reflect:

- **Re-read Isaiah's description of how Jesus rules. How does it make you feel? What do you look forward to?**
- **Is it easier to think of Jesus as your savior than your ruler? How might your relationship need to change to reflect that Jesus is both?**

Ever notice how we get more nostalgic during the holidays? We go about our lives for 330 days, then December hits, and the opening notes of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" brings us to tears. If you're homesick this Christmas, consider that Jesus knows how you feel. He spent 33 years separated from His Father on a long-term mission to reconcile God and humanity.

Then, when Jesus' work was done, Hebrews says He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3). God the Father and God the Son reunited, and one day, we will do the same. When we see a soldier come home and scoop up their son or daughter, we don't have to know them personally to feel the tug on our heartstrings. Because deep in all of us is a desire for God to do the same.

The holidays tap into this deep longing to be at home with God. When we gather with friends and family, we get a taste of the homecoming that awaits us in eternity. As sons and daughters, we long to be in the presence of God the Father. Galatians 4:6 says, "You can tell for sure that you are now fully adopted as his own children because God sent the Spirit of his Son into our lives crying out, 'Papa! Father!'" (MSG).

The day is coming when we'll see God face to face, and our longing for home will be complete. Until then, we have the gift of His Spirit, who allows us to speak to God, hear from God, and feel His presence in this home away from home.

Reflect:

- **Are you missing certain people or places this Christmas? Take some time to tell God who you're missing and how you're feeling. Ask Him to show you that you're not alone.**
- **Hebrews 1:2 says everything that belongs to God belongs to Jesus, and Galatians 4:7 says that, through Jesus, we become God's heirs as well. What do those two statements together mean for you? Is there any longing you have that God cannot fulfill?**

DEC 29, WEDNESDAY

Psa 105:1–4, Psa 68:3–5

Celebrate Christmas All Year Long

Psa 105:3–4

Long after the tree is packed up and the lights are put away, the spirit of Christmas can live on in us. Christmas reminds of God's faithfulness, and His faithfulness never ends.

Psalm 105 tells us to sing to God and tell of all his wondrous works. Singing is powerful. When we sing, we're telling our hearts what's true and reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness.

Reading the Bible and talking with God in prayer are two more ways to keep God's faithfulness before us all year long. As we read the Bible, we see how God has been taking care of His people from the beginning of time.

Psalm 105:4 says, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always" (NIV). Always really does mean always. Cry out to God with your frustration. Ask Him to show you He's near and give you peace. God is always with you, ready to hear from you.

Record how God is speaking to you through Scripture, circumstances, and other Christians. It doesn't have to be complicated or detailed. It doesn't matter if it's digital or written. Keeping a record of when God shows up and shows off helps us recall His character and "glory in his holy name" (Psalm 105:3).

Christmas celebrates God coming to earth to be with us. When we take the time to be with Him, we can experience the same joy and hope we have at Christmas every day of the year.

Reflect:

- **Can you remember a time when God answered your prayers in a clear and specific way? Take some time to reflect on that today.**
- **Have you ever specifically asked God to help you feel His presence in your life? Go ahead and give it a try.**

P.R.A.Y

PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

DEC 29, WEDNESDAY

Psa 90:1-17

A Psalm For The End Of The Year

Psa 90:12

Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom. Psalm 90:12 (NLT)

Psalm 90 is a perfect psalm for the end of the year. For one thing, this psalm includes the word "year" more than any other psalm. In the Hebrew text of Psalm 90, the word translated as "year" (shena) appears seven times. No other psalm includes shena more than twice.

But, apart from the frequency of the word "year" in Psalm 90, its themes speak to us as we wrap up another calendar year. It begins by noting that God has been our home "through all the generations," from year to year to year (90:1). Even "before the mountains were born," God is God (90:2). God is always there for us.

Though we can make a big deal out of the change of years, from God's perspective, "a thousand years are as a passing day" (90:4). This fact reminds us of God's unmatched majesty. It also suggests that all the hype surrounding New Year's doesn't really matter in the long run. Tomorrow night, the big crystal ball will fall in Times Square, but what will really be different, other than the number of the year?

Psalm 90 acknowledges the difficulties of life: "Seventy years are given to us! Some even live to eighty. But even the best years are filled with pain and trouble; soon they disappear, and we fly away" (90:10). Now that could sound pretty depressing. But, the fact that the Bible doesn't "make nice" commends to us its truthfulness. Yes, indeed, even when life is fine for us, others are suffering. We may have plenty to eat, but millions throughout the world are without food today. And we might feel as if we're going to live forever, but, in fact, our days are numbered.

Does this mean we should get all down in the mouth? Hardly. Verse 12 offers this prayer to the Lord: "Teach us to realize the brevity of life, so that we may grow in wisdom." The Hebrew of this verse could be translated literally, "Teach us to count our days, so we might gain a heart of wisdom." How does acknowledging the brevity of life help us to be wise? Well, for one thing, when we realize that we have only so many hours on earth, we'll be eager to use them well, rather than frittering them away with empty activities. Accepting the limits of our lives will help us to use well every minute God gives us.

Psalm 90 underscores the fact that fulfillment in life isn't a matter of how much we have or how much we accomplish. Rather, what gives life purpose and meaning is a living relationship with the living God: "Satisfy us each morning with your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives" (90:14). I can't think of a better thought with which to end the year and begin a new one. If we live each day in the satisfaction of God's love, we will be empowered to live for him, to love him through serving our neighbors. We won't fret about the passing of the years, but will accept the gift of each day as a new opportunity for love and service.

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

- ***As you come to the end of the year, what thoughts do you have about 2021?***
- ***Have you lived this year to the fullest?***
- ***In what areas of life do you need more of God's wisdom?***
- ***Are you open to being satisfied each day with God's unfailing love for you?***

DEC 30, THURSDAY

Psa 31:1-24

Reflections for the End of the Year

Psa 31:14-16

Well, we have come to the last day of 2021. You might want to add, “Finally!” In so many ways this has been a long, hard year. If all we had to deal with was a global pandemic, that would be tough enough. But layered onto this affliction has been economic hardship, fear and anxiety affecting everyone. To this list you can surely add difficulties from your personal life and that of your friends, family, church, and city.

The events of 2021 reminded us that, as much as we might want to be in control of our life and might even believe we are, in fact we really aren’t. So much of what happens to us and to those we love is way beyond our control. I’ll admit that I don’t like this very much, but it’s true.

My feeling out of control led me, several months ago, to add a simple element to my morning devotions. One of the things I do each morning is recite portions of several psalms, ones I have memorized so I can have them with me throughout the day. My collection includes beloved passages, such as Psalm 100 (“Make a joyful noise to the Lord”). In May I added a few lines from Psalm 31: “But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love” (Psalm 31:14-16).

This psalm, attributed to David, is a cry for help from someone who is in a dangerous, distressing, and dreadful situation. Right before the verses I just quoted, David laments the fact that people are plotting to kill him (Psa 31:13). So how does he respond? David reaffirms his trust in the Lord. God is not just the God of heaven and earth, but “my God,” the God whom David knows intimately.

On the basis of this relationship, David prays, “My times are in your hand” (Psa 31:15). What happens during the times of his life and how long he will live are ultimately God’s to control. Yet, this isn’t a prayer of resignation, as if David believes that his life is established by fate. Rather, he knows that he can call out to God for help. So, he asks to be delivered from the hand of his enemies. David implores the Lord to look upon him with mercy and to save him as an expression of divine love.

When I echo David’s prayer each morning, saying, “My times are in your hand,” I feel a sense of release and relief. It’s as if I’m leaning back into God’s strong, trustworthy arms. I’m reminded that I belong to God, that I exist for the praise of his glory. I find myself wanting with greater urgency to use the time God has given me for his purposes. I can let go, at least for a moment, of the worry I carry around about myself, not to mention the world around me.

So, as we bid farewell to 2021 and say hello to 2022, it’s important to remember that our times, our years if you will, are in God’s hand. Though the calendar may change, though we may face unexpected challenges, disappointments, and losses in the new year, we are safe in God’s strong, merciful, loving hand.

Reflect

- **As you look back on 2021, what comes to mind? What thoughts? What feelings?**
- **When you feel out of control, what do you do?**
- **If you were to believe, really to believe, that your times were in God’s hand, what difference might this make in your life?**

Act:

As you think about the past year and prepare for a new year, let the fact that your times are in God’s hand sink into your heart.

You may even find it helpful to memorize this verse so you can take it with you all the time.

DEC 30, THURSDAY

Psa 31:1-24

Reflections for the End of the Year

Psa 31:14-16

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

The words of the old hymn ...

**“COUNT YOUR MY BLESSINGS NAME THEM ONE BY ONE
AND IT WILL SURPRISE YOU WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE.”**

still ring through today.

As the year draws to a close let's Count Our Blessings, Name Them One by One ...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Take Time to Thank God for Each and Everyone of These Blessings.

*PS: Do not forget to Thank God for BWJ – completing 5 long years of reading
His Word daily and systematically .*

DEC 31, FRIDAY

Deu 8:1–20

What To Do on the Last Day of the Year

Lam 3:22–23

Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lam 3:22-23

This is it, the last day of the year, and within hours a new and strange-sounding year will begin full of we have no idea what! Hopes, dreams, beginnings and endings. It's a bit scary! But should it be, really?

Tomorrow morning (or afternoon) when you rise and face the eastern sky, you won't find emblazoned across the heavens the words, "This is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday!" Neither will you find the warning, "Today is all you have so make it a good one!" You will find the winter sun piercing the clouds, squinting at you, driving back the darkness and giving you the light of another day.

Life really isn't broken up into days and months and years but into 24-hour cycles as the dawn of a new day comes; and these God-given periods are what life is about: sunrise and sunset, one day at a time.

Coming to the end of a year often is a cause for reflection, and that can be positive. Sometimes it's good to look back, to reflect, and to see the hand of God who brought you through some rough times. Before God took His children into the Promised Land, he asked them to look back. Here are the words from Deu 8:2, *"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands."*

"Remember how the LORD your God led you," was Moses' instruction. As you stand on the threshold of a New Year, there are four things which I hope you will remember which can serve as guideposts for the future.

First, **REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO YOU THIS PAST YEAR.** It was Jeremiah who cried out, "Great is your faithfulness!" He is still faithful today. Remember how God did meet you this past year, how He faithfully responded to your heart cry and saved you from disaster.

Next, **REMEMBER THE FACT THAT GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND THAT HE IS STILL IN CONTROL OF THE UNIVERSE.** 2 Chr 29:11 reminds us of just who God is: "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all." Let's refresh our memories about who God is. Yes, He is big enough to be in control of our lives.

Then **REMEMBER HIS PROVISION FOR YOU THIS PAST YEAR.** Are you familiar with the poet and song-writer, Annie Johnson Flint? Born in the late 1800s, hers was a life of difficulty and disability and yet she remembered the goodness of God. "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us,/ Hitherto His hand hath led," she penned. "Hitherto His arm protected,/ Hitherto His bounty fed./ Will His love desert us wholly,/ Will His heart our need forget?/ Will His presence clean forsake us who has never failed us yet?" How would you answer those questions?

Finally, **REMEMBER HIS PROMISES.** There are literally thousands of promises in God's word with your name attached to them. While some promises are given specifically to certain groups or people, most of the promises of the New Testament are made to God's children. They belong to you, not because you are good, or beautiful, or kind to others, but because you are God's child. They are part of your inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Face the New Year one day at a time, walking hand in hand with Him who knows no surprises and will meet you at the beginning of each new day.

DEC 31, FRIDAY

Deu 8:1-20

What To Do on the Last Day of the Year

Lam 3:22-23

P.R.A.Y PRAY & PRAISE | READ & REFLECT | ASK & APPLY | YIELD & YAKHAL

**Personal Prayer Needs for
the Coming Year(s)**

**Prayer Needs for
My Family Members**

Not New Year Resolutions But God-Given Burdens & Desires ...

**Salvation - People I want to bring before
the Lord for their Salvation**

**Discipleship – To Disciple OR to be Discipled
Prayerfully decide who you would want to
disciple you & who you want to disciple.**

To Pray Our God-Given Burdens & Desires Into Fruition

"HE APPOINTED TWELVE THAT

they might be with him

AND THAT HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH AND TO
HAVE AUTHORITY TO DRIVE OUT DEMONS."

MARK 3:14-15

Lunch-time Devotion

FOLLOWING BWJ DAILY READINGS

Monday to Saturday, 12 PM-1 PM

zoom @ tinyurl.com/SSMCLTD

ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN

also featured at facebook.com/SSMethodistChurch



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