

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

VOL 2, MAY–AUGUST 2021

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 fifth year doing Being With Jesus (BWJ) and I trust it has been enjoyable and enriching for all of us. God's Word, the Bible, can never be exhausted in terms of content, understanding and current application. Though written literally thousands of years ago, its message is ever fresh and relevant to our 21st century, each day and season.

Due to the Covid 19 Pandemic, many people have been forced to spend more time at home. As they save on time travelling to and from work, we trust they have more time to do their daily devotion consistently.

By now most of you would have gotten used to the BWJ format. The 2021 edition however, has some changes and additions to make it more relevant and effective in catering to the diverse spiritual needs of the Church Family.

In this BWJ 2021 Vol 2 for May to August, we have included a special week of devotions focusing on Missions as SSMC will be celebrating her 46th Anniversary Gift Day for Missions on Sunday, 23rd May. For the entire week (16th to 23rd May), we will have Devotional Reflections written by some of our Mission Partners and our very own Mission Workers. Hopefully, this will spur something within all of us regarding Missions – the people and the ministry.

Just a quick recap on BWJ 2021:

- Reading through the entire **New Testament** again but in a **Chronological** order. We will be completing the Gospels in this volume.
- **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 is listed at the bottom of the page.
- **Reflective Statements / Questions** at the end of each Devotion as an aid to that day's reading and a useful Guide for DG Word discussion and sharing.
- Our BWJ mnemonic **P.R.A.Y.** – Pray – Read & Reflect – Apply – Yield has been expanded to refer to: **PRAY & PRAISE – READ & REFLECT – ASK & APPLY – YIELD & 'YAKHAL'** (*Hebrew for HOPE*).
- **Extra Explanatory Notes** on key Calendar / Church Calendar Events to give a better understanding and appreciation of Historical / Traditional Church Practices.
- **BWJ Plus edition is available** for those who want a more in-depth reading and study. This will be available only in softcopy, downloadable from our Church website. Hard copies of the BWJ Plus edition in A4 and A5 sizes will be made available on request.

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

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

Blessed Continuing BWJing 2021

Ps Swee Ming

16th March 2021

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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 an 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?

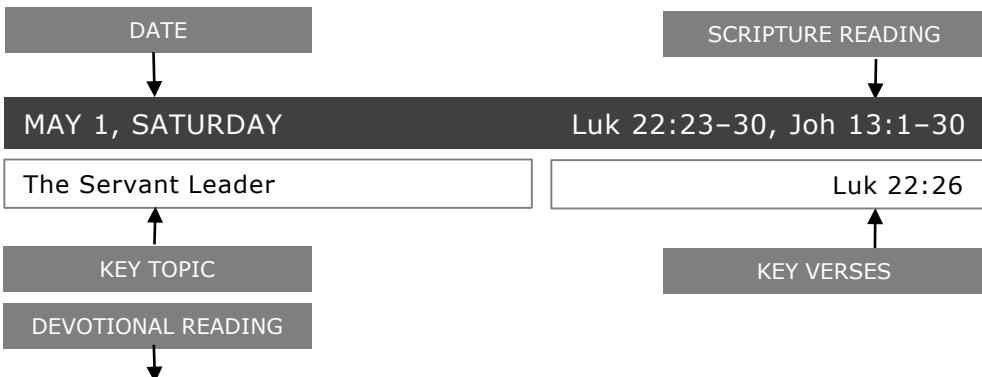
"To the degree & to the extent that I yield and submit to the Holy Spirit in my life, God's Kingdom will come more and more into my life, my family, my Discipleship Group, my work, my Church & my community."

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:



But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. Luke 22:26

Jesus makes a simple yet powerful statement about the Christian definition of authority. It must have grieved Him. In the midst of sharing His last meal with His disciples, and reflecting on His coming suffering, the disciples began arguing over who was number one among them. This issue must have been an ongoing discussion among the disciples. Matthew and Mark have recorded this dispute in earlier settings (Mk 10:41–45, Matt 20:24–28).

REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS & QUESTION(S)

**What kind of leader are you? What kind of follower are you?
Pray that whether we lead or follow, we may always serve others with a spirit of humility.**

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

JOURNAL YOUR REFLECTIONS, IMPRESSIONS, THOUGHTS, LESSONS HERE.

ALSO PRAYER NEEDS FOR YOURSELF & OTHERS

SOURCE REFERENCE

MAY 1, SATURDAY

Luk 22:23–30, Joh 13:1–30

The Servant Leader

Luk 22:26

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. Luke 22:26

Jesus makes a simple yet powerful statement about the Christian definition of authority. It must have grieved Him. In the midst of sharing His last meal with His disciples, and reflecting on His coming suffering, the disciples began arguing over who was number one among them. This issue must have been an ongoing discussion among the disciples. Matthew and Mark have recorded this dispute in earlier settings (Mk 10:41–45, Matt 20:24–28).

Jesus points to the character of His own ministry. In the culture of His time, the greater person, the master, sits at table, while the lesser serves (v 27). Instead, Jesus has been among them 'as one who serves' (v 27). This is the spiritual legacy He leaves His disciples. He served the people with great compassion and He would soon demonstrate a service of even greater proportions, in laying down His life. John 13 tells us that before the meal, Jesus washed His disciples' feet as an act of humble service. His words are deeply rooted in personal example (Phil 2:5–11).

In our world today, leaders wield power and authority and seek glory and honor for themselves. People of rank and position expect and even demand to receive service and are offered the opportunity to 'call the shots'. The kingdom of God, however, does not operate according to power politics. Christians in positions of authority are mere stewards of the gifts they have been given to enable them to serve others. Biblical leadership is about humility and service. True greatness in God's eyes is not defined by position or office but by one's attitude towards service. God exalts those who humble themselves by serving the people they lead. Christianity must not sell out to the world's model of authority. The world's way of achieving honor and power has no place in God's kingdom.

What kind of leader are you? What kind of follower are you?

Pray that whether we lead or follow, we may always serve others with a spirit of humility.

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

MAY 2, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 3, MONDAY

Joh 14:1-31

I Will Return for You

Joh 14:6

"I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." John 14:3

We are told in the previous chapter that Jesus is 'troubled' by the presence of a traitor among His disciples (13:21).

Here, it is the disciples who are 'troubled' because of the Lord's imminent departure (v 1). 'Not to worry,' says Jesus: His purpose in going away is to prepare a place (in His Father's house) with ample accommodation for all of them (v 2)! His departure is not to be 'adieu' (a permanent parting) but 'au revoir' (till we meet again) as He will come back for them. The cure for their concern is to trust God the Father and Himself and His word.

The puzzled Thomas' question (v 5) elicits an answer from Jesus in which He makes a claim for uniqueness – 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (v 6). Jesus explains His claim by saying, 'If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well' (v 7). When Philip asks that He show them the Father (v 8) Jesus chides him, 'Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father' (v 9). What Jesus says here is perhaps a clarification of John 1:18 – 'No one has ever seen God. but God the One and Only, (the only begotten Son. God incarnate, Jesus) who is at the Father's side, has made Him known'.

Jesus further emphasizes that He is in the Father and that the Father is in Him (vs 10-11). His words and works are God's. He encourages them by saying that anyone who has faith in Him will be able to do even greater things than what He has been doing (v 12). Because He is returning to God (after accomplishing His mission on earth) He will do whatever they ask God in His name, and so bring glory to God.

**We as Christians can draw great comfort from the fact that
His promise to the disciples is as valid for us today.**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 4, TUESDAY

Joh 15:1-27

Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit

Joh 15:5

'I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener' is the last of the metaphors ('I am') by which Jesus describes Himself, as recorded by John.

The scenario of a vineyard, with the vine and its branches and a 'vine-dresser' (gardener) lends itself readily to spiritualization: God (the gardener) has planted His vine (Jesus) in the vineyard (the world) to bear 'fruit' (people) that will give Him satisfaction and demonstrate His benevolence. The 'branches' are the 'followers' of Jesus who are meant to bear 'fruit' reflecting the character of Christ (the fruit of the Spirit - Gal 5:22). There are however, two kinds of branches - those that don't bear fruit and those that do. God discards the former but 'trims clean' (prunes or disciplines) the latter in order that they be more productive ('more fruitful' - v 2), more Christlike.

Jesus assures His disciples that they are all 'clean' because of the word He has given them. (He could not say this to them when Judas Iscariot was still with them.) Jesus exhorts His disciples to remain in Him ('united to Christ' - Phil 2:1). Only as they are united to Him (they in Him and He in them) will they bear 'much fruit' but apart from Him they can do nothing (v 5).

He also assures them that by being in union with and obedient to Him they will be given whatever they ask. Their bearing much fruit will be to the glory of the Divine gardener. He reiterates that they will be in loving fellowship with Him if they obey His commands. Their relationship to Him will change - from being servants to friends.

Not only are they to bear fruit, more fruit and much fruit but also fruit that will last (v 16).

True discipleship is evidenced by holding to Christ's teaching (obeying His commands - 8:31, 15:10), loving one another as Christ loved (13:34, 15:12) and bearing much fruit (15:8).

It is as true today as it was when Jesus announced it.

The Christian life may be summed up in two words - progress and perseverance.

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 5, WEDNESDAY

Joh 16:1-33

The Spirit and the World

Joh 16:14a

'When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.' John 16:8

In 13:36, Peter asks the Lord in a rather general way where He is going and in 14:5, Thomas remarks, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going'. Since then, Jesus has become more specific about His departure and the subsequent coming of the Counsellor. He is therefore, surprised when they do not press Him further about His departure. He then tells them He is going to the Father who sent Him and He observes that they are 'filled with grief'. He assures them ('I tell you the truth') that it is for their good that He is going away because it is only with His departure that the promised Counsellor will come to them.

By His incarnation, He had made God known (1:18) but this revelation was personal and therefore only seen locally. With the coming of the Counsellor who will live with them and be in them (14:17), the revelation of Himself (and therefore of God) will be multiplied and universalized. He will be in each one of them wherever they may go even 'to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

In the 4th reference to the Counsellor (v 7) in the Gospel (in the three previous references to Him in 14:16, 26, 15:26, He ministers to the disciples) He will convict the world of (or expose the world's error with regard to) sin and of righteousness and of judgment. His conviction of sin will lead either to repentance or resistance on the part of the hearers. His conviction of righteousness will expose the unjust judgment of Christ at His trial but will endorse Christ's righteousness and Christ's acceptance by a righteous God. His conviction of judgment will confirm the condemnation and judgment of the 'prince of this world' and his whole evil order.

Jesus says that when the Spirit of Truth (Counsellor) comes. He will continue to unfold the truth that He had begun to teach them. His further function will be to glorify Him (the Lord) by progressively making known all His qualities and attributes. The time has come for Him to leave them but He will be with them in the Spirit.

Christians can rejoice in the fact that the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor and Companion, is as available to the church today as it was at His advent at Pentecost.

Armed with the word of God and the presence and power of the Spirit, the church is equipped to face an indifferent and even hostile world.

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 6, THURSDAY

Joh 17:1-26

Don't take them Out of the World

Joh 17:9

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."
John 17:15

After his Farewell Discourse (13:31-16:33), Jesus continued with prayers of dedication and consecration for Himself (v 1-5), His disciples (v 6-19) and all believers (v 20-26). Just as Jesus is dedicated and set apart for His final redemptive death on the cross, His disciples are also set apart and consecrated for the task of remaining in a hostile world and bearing witness for Him.

In a world that is preoccupied with security as a result of rising crime, increasing natural disasters, escalating terrorist acts, and growing tension resulting from racial discrimination, religious intolerance and persecution, it is timely to be reminded of Jesus' prayers for all of us. Nowhere in His prayer did Jesus ask that God would remove all the troubles and hardships confronting us; or that we would be delivered from these disasters. Nowhere also did Jesus advocate that as a community of believers we are to withdraw and retreat from the hostile world so that we could operate from within the safe confines of a Christian community. But what Jesus did pray is that God would protect us from the evil one (v 15) as He sends us into a hostile world (v 18).

As believers, we are not spared the hardships of life as a result of the catastrophes facing us and from persecution because of our faith in Christ. But we are promised that God will be with us in difficult times when we go through the storms in our lives. Therefore, our responsibility is to remain steadfast in our faith, faithful to God and diligent in sharing our faith. Even in times of hardships and difficulties, we have a message of hope, peace, love, and comfort to share to a hostile world resistant to the Gospel.

**'When the storms of life are raging. Stand by me;
When the world is tossing me, Like a ship upon the sea,
Thou Who rulest wind and water. Stand by me.'**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 7, FRIDAY Mat 26:30–35, Mar 14:26–31, Luk 22:31–38, Joh 13:31–38

Second Chance

Joh 13:34–35

Everybody wants to be on the winning team. Although Jesus has repeatedly predicted His death, His disciples are unable to grasp its full implications. If Jesus were truly the Messiah they were looking for, how could His life end in defeat?

Death on the cross is a stumbling block and offence to many, including Peter. Peter's strong protest shows that he does not think Jesus' death is likely. He has visions of a heroic Jesus who will usher in a New Kingdom with power. Jesus, on the other hand, aligns Himself with Zechariah's prophecy (13:7) – an abandoned shepherd, whose sheep are scattered.

'To fall away' (14:27) does not suggest that the disciples will lose their faith but that their courage will fail and they will forsake Him. Peter does not know how weak he really is. Nor do the rest of the disciples, as they enthusiastically chime their allegiance to Jesus. Are we trusting our own strength? Peter begins to disassociate himself from Jesus out of fear of receiving the same treatment.

Is the cross a stumbling block to our faith? Our God is a God of second chances. He will restore. Like Peter, a true disciple may temporarily fail to stand up for Christ but will never willingly sell Him out. Inevitably, the faith of all His disciples will falter. This is a necessary refining process for a new people of God to emerge.

God gives us second chances.

Is there someone you should be giving a second chance to?

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 8, SATURDAY

Mat 26:36–46, Mar 14:32–42, Luk 22:39–46, Joh 18:1

When the Going Gets Tough

Mar 14:38

To obey God in all circumstances is going to cost us something. Yet, in times of crisis we are always tempted to take the easy way out, rather than pay the price for our convictions. That is why earnest prayer and continual watchfulness are vital resources. This command recognizes the inherent weakness of our flesh and at the same time, a readiness in our spirit to tap into God's power at a time of crisis.

It is unlikely that Jesus is bringing the three disciples to Gethsemane to comfort Him in His agonizing isolation. His disciples do not understand Calvary. Jesus knows they will abandon him ... He shares His deepest with the Father.

He does not ask the three to pray for Him. They are asked to keep watch while He prays. They are to pray for themselves lest they experience severe testing of their own. The hour demands their vigilance. Earlier glib self-confidence (14:29, 31; 10:38–40) is exposed as they fail to even stay awake in Jesus' critical hour.

Jesus returns to them again and again to find them asleep, unable to maintain their vigil. Jesus warns them repeatedly. Spiritual wakefulness and prayer in full dependence upon divine help provide the only preparation for crisis. When the going gets tough, will the faithful get praying?

What do you do when the going gets tough?

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 9, SUNDAY – Mother's Day

What does the Bible say about Christian Mothers?

Being a mother is a very important role that the Lord chooses to give to many women. A Christian mother is told to love her children (Tit 2:4–5), so that she does not bring reproach on the Lord and on the Savior whose name she bears.

Children are a gift from the Lord (Psa 127:3-5). In Tit 2:4, the Greek word *philoteknos* appears in reference to mothers loving their children. This word represents a special kind of “mother love.” The idea that flows out of this word is that of caring for our children, nurturing them, affectionately embracing them, meeting their needs, and tenderly befriending each one as a unique gift from the hand of God.

Several things are commanded of Christian mothers in God’s Word:

- Availability – morning, noon, and night (Deut 6:6-7)
- Involvement – interacting, discussing, thinking, and processing life together (Eph 6:4)
- Teaching – the Scriptures and a biblical worldview (Psa 78:5-6; Deut 4:10; Eph 6:4)
- Training – helping a child to develop skills and discover his/her strengths (Prov 22:6) and spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3-8 and 1 Cor 12)
- Discipline – teaching the fear of the Lord, drawing the line consistently, lovingly, firmly (Eph 6:4; Heb 12:5-11; Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15-17)
- Nurture – providing an environment of constant verbal support, freedom to fail, acceptance, affection, unconditional love (Tit 2:4; 2 Tim 1:7; Eph 4:29-32; 5:1-2; Gal 5:22; 1 Pet 3:8-9)
- Modeling with Integrity – living what you say, being a model from which a child can learn by “catching” the essence of godly living (Deut 4:9, 15, 23; Prov 10:9; 11:3; Psa 37:18, 37).

The Bible never states that every woman should be a mother. However, it does say that those whom the Lord blesses to be mothers should take the responsibility seriously. Mothers have a unique and crucial role in the lives of their children. Motherhood is not a chore or unpleasant task. Just as a mother bears a child during pregnancy, and just as a mother feeds and cares for a child during infancy, so mothers also play an ongoing role in the lives of their children, whether they are adolescents, teenagers, young adults, or even adults with children of their own. While the role of motherhood must change and develop, the love, care, nurture, and encouragement a mother gives should never cease.

PLEASE PRAY FOR ALL MOTHERS INCLUDING SPIRITUAL MOTHERS & GRANDMOTHERS

- Thank God for them and Pray God's Blessing Upon Them.

MAY 9, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 10, MONDAY

Mat 26:47–56, Mar 14:43–52, Luk 22:47–53, Joh 18:2–11

Jesus Is In Control

Luk 22:51

But Jesus answered, “No more of this!” And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. Luke 22:51

There is great tension and suspense here. Only Jesus is in full control. Ironically, He is the one facing arrest. He has prayerfully surrendered to God’s will (v 42) and is ready to obey to the uttermost.

Judas tragically plays right into the hands of the enemy by betraying Jesus with a sign of friendly intimacy (v 48). In panic, the other disciples lose control and try to take matters into their own hands. Without waiting for an answer to their question (v 49), one of them reacts by wielding his sword and severing the ear of the high priest’s servant. Jesus who remains in control, reaches out to heal. Even the enemy is not beyond His compassionate reach. One who participates in Jesus’ arrest experiences God’s grace. The religious leaders remain defiant although Jesus exposes their cowardice. What they dared not do in public for fear of the people, they now carry out in a private setting (v 53).

In our world today, trust is easily sacrificed on the altar of lust, greed and selfishness. Children suffer abuse from parents, the very ones who should nurture trust in them. Spouses abandon each other, and friends can be disloyal for personal gain. We may find ourselves the victims, yet we are also capable of being perpetrators. However, this does not need to be the final word about our lives. Jesus, who has experienced the depths of betrayal Himself, and who remains in full control of every situation, reaches out to us in compassion. He is ready to heal all who turn to Him.

Notice the grace and gentle strength of Jesus.

Believing that He is always in control, bring yourself to Him, asking for healing in those areas where you have been victim or perpetrator.

You can also pray for the victims and for the perpetrators of betrayal, that Christ’s compassionate grace may touch their lives with deep healing.

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 11, TUESDAY

Mat 26:57–68, Mar 14:53–65, Luk 22:63–71, Joh 18:12–14, 19–24

Justice Denied

Mat 26:59

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. Matthew 26:59

People framed for crimes they did not commit; confessions forced out of people through torture; judges who give verdicts according to how much they are paid or that which suit the people in power - this is the scenario of justice in our world today. It was the same in Jesus' day.

The Sanhedrin was a council of Jewish elders and teachers of the law with the high priest as its president. It acted like a court and could pass the death sentence but it needed the permission of the Roman governor for the sentence to be carried out.

Notice that even before the trial started, they had already decided on the sentence (v 59). What they needed to do was to determine the charge against Jesus and then get people to give evidence to make the charge stick. The last step was to convince the Roman governor that Jesus was a security risk. Then he would have no choice but to carry out the death sentence. The verdict had been decided even before the trial began. Although it was a show trial they still needed at least two witnesses against Jesus. Finally, they found the two but they misquoted Jesus' words as recorded in John 2:19 (v 61).

There was no lawyer for the defense. If there had been one, would Peter have made a good witness for the defense? From his denial of Jesus, we think not (v 69–75).

Jesus' silence fulfilled the words of Isaiah 53:7, but He broke His silence to confirm once and for all His identity as the Messiah (v 63–64a). Jesus is the Messiah, not the Messiah of Jewish tradition but the Son of God and Son of Man with heavenly authority and power (v 63–64). Jesus spoke the truth but the court called it blasphemy, a charge punishable by death (v 66).

Man sentencing God to death proves beyond doubt how deeply man has fallen into sin. If Jesus had fought back - which He could easily have done - there would have been no salvation for us.

Now, although most of us do not live in a just society, we can take our cause to Jesus and be assured that He will defend us.

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 12, WEDNESDAY Mat 26:69–27:10, Mar 14:66–72, Luk 22:54–62, Joh 18:15–18, 25–27

A Searching Glance

Luk 22:61

The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times." Luke 22:61

Place yourself in Peter's shoes. Your heart beating rapidly, your whole body trembling with tension, you follow Jesus to the house of the high priest, keeping some distance from the captors. The late evening air is chilly and you join the servants around the fire in the courtyard, keeping your head slightly bowed. However, the light from the fire shines on your face. And you find yourself denying that you know Jesus (v 57). Subsequently, two others around the fire identify you as part of Jesus' group. Your Galilean accent has been recognized, but yet again, words of denial slip easily from your mouth. 'Man, I don't know what you're talking about!' (v 60). From a distance, a rooster crows.

At the same time, Jesus, from inside the house, turns and looks straight at you. For a split second, your eyes meet. His searching look indicates that He knows what you have just done. In a flash, your memory is jolted. You remember Jesus' words, spoken to you at your last meal together. Over supper you were rash enough to declare your readiness to go to prison and even die for Jesus. But your mask of boldness has been stripped away, your cowardice exposed. Indeed, your Lord knew you better than you knew yourself. He predicted this failure (v 34). Now you know yourself too and your heart breaks over what you have done. Weeping in remorse, you leave the courtyard. You need to grieve over your failure.

This experience of stepping into Peter's shoes helps connect us with our own inclination to deny the Lord when the going gets tough. We too may have hedged about our faith when in the company of those who would reject us. Failure can be painful. However, the Lord does not condemn us. When we repent, He forgives. He later restored Peter (Jn 21:15–19). With His help, we mature through the depths of our failures.

**Lord, I know how many times I have failed You.
Thank You for using each painful occasion as a means of growth. Amen**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 13, THURSDAY

Mat 27:11-26, Mar 15:1-15, Luk 23:1-25

Vengeance Belongs to God

Mar 15:5

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed. Mark 15:5

We Asians are usually not as vocal as our Western counterparts. When we are wrongly accused, oftentimes we would just keep quiet and say nothing ‘like a dumb boy eating lotus seeds.’ We do not see the point of arguing because we believe our accusers have already made up their mind.

Jesus was silent before His accusers because they were intent on finding Him guilty. To fulfil Scriptures, He said not a word in His own defence. Though He suffered emotionally and physically, He did not retaliate nor threaten to get even. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy He knew would be His afterwards (Heb 12:2). He left His case in the hands of God who always judges fairly.

Jesus suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21-23). When we suffer for doing good, we are to face it, like our Lord, with confidence that God is in control of the future. God is pleased with us when, for His sake, we patiently endure unfair treatment. We should be joyful when we are persecuted for being or doing right, for these testings will develop persevering faith, proven character and mature hope (Ja 1:2-4).

God has not finished with us yet. Therefore if, in the face of such trials, we get upset or agitated, we need to deal with our heart before the day is out, thus allowing no root of bitterness to grow. So what if we were wronged? Why not just accept the injustice and leave it at that? Forgive as the Lord forgave us. We can then love and pray for those who persecute us as the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross.

Let God be the Judge.

What would Jesus do? Am I serious about doing what He would do?

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 14, FRIDAY

Joh 18:28-19:16a

Whom Do We Prefer?

Joh 18:38a

"Give us Barabbas!" John 18:40

Who was Barabbas? The Jewish authorities preferred him to be released instead of Jesus. From our reading and the Synoptic Gospels, we know that Barabbas was a notorious prisoner (Matt 27:16) who had taken part in insurrections and had committed murder (v 40, Mk 15:7, Lk 23:19).

From these observations, we note that Barabbas believed that God saves through violence and war and he was prepared to fight for that belief. In this respect Pilate found him to be dangerous. But Jesus of Nazareth believed that God saves through self-sacrificing love and that He Himself was the embodiment of that love by His willingness to die sacrificially on the cross for humanity. Because of this, the Jewish authorities found Him dangerous.

In contrasting the character of Barabbas with Jesus, our reading confronts us with the question of how we respond to the circumstances surrounding us today. In a world of heightened terrorist attacks, rising religious intolerance and increasing curtailment of religious freedom, how are the church and individual believers of Jesus Christ to become agents of transformation? Sometimes we hear the clamor, 'Give us Barabbas', denoting a preference for a revolutionary option of displaying political power, military strength and economic sanctions instead of the ethic of Jesus that teaches us to love our enemies, pray for our persecutors, turn the other cheek, and to go the extra mile.

It is easier for us to choose to follow the worldly ways than to follow Jesus in embodying self-sacrificing love. If properly understood, the ethic of Jesus calls into question the assumptions of our society that power, strength, and might make it right through the display of military power and strength. It appears that the lessons from the Vietnam War and the more recent Afghanistan invasion and Iraqi war have not been learned.

**Whose way do we choose to follow?
Is it the way of Barabbas or the way of Jesus Christ?**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 15, SATURDAY

Mat 27:27–44, Mar 15:16–32, Luk 23:26–43, Joh 19:16b–24

The Cross of Forgiveness

Mar 1:35

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 23:34

What would have been your response at the place called the Skull, where they crucified Jesus (v 33)? There were different reactions from the people standing around. Some were mere spectators of the cruel drama. Others, like the religious leaders, the soldiers and the criminal on His left, mocked Jesus. The other criminal confesses, 'We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong' (v 41). He petitions for Jesus' favor and this Jesus willingly grants (v 43).

After Jesus' death, other reactions are noted. The Roman centurion praises God, calling Jesus a 'righteous man' (Matt 27:54, Mk 15:39) for he had seen God at work as the drama unfolded. A second reaction comes from the crowd. They have watched and they went away beating their breasts (v 48). They are moved with remorse. The third reaction is from those who knew Jesus, including the women who had followed Him since His ministry in Galilee. They had not deserted Jesus. They took to heart what they saw, not fully understanding but willing to remain near Him.

We should allow ourselves to enter the experience of the cross before we hurry on to the empty tomb. Indeed, we cannot witness the death of Jesus as disinterested bystanders. As we pause to ponder Jesus' suffering, we see His heart for humankind. We see ourselves more clearly too, perhaps reflected in some of the reactions of the original witnesses. We recognize the seeds of unbelief, anger and cruelty in ourselves just as we also acknowledge our own remorse, guilt, and love for our Lord. In the midst of great suffering, Jesus' compassion dominates. As we stand at the foot of the cross, let us receive His words of forgiveness (v 34).

**Lord, we pray in the words You have given us:
"Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us."**

P.R.A.Y

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

2021 MISSION WEEK: 16 MAY – 23 MAY, 2021**Daily Devotionals by our Missionaries & Mission Partners**

We look forward to celebrate SSMC's 46th Anniversary Gift Day for Missions this weekend, 22-23 May 2021. We have invited our missionaries and mission partners to share a short devotional reading with us this week. Each day this week, there are two devotional readings by different missionaries and mission partners. We pray you'll be blessed by these readings daily, and you will see Jesus at work in Malaysia and the nations.

We are on God's mission to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has commanded (Matt 28:19). May we rise up to answer the call to take Jesus' love and blessing to every people in every land. Each one of us is on a mission – God's MISSION.

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Psalm 42:1-11

Hope In Place of Despair

Psalm 42:11

Psalm 42 begins with familiar words, ones that you may recall in a popular worship song.

Yet, a closer reading of this Psalm reveals the honest cries of a person whose soul is cast down, who is going through a seemingly hopeless situation, one where God does not seem to be present. In times of hopelessness like the present pandemic, it is easy to lose hope and sink into despair.

Yet, the psalmist draws strength from what he remembers. He recalls experiences when he praised and worshipped God (42:4), when God saved him (42:5), and when God's steadfast love and presence were so real to him (42:8). Instead of despairing, he remembers, and then speaks comfortingly to his downcast soul – “Hope in God; for I shall again praise him” (42:11).

Spend time reflecting:

- Today – What hopeless/downcast situation am I experiencing right now? Can I honestly tell God how I feel?
- Yesterday – What will I choose to remember? How have I experienced God’s presence and steadfast love in my life?
- Tomorrow – What strength can I draw from remembering these things as I face the future? How will I help others face their future?

“How we remember yesterday, will impact how we respond today, and how we will face tomorrow.”

Shared by Philip Phua

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Deu 15, Joh 3:1-20

THE GREAT RESET

Deu 15:6

When the lockdowns first started, pictures of clean waterways, clear skies and animals coming out to play made their rounds. While it was fun to see these rare footages, it also raised questions about how this pandemic has been an opportunity to pause and reflect on how our constant need for consumption and growth has been detrimental to the "least of these".

Yet while we have welcomed the environmental renewal, adapting to the "new norm" has not been an easy journey for some. For the B40 group whose lives had been fragile even before Covid19 hit, we hear of fathers stealing bread in desperation to feed their children. For refugees who have been depending on odd jobs and the generosity of Malaysians, provisions have been thinning and xenophobia has caused much fear among them.

However, Deuteronomy reminds us that if there is any poor among us, we should not be "hardhearted or tightfisted" but to freely lend. Indeed, as John the Baptist was preparing the way for Jesus, who was going to "reset" our relationship with our Father, John reminds us that we should not forget the little actions we could take every day in bringing about a more just world (v 10-14).

Reflection

- 1) What is the one thing that you have felt relieved about since the pandemic started?
- 2) Listen to the conversations surrounding those who have been hit hard by the pandemic; how are the words in Deuteronomy 15 and John 3 inspiring or challenging you?
- 3) What are some of the everyday actions you can take to practice justice and to bless others?

**"Let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.
He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (Ps 98:9).**

Shared by Melanie Yong, Malaysian Care

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 17, MONDAY

Eph 4

Hope through Grace

Eph 4:7, 29

Online conferences are common these days and during a live broadcast, we faced severe lag resulting in participants filling the chat with questions and complaints.

A voice whispered, "The problem is you – you've messed up." The video was being broadcast from my computer and even though we had tested everything, feelings of failure and shame filled me – I had disappointed everyone who had worked so hard! I needed to apologise and remove myself from the group.

In that moment, God spoke, "Receive grace from me. Your worth does not come from what you produce – you are my child and you have done your best. This was not within your control but I am in control." I cried at my computer as I felt God's peace.

After my apology, many participants offered grace as well: "It's okay, we still appreciated the effort and the content; there was lag but our internet is not great anyway; we're all in this together."

Grace was given by God and others during an extremely stressful time. What is grace? Receiving what we do not deserve – in this case, instead of criticism and condemnation, I received encouragement from God and others.

Reflective question

How have you received grace from God lately? How will you extend grace to others around you instead of being critical?

Shared by Phua Su-Kim

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 17, MONDAY

Psa 139, Mat 13:34-36, Eph2:1-10

God's Perfect Masterpiece

Psa 139:13-16

Have you ever happily purchased a watch thinking that it was the best deal that you could get, only to return to the same store a week later to find this very watch at half of the price that you paid? Though it is still the same lovely watch, but somehow, its value has changed. You may even have felt slightly cheated.

Often, that is how our lives are. God created us perfect, but along the way, we find ourselves on the bargain rack due to circumstances in our lives. Perhaps it is sin or wrong decisions, or you could have been mistreated or abused by someone. Maybe you lost your job and have been finding it difficult to get re-employed due to the current economic situation. It could also be a sickness or an accident that has left you immobilized.

All of these events can cause us to feel as though we're not worth the "full price", and we believe in the lies and accusations of the enemy telling us that we can never measure up. But Christ has paid the full price for you when He declared on the Cross that "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

David was far from perfect. He was a murderer and an adulterer, broken by sin (Psalm 51). He had his seasons of depression and despair (Psalm 43). He was also mistreated. And yet, David knew the heart of God. He knew that God intricately made him.

No matter what has happened or how far you've gone, your value in Christ will never change. He still went to the Cross for you! You are His masterpiece, and never a mistake.

"Heavenly Father, thank You for Your unconditional love for me even in my weaknesses and brokenness. Help me to live in the freedom of who You've created me to be, that I may fulfil the purposes that You have for my life! Amen."

Shared by Timothy Chui, Raphah Ministries

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 18, TUESDAY

Jos 2, Rom 8:24–25, Rom 15:13

Hope in Waiting

Rom 12:12

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer.” Rom 12:12

Amy (23) came to Malaysia to study. One day, she was asked to deliver a package to a house. To her surprise, the police appeared and found drugs in it. She was arrested, sentenced to 7 years in prison. She lost hope and exhibited uncontrollable behaviours.

A social worker, Jay, took up her case. She regularly visited Amy and encouraged her with the Word of God, which helped Amy to hope in God again. That hope brought a change in behaviour. After waiting for months, her prison sentence was reduced to three and a half years. Today, she is back in her country with her own sewing business.

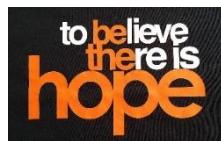
We read in the Bible that Rahab the prostitute was in a similar situation. The scarlet cord that she used to let the Israelite spies escape became a promise/ hope of salvation. We can imagine her hoping and waiting through the night, as in Rom 12:12 – being joyful in the hope that her family would be rescued, patient in the uncertainty, and praying to the one true God that she didn't even yet know, to be her salvation.

One of the most difficult things to remember is that "hope is rooted in waiting". Both Rahab and Amy were able to hope while waiting for the promise to come to pass.

Reflection

"To Believe There is Hope"

- 1) How do we cling to hope and keep waiting?
- 2) How do we keep doubt from overwhelming us?
- 3) How can we be a blessing (as the “cord or rope”) for others?



I can cling to God and cry out with the psalmist,

“For thou art my hope “tikvah”, O Lord God; thou art my trust from my youth” (Psa 71:5).

Shared by Jacqueline Yap

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

MAY 18, TUESDAY

Act 1:8

Transformed by the Word and the Spirit

Act 1:8

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." Act 1:8 NKJV

Mary was a nominal Sunday Christian and attended our Bible classes in our School of Ministry program only to stop her sister from nagging her too much. She thought to herself that she would just attend the first day of the school, then take leave to go for her business trip and not return to continue with the classes. However, she was totally unprepared for what God had in store for her. On the first day of the school she was deeply touched and captivated by the testimony of the teacher who had left his own country to serve God in Malaysia for many years. She was amazed that there are Christians who are willing to sacrifice and to give up many things for the privilege of serving God.

Her heart was touched by the Holy Spirit that very first day and after her business trip, she eagerly came back to rejoin the classes where she learned how to worship and pray every morning and was taught the word of God daily. When the school ended three months later, she was in tears to think that she would no longer be able to pray together with her classmates. She did not want the prayer to end and being the head of a major corporation, she started morning prayer in her office. When it started, she was on her own but soon more and more of her colleagues joined her and now many years later, the morning prayer at her office is still going on. She applied the Christian principles she learned from the classes to her business and soon her business grew and prospered and she is now able to help the poor and those in need. One testimony changed her life and she in turn was used by God to touch many lives for God.

Shared by Rev. Ron Hee, Principal of Tung Ling Seminary Malaysia

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 19, WEDNESDAY

Psa 34:6–7

Prayer of a Desperate Man in a Hopeless Situation

Psa 34:6–7

When I had nothing, desperate and defeated, I cried out to the Lord and He heard me, bringing His miracle – deliverance when I needed it most. The angel of the Lord stooped down to listen as I prayed.

This was my prayer when I was at my lowest point of my life more than 30 years ago. That was my turning point when I committed to serve the Lord in the Drugs, Prison and HIV ministry.

The Lord comforts us when we are down and we are called to comfort and encourage others. He will empower us; He will do this for everyone who fears the Lord.

As the men are delivered from drugs, released from prison or infected with HIV, we are called to share the love of Christ to give them hope when life seems hopeless.

God's story

- i. Sam was sentenced to life imprisonment for possessing firearms. This means he has to spend his natural life in prison. While serving time, he became a believer and gradually he shared the gospel with the other inmates. He even baptised some of them. After 12 years, God miraculously enabled him to be released.
- ii. Mervyn was sentenced to the gallows for trafficking in drugs. He accepted Christ while serving time. He prayed continuously for a pardon. After serving 5 ½ years, his prayer was answered. He was set free. God gave him hope in a hopeless situation.

God has a purpose for allowing things to happen in our lives.

Shared by Xavier.S

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 19, WEDNESDAY

Mat 22:37-40

Leading A Missional Life

Mat 22:37-38

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

God has a plan for each one of us to fulfil His grand purpose on earth. It is the 'missio dei', or the mission God has given us i.e., to reflect His fame and accomplish His redemptive plan in our society, and the nations.

Being missional in life is intentionally portraying the presence of God in our communities. Being missional is attractional because we live a life exhibiting the characteristics of Christ, portraying His love; attracting others like a lighthouse, hence being the 'reincarnation' of Christ to our society. In essence we are fulfilling the 'missio dei', being His instrument of love to others.

Three ways God wants to accomplish His task on planet earth:

1. He wants to fulfil His mission by making us into His likeness. He wants us to have a deep bond and intimacy with Him.
2. God wants us to be missional in working together with one another in the task of redeeming the lost communities back to Him.
3. We are created for 'community'. Live a missional lifestyle that would make your life attractive; express His love in your home, at work and university.

Reflection

- 1) What is God's grand purpose for my life?
- 2) In fulfilling the 'missio dei' reflect on how you can live a missional life at home, work and school.
- 3) What would you do to lead an attractional life to be 'His presence' on planet earth?

Shared by Peter Shankar, STAMP

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 20, THURSDAY

Joh 4:1-42

Personal Mission

Joh 4:39-42

Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world." Joh 4:39-42

In the above narrative, while we don't know all the details, the main message of the Samaritan woman to the other people in town was that Jesus told her all that she ever did. It was not theological, doctrinal, intellectual nor of any great depth. She was just sharing her encounter with Jesus. We are not even sure whether she really understood who Jesus was.

All that the woman did was to point people to Jesus. The people then encountered Jesus for themselves and they believed because of Jesus Himself.

What the woman did seems like a simple thing. The act of sharing was simple. But it was probably not easy for the woman to share. In her cultural context, she probably knew that her words as a woman might not be received seriously. On top of that she did not have a very good reputation in the eyes of the people because of her private life. So, she had to battle through her fears, shame and cultural taboos to point people to Jesus.

Questions for reflection:

- What personal encounters do you have of Jesus? (They don't have to be theological or intellectual nor dramatic but need to be authentic.)
- Who can you share these encounters with – to point that person to Jesus?
- What can we learn from the Samaritan woman in overcoming our barriers in our personal mission?

Shared by Koh Earn Soo

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

MAY 20, THURSDAY

1 Co 15:35-58

Living Faithfully Day to Day

1 Co 15:58

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Co 15:58

Sometimes, our lives may seem insignificant as we go about the day-to-day routines, but let's remind ourselves that each day counts for the Lord, whether we see it or not. In the seemingly insignificant, God is at work, as always. We just need to be faithful and do our best to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

Will we offer words of encouragement or a listening ear? Will we help those in need and be there for them? Will we forgive and show mercy in the face of lies and slander? Will we exercise grace and restraint when treated unjustly?

God can use us to bring transformation, even without us realising it. I have heard someone say, "I still remember so clearly what you said/did. That changed my perspective completely about my spouse/marriage."

Recently, a friend and his wife picked up on something we had done. They decided to take a leap of faith and were amazed at how God worked. "We have experienced a breakthrough," he shared.

In the day to day, God works as He wills. Our part is to be faithful.

Reflective question

Will we live each day for the Lord and let Him do His work through us? We may not see or realise what He's doing, but let us keep in mind the imperishable, and be faithful.

Shared by Well & Michelle Manurung

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 21, FRIDAY

1 Jo 1:1-3

Sharing Common Life

Joh 17:3

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" Joh 17:3

What is the essence of the Christian life? Is it prayer, Bible study or attending church? Or is it something altogether beyond this natural world? In the Gospels we see the close partnership Jesus had with His Father. They share the same nature, the same life, same heart devoted to one eternal purpose. This fellowship between the Father and the Son is the source of eternal life. In John 17.3 Jesus invited His disciples into an experience of knowing God, thereby to experience eternal life.

In 1 Jo 1:1–3 John invited us into this same supernatural experience. Here, the word fellowship is *koinónia* in Greek—being in close partnership through sharing common life. This *koinónia* was one of several key essentials the early church in Jerusalem enjoyed (Act 2:42). *Koinónia* conveys the idea of intimacy, sharing a common life form that originates in God Himself. In Joh 3:36, "*The one who believes in the Son has eternal life...*" Jesus spoke of this eternal life as a present reality, not something in the future. The word life is the Greek word *zóé* and can be translated, life-giving life. It is a life originating from the eternal realm sustained by God's uncreated self-existence. Jesus made possessing eternal life synonymous with experiencing God now. Thus, true believers have life-giving eternal life right now and can experience this quality of God's life based on intimacy with the Father and Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

Jesus said, "Abide in Me and I in you" indicating that the true believer is indwelt with the very life of God. Today, He is inviting us into an experience of *koinónia*, a true fellowship of enjoying common life together, not only with one another, but more importantly, with the Father and the Son.

Reflection question

How am I sharing common life with the Father and the Son, and with each other?

Shared by Yeow Mooi

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

MAY 21, FRIDAY

Mat 9:37-38

Seedtime, Harvest & Laborers

Mat 9:37-38

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Mat 9:37-38 ESV)

The durian season is just over. As the harvest is plentiful, a durian farmer will tell you that if workers are short, they will be facing some serious problems: either the ‘good neighbors’ will harvest for themselves without any permission, or the wild animals will have a feast. And many fruits will be left to rot simply because there are not enough hands to do the harvesting. Such is the picture of the harvest field in Malaysia. It is both seedtime and harvest during this Covid-19 pandemic.

“Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest” (John 4:35). People are spiritually ready to have their sins forgiven by God. Sowing and harvesting are more than just helping people become Christians; it includes helping them to grow as God’s disciples. God wants to use us as a channel to spread the gospel. God seeks men and women who desire to be involved in sowing, watering, and harvesting. No special qualifications required – only believe Him and depend on Him with all your soul, mind, and will.

May the Lord challenge all of us to look at the harvest field that is ripening. Don’t let “others” do the harvesting simply because we fail to realize we are the laborers that God is calling forth.

Shared by Randy Singkee, Wawasan Penabur

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 22, SATURDAY

Mar 10:42–45, Gal 6:9–10

True Greatness

Mar 10:42–45

What is true greatness? In 1905 President Joseph F. Smith made this most profound statement, “Those things which we call extraordinary, remarkable, or unusual may make history, but they do not make real life. After all, to do well those things which God ordained to be the common lot of all mankind, is the truest greatness. To be a successful father or a successful mother is greater than to be a successful general or a successful statesman.”

Helen Keller sums it up: *“I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”* True greatness begins with being faithful in what God has entrusted to us, be it in our homes, neighbourhood, or community; caring for the sick, the elderly, blessing the poor, caring for my neighbour’s property or simply serving to display His goodness and kindness to all man.

Today’s world equates “greatness” with the accumulation of wealth, success, power, accomplishments, titles and position. This is contrary to God’s Word. In Mark 10:42–45, Jesus overturns the world’s value system by inaugurating His Kingdom values whereby greatness is serving rather than lording over others. Our greatest ambition in life should be to love and serve others as that is fulfilling the greatest commandment of loving Him and loving people.

Thousands of workers in the field trade lives of comfort for poverty and danger to serve the least reached people groups, often in war torn nations. Unseen, unknown, without accolades, they labour faithfully among the poor, the despised, and plant 5 to 20 generations of house churches, advancing His kingdom. These nameless, and faceless labourers have no status and are not esteemed by the world but they are highly honoured and esteemed by the Lord Himself! There are many great, unnoticed, and forgotten heroes among us. May we remember them in prayer today while remembering to be faithful in our “ordinary” task!

Shared by Lucrece Loo

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

MAY 22, SATURDAY

Gen 12; Heb 11: 8; Joh 17:18

I Will Go Where God Wants Me to Go

Mat 28:19

Nobody wants to be stuck. We talk about being stuck along the way. To be stuck means not being able to move or grow. It is the same spiritually. At times, we all feel stuck at a particular point in our spiritual journey. The good news is that Jesus is able to get us moving and to go where He wants us to go. We will not get stuck if we listen to Him. This is what Abram did in Gen 12. While he was stuck in his homeland, God told Abram to go on an incredible journey, to leave his country and his family and to go to the land that God will show him. As a result of Abram's faith there's a new nation that praises God.

In Heb 11: 8 we read that Abram obeyed God's word and he went where God wanted him to go even though he did not know where to go. He is an example for us. This is a question of faith. Trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God's plan for our lives. When faith is required, there is risk and sometimes fear because we don't know how all of these things will be put in place. Choosing to obey is to face your fears.

Jesus fulfilled His mission on earth and He gave this command to His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations" Mat 28:19. Jesus prayed in Joh 17:18: "He said to the Father, "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." Go where Jesus wants us to go: this is discipleship, and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Tell Jesus that you will go wherever He wants you to go.

Reflection question

- Will you go where God wants you to go today?

Shared by Esther Thean, GMT

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

2 Co 5:14-21, 6:1-2, Rom 5:1-2, Act 1:8

Christ's Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Mat 24:14

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come." Mat 24:14

Paul's exhortation and challenge to the Corinthian Church regarding their position and role in the ministry of reconciliation is as relevant to us living in the 21st century. We live in a world fragmented and broken in every way in our relationship with God and with one another through family, race, religion, economic and social status. It requires mending, restoring, healing and rebuilding.

His reminder to the church is that in order for reconciliation and healing to take place, we need firstly to be reconciled to God (vs 18) which enables us to be new creation (v.17) made righteous (v.21) through Christ. Being in Christ (v.17) is the essence of being reconciled to God. This gives us the privilege to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation (v.18) as we have been given the message of reconciliation (v.19) – our God's story and experience of reconciliation. What a humbling opportunity to share this message of love and grace to bring reconciliation and healing. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors (v.20) of reconciliation who only live for Him empowered by His love (v.14,15) – we actively appeal and help people to be reconciled to God (v.20).

Reflection and thought: Are pre-believers not being reconciled because we are not living lives of reconciliation by word, life and deed as Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation? Paul's challenge to the Corinthian church and us – 'that as God's fellow workers (Christ's Ambassadors) do not receive God's grace (reconciliation) in vain' (2 Co 6:1) – for this is the season and day of His favour and salvation (2 Co 6:2).

Jesus gives us the humble privilege to bring about closure (Mat 24:14) when we, empowered by the Holy Spirit (Act 1: 8) actively partner Him in sharing, living and doing the work of reconciliation as a testimony to the nations.

Shared by Pastor Phua Seng Tiong

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

Mat 28:18–20

Make Disciples

Mat 28:19

In what we commonly call the Great Commission (Mat 28:18–20), Jesus spoke of his absolute authority before commissioning his disciples to: "... go and make disciples ..." The two words that are the key to understand this whole passage are "make disciples". The other commands: "Go...baptize...teach" all flow out of the central command to "make disciples". This was Jesus' brilliant blueprint to save the world: make disciples who would make disciples who would make disciples...until he returned. For some inexplicable reason the church has largely ignored this imperative. We need to recapture this clear focus.

Something that is not immediately obvious about the Great Commission is who we are to go to. Of course, we have to try and reach every single person on the planet, but Jesus gave us a clue as to the strategy when he said: "...all nations ..." For most of us, the word "nations" means "countries", referring to geo-political states. But in the original Greek, the word "ethne" is used, which is where the English term "ethnic group" comes from. Jesus' reference to "nations" refers to people groups.

Today, there are more than 17,000 distinct ethnic groups on earth, which, for simplicity, we'll call "people groups", a term describing an ethno-linguistic group, distinguishable by their language, culture or beliefs. Of these 17,000 groups, at least 6000 – 6700 are counted as "unreached", which means they have so few Christians that they can't evangelise or disciple their own people or plant their own churches without external help. When added together, people living in unreached people groups equate to over 3.2 billion individuals, or about 41% of the world's population!

This is the greatest challenge of modern-day missions. It is therefore vital that we all play a part in reaching the unreached peoples by going to serve on the frontier, giving to support those who do go or by praying for the mission workers.

Shared by Bruce Hill, International Director of World Outreach

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 24, MONDAY

Mat 27:45–56, Mar 15:33–41, Luk 23:44–49, Joh 19:25–37

Christ Dies

Mat 27:54

"Surely he was the Son of God!" Mat 27:54

No death has made such a difference to the world as the death of Christ.

The manner of His death - crucifixion - was both cruel and humiliating. Stripped of His clothes, He was made to hang on the cross in public view until His death. He could have numbed the physical pain and the pain of being mocked (vs 39-44) by drinking the heavily drugged wine that was offered to Him (v 34) but He chose to suffer the pain. Jesus thus fulfilled the prophecies of Psalm 22 and 69:21.

While we wonder how the innocent Jesus could have borne the suffering and the shame, for Jesus it was His alienation from God that was unbearable (v 46). Jesus who had always addressed God as 'Father' could only cry out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' as God looked away from the sins of the world that were upon Jesus.

This sudden outburst from Jesus who had been silent thus far shocked those present (vs 47-49). Victims of crucifixion lose consciousness before they die. But Jesus cried out loudly before He died. And when He died, it was an act of His own will - He gave up His spirit (v 50). The unusual manner of His death and the fact that the sun did not shine for three hours as Jesus hung on the cross (v 45) ought to have convinced the Jews that Jesus was no ordinary man. Then, some more amazing events took place (vs 51 -53), the most telling one being the curtain of the temple being torn from top to bottom (v 51). It was the beginning of a new era – access to God through Jesus our high priest who is always in the presence of God, ready to take our needs to Him.

Scripture tells us that it was the Romans and not the Jews who believed in Jesus upon seeing these signs (v 54). As for the women, their faith in Jesus had always been steadfast (vs 55-56).

**Imagine what life would have been like if Jesus had not died for us.
Praise God that the Lord Jesus shed His blood for our redemption.**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 25, TUESDAY

Mat 27:57–66, Mar 15:42–47, Luk 23:50–56, Joh 19:38–42

Courageous Action

Mar 15:43

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. Luke 23:50-51a

Jesus had died but the Romans had no qualms about leaving victims hanging on their crosses for days after their death. Jesus, however, received an honorable burial. According to Jewish practice (Deut 21:23) the bodies of all executed criminals should be buried the same day so that the land would not be defiled. Doing the right thing takes courage and effort. It is easier to believe that something should be done than to act on our convictions. Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council, also described as a good and upright man who was waiting for the kingdom of God, acted on his convictions. He is described as someone who had become a disciple of Jesus (Matt 27:57). He asked for Jesus' body, took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a new tomb.

Joseph's action is exemplary. He ignored caution in order to honor Jesus' body. It would have been risky for him to associate publicly with a condemned criminal. As a member of the Council, he had not consented to their decision and action (v 51) and now he acted on that earlier conviction.

As you read this passage, place yourself at the tomb. After the noise and drama of the passion and crucifixion, Jesus' wrenching pain and the final breath, comes a deep stillness as Jesus is buried. In the quiet around the tomb, ask yourself whether you would have the courage of Joseph. Also consider the women who followed Joseph to see where Jesus was laid. What gave them the courage to act on their convictions? What might give you the courage to act on yours?

**Lord, teach me what it means to act on my convictions.
You stood by Yours and it cost You Your life.
It is easy to associate myself with You when it is convenient.
Grant me the courage to do so even when the tide turns. Amen**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 26, WEDNESDAY

Mat 28:1–10, Mar 16:1–11, Luk 24:1–12, Joh 20:1–18

CHRIST is RISEN

Mat 28:6a

"Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." Luke 24:6b-7

There are skeptics today who seek scientific proof to confirm the resurrection. In the Gospel records, we read about the first disciples who, in their response, were the first skeptics. Drawn by their loyalty and devotion to Jesus, the women were seeking to render one last service to Him by anointing His body. They obviously did not anticipate the resurrection and were perplexed when they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Although they had been prepared earlier by Jesus (9:22), their memories had to be jolted before Jesus' words came back to mind. They returned to tell the eleven but their story was dismissed as 'nonsense'. How skeptical the first audience of the startling news! Peter, now wiser from his own experience, knew better than to doubt Jesus' words. He ran to check it out and marvelled at seeing the empty tomb. He went away pondering, struggling to understand the reality of Jesus' resurrection. The first steps of belief had begun, even for the first skeptics, and we know that full conviction would follow.

What does the empty tomb mean for Christians? What do we see as we view life through the empty tomb? First and foremost, we see our faith vindicated. Jesus who was dead is alive. God has defeated death, our last enemy. Therefore, we can embrace a resurrection perspective on life. Everything, from our careers, our relationships and even our struggles with illness and death, takes on an eternal perspective. Secondly, the resurrection promises an incomparably great power for those who believe (Eph. 1:19-20). This power gives believers the courage and boldness to commit our lives to the Lord and to His kingdom.

**Pray that God may give us wisdom to live life in the light of the resurrection.
What are some of the changes that we will have to make?**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 27, THURSDAY

Mat 28:11-15, Mar 16:12-13, Luk 24:13-35

With Burning Hearts

Luk 24:32

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32

Something goes wrong in our life. Perhaps it is an illness, or a loss of job or loss of a loved one. Through the period of grief and adjustment, we find ourselves downhearted, and full of disappointment. Our faith is near breaking point.

Over two thousand years ago, two disciples shared their deep disillusionment as they walked towards Emmaus. They had just lost the beloved Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, whom they believed would lead Israel to freedom from Roman rule. The One they had placed all their hopes on had been crucified. Moreover, His body was now missing from the tomb. As they walked, a stranger came up and walked along with them. They found themselves pouring out their hearts to Him. The stranger listened carefully but at the same time He used Scripture to explain to them what had transpired. As they reached their destination, they invited the stranger to stay with them. During the meal that followed, they finally recognized Him for who He was: their beloved Jesus, now risen!

We, too, believe in a risen Lord who walks beside us on life's journey. Our assumptions about life may have collapsed amid the many losses we face. Our brokenness might seem a barrier between us and God. However, that may be the very place where we meet the risen Lord. In the post-resurrection encounters, Jesus met the first disciples where they least expected Him! Indeed, the risen Lord who is no stranger to pain and suffering, is our companion on life's journey. As we share with Him our disappointments, He opens our eyes, banishes our doubts and replaces it with a joyous and strengthened faith. When we look back at our encounters with the risen Lord, we will declare that surely, 'Our hearts burned within us'.

**Come to Jesus in your grief and disappointment.
He opens eyes to a new understanding of what's happening.**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 28, FRIDAY

Mar 16:14, Luk 24:36–49, Joh 20:19–29

Empowered To Witness

Luk 24:48

"You are witnesses of these things." Luke 24:48

There are many ways we can share our faith with others. Sometimes we need the help of programs to move us out of our comfort zones to share the Gospel with those around us. These are helpful when applied appropriately but the bottom line is that as believers, we should be able to share not only the facts about salvation in Christ, but be 'witnesses' of the Lord we have personally met.

In the final resurrection appearance mentioned here, Jesus, the risen Lord, reassures the first disciples that He is indeed alive. He then commissions and empowers them to be His witnesses. The eleven were taken through a process of gradual awakening. They were startled and fearful when Jesus appeared to them. They thought He was a ghost. They must have recognized Him but the truth seemed too good to be true. There was much joy and amazement but also some doubt. Jesus ate with them and then opened their understanding of the Scriptures.

As believers in the twenty first century, we do not have the opportunity to touch the risen Christ or see Him, but in our personal journey of faith we can become witnesses of the many things that He has taught us along the way. When we open our hearts and lives to the risen Lord, we will soon be filled with wonder at the many times He touches us in unexpected ways. The facts about salvation are important but they must also be made real in our lives. Through our personal experiences of the risen Christ, and empowered by His Spirit, we too can become authentic witnesses.

Think about the things you would share with a person who does not know Christ.

How could you be a witness to all the things the Lord has taught you?

Be prayerful as you witness.

Remember though, that it is the Spirit who finally convicts a person of the truth of the Gospel.

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 29, SATURDAY

Joh 21:1-25

Breakfast with Jesus

Joh 21:12

Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." John 21:12

There are many speculative reasons as to why the disciples went back fishing after meeting the risen Lord. Some suggest that the disciples were disillusioned. Others suggest that they were at a loss as to what to do next. Still, others suggest that they were confused by recent events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Whatever the reasons, the fishing trip turned out to be a fruitless effort. It was not until Jesus appeared and directed them to cast the net on the other side did they have a full net of catch.

Sometimes life is full of surprises. Things often turn out the way we least expect. We may be disillusioned by our service for the Lord because after years of serving, we have yet to see the fruit of our labor. The countless hours and efforts put into serving the Lord are often not matched by words of appreciation and encouragement. We may be at the crossroads of our lives, feeling lost and not knowing the next step we should take. We may be confused by recent events we have encountered. In moments of frustrations, disappointment and discouragement, we may choose to go our own way and do things our own way according to our own strength and effort. We may even feel neglected and the Lord may seem far away from us. In times like these, let us pause for a moment and listen to the still, small voice of the Lord speaking to us. Like the disciples, it is time to accept the invitation of our Lord to have breakfast with Him (v 12). It is time to renew our strength in His presence. It is time to sit at His feet again to hear His voice and guidance so that we can be refreshed to be His effective servants.

The lack of success can be turned to miraculous effectiveness through the guidance of our Lord and our obedience to His directions.

PS: Jesus is still inviting us to have Breakfast with Him each and every day.

Would you accept His invitation to eat with Him?

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 30, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 31, MONDAY Mat 28:16–20, Mar 16:15–20, Luk 24:50–53, Joh 20:30–31, Act 1:1–11

Marching Orders

Mat 28:19–20

"*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.*" Matt 28:19a

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the best news ever! Nothing anybody else has done can match what Jesus has done for us. Before Jesus returned to heaven, He gave instructions to His disciples to take the Gospel far and wide.

Jesus' original mission began in Galilee and He returned there to launch His worldwide mission. Some of the disciples recognized Him and responded in worship (v 17). Others were uncertain. The Greek word for 'doubted' conveys the meaning of being uncertain. Were they uncertain as to who He was or did they recognize Him but were uncertain as to whether He would accept them after they had abandoned Him? Jesus put to rest their uncertainties by entrusting them with the responsibility to take the Gospel to all the world (vs 18–20). Their authority would come from Jesus, God and King of not only the Jews but of all heaven and earth (v 18). They had to:

- Go to people with the Good News and not wait for them to come
- Make disciples all over the world, teaching them to live according to the teachings of Jesus
- Baptize those who receive Jesus as their Savior as a public confession that they are turning to serve Christ
- Teach those who receive Jesus to be obedient to Him

Jesus' presence is ever with those who love and serve Him.

The Gospel is too good to keep to yourself. Share it with others.

**Tell them what Jesus means to you and give them a Gospel of Matthew or John to read;
Be a good friend to them and pray for them.**

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 31, MONDAY Mat 28:16–20, Mar 16:15–20, Luk 24:50–53, Joh 20:30–31, Act 1:1–11

Question: "Should Mark 16:9–20 be in the Bible?"

Answer:

Although the vast majority of later Greek manuscripts contain Mark 16:9–20, the Gospel of Mark ends at verse 8 in two of the oldest and most respected manuscripts, the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. As the oldest manuscripts are known to be the most accurate because there were fewer generations of copies from the original autographs (i.e., they are much closer in time to the originals), and the oldest manuscripts do not contain vv. 9–20, we can conclude that these verses were added later by scribes. The *King James Version* of the Bible, as well as the *New King James*, contains vv. 9–20 because the *King James* used medieval manuscripts as the basis of its translation. Since 1611, however, older and more accurate manuscripts have been discovered and they affirm that vv. 9–20 were not in the original Gospel of Mark.

In addition, the fourth-century church fathers Eusebius and Jerome noted that almost all Greek manuscripts available to them lacked vv. 9–20, although they doubtless knew those other endings existed. In the second century, Justin Martyr and Tatian knew about other endings. Irenaeus, also, in A.D. 150 to 200, must have known about this long ending because he quotes verse 19 from it. So, the early church fathers knew of the added verses, but even by the fourth century, Eusebius said the Greek manuscripts did not include these endings in the originals.

The internal evidence from this passage also casts doubt on Mark as the author. For one thing, the transition between verses 8 and 9 is abrupt and awkward. The Greek word translated “now” that begins v. 9 should link it to what follows, as the use of the word “now” does in the other synoptic Gospels. However, what follows doesn’t continue the story of the women referred to in v. 8, describing instead Jesus’ appearing to Mary Magdalene. There’s no transition there, but rather an abrupt and bizarre change, lacking the continuity typical of Mark’s narrative. The author should be continuing the story of the women based on the word “now,” not jumping to the appearance to Mary Magdalene. Further, for Mark to introduce Mary Magdalene here as though for the very first time (v. 9) is odd because she had already been introduced in Mark’s narrative (Mark 15:40, 47, 16:1), another evidence that this section was not written by Mark.

Furthermore, the vocabulary is not consistent with Mark’s Gospel. These last verses don’t read like Mark’s. There are eighteen words here that are never used anywhere by Mark, and the structure is very different from the familiar structure of his writing. The title “Lord Jesus,” used in verse 19, is never used anywhere else by Mark. Also, the reference to signs in vv. 17–18 doesn’t appear in any of the four Gospels. In no account, post-resurrection of Jesus, is there any discussion of signs like picking up serpents, speaking with tongues, casting out demons, drinking poison, or laying hands on the sick. So, both internally and externally, this is foreign to Mark.

While the added ending offers no new information, nor does it contradict previously revealed events and/or doctrine, both the external and internal evidence make it quite certain that Mark did not write it. In reality, ending his Gospel in verse 8 with the description of the amazement of the women at the tomb is entirely consistent with the rest of the narrative. Amazement at the Lord Jesus seems to be a theme with Mark. “They were amazed at his teaching” (Mark 1:22); “They were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves” (Mark 1:27); “He healed the paralytic, and they were all amazed and were glorifying God saying, ‘We’ve never seen anything like this’” (Mark 2:12). Astonishment at the work of Jesus is revealed throughout Mark’s narrative (Mark 4:41; 5:15, 33, 42; 6:51; 9:6, 15, 32; 10:24, 32; 11:18; 12:17; 16:5). Some, or even one, of the early scribes, however, apparently missed the thematic evidence and felt the need to add a more conventional ending.

MAY 31, MONDAY Mat 28:16–20, Mar 16:15–20, Luk 24:50–53, Joh 20:30–31, Act 1:1–11

Q: "What does the Bible say about snake handling? Should we be handling snakes in church?"

Answer:

Snake handling, as practiced by some misguided churches, is not a biblical endeavor. Mar 16:17–18 is used by some as a basis for handling snakes: "These signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will... pick up snakes with their hands." Churches that practice snake handling have special services in which people actually handle venomous snakes, supposedly giving evidence that the church members are true believers who are empowered and protected by God. It's true that Mar 16:17–18 says Jesus' followers will "pick up snakes," but there are several problems with the modern practice of snake handling.

First, the practice of handling snakes for the purpose of "proving" one's faith (or proving God's protection) is a violation of God's command not to put Him to the test: "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Mat 4:7; cf. Deu 6:16). Trying to force God's hand by requiring that He perform an obvious miracle is more than foolish; it is sinful. To test God's presence and power by purposely placing oneself in an unsafe situation is expressly forbidden in Scripture. Daniel did not seek out the lions, but when he found himself surrounded by them, through no fault of his own, he found God was there. Likewise, we trust God in dangerous situations, but we never purposely seek out danger.

Second, it is important to remember that there are serious questions regarding whether verses 9–20 of Mar 16 belong in the Bible. The evidence suggests that these verses were not originally part of the Gospel of Mark. Some of the oldest and most reliable Greek manuscripts do not contain verses 9–20. Other manuscripts contain verses 9–20 but set them apart from the rest of the Gospel. The most likely explanation is that Mar 16:9–20 is an interpolation. As a result, it is unwise to use anything from Mar 16:9–20 as the sole basis for any doctrine or practice. Snake handling is one such example of a dubious concept drawn from Mar 16:9–20. For more information, please see our earlier article "Should Mar 16:9–20 be in the Bible?"

If we assume, despite the evidence to the contrary, that Mar 16:17–18 does belong in Scripture, does it teach that we should be handling snakes in church? Absolutely not. Mar 16:17–18 contains no imperatives. The verse does not say, "Go out and handle snakes"; it says, "They will pick up snakes with their hands." It is a declaration that something will occur, not a command that someone make it occur.

Again assuming that the snake-handling passage belongs in Scripture, we could say that Jesus' words were fulfilled by the apostle Paul in Acts 28:3–5: "Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand... But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects." Notice that Paul was not seeking out snakes to handle. He was handling firewood and was bitten by a snake against his wishes. God intervened and miraculously protected Paul from the effects of the snake bite. Jesus' words in Mar 16:17–18 gave His apostles the assurance that, as they faithfully served God in the spread of the gospel, He could protect them from anything that crossed their paths.

If the snake-handling churches were consistent, they would also observe the second part of Mar 16:18: "And when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all." Why not drink a vial of strichnine or arsenic and "prove" one's faith that way? Why stop with the snakes?

God can and will protect us, according to His will, as we are serving Him. But we are not to put the Lord to the test. Just as Jesus refused to jump off the pinnacle of the temple and just as Daniel did not go lion-hunting, so are we not to intentionally seek out situations that require God's miraculous intervention. While not speaking directly of snake handling in churches, 1 Cor 10:9 could apply: "We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes."

Overview of Acts 1:1–9:31

Luke wrote the book of Acts to continue the story he had started in the Gospel which bears his name. His first work had been about all that Jesus began to do and teach until His ascension to heaven (1:1–2). By implication, this book is what He continued to do after that.

Luke tells us in his Gospel that Jesus was the 'Servant of the Lord' prophesied by Isaiah. Simeon had spoken about this when Jesus was a baby (compare Luke 1:32 with Isaiah 49:6) and God Himself had given Him the Spirit and declared He was 'well pleased' with Him at His baptism (compare Luke 3:22 and Isaiah 42:1). Isaiah later prophesied that this Servant would die for the sins of many and rise again (Isaiah 53).

Isaiah also prophesied that the Servant would both restore Israel and bring God's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isaiah 49:6). The death and resurrection of Jesus made this possible. But He would complete this work after His ascension, through His people who would also be given the Spirit. By the Spirit working through them. Jesus would indeed restore Israel and then bring His salvation to the nations (see Acts 13:47 for how Paul applies prophecy about the Servant's work to his own ministry).

Jesus Himself provides the outline for this program in I:8. The Holy Spirit would firstly come upon the disciples to equip them for the task. They would then witness for Jesus in three stages:

1. Jerusalem
2. Judea-Samaria
3. The ends of the earth

Jerusalem was the city of God from where God's law would go out, Judea and Samaria correspond to the old Israel, and the ends of the earth are the nations to which salvation would eventually go.

This three-stage witness provides the outline for this book: the witness in Jerusalem (1:1–8:1), in Judea and Samaria (8:1–1:18), and the ends of the earth (11:19–28:31). But the task is not over. We continue the Servant's work by bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth today!

JUN 1, TUESDAY

Act 1:12-2:13

Receiving the Promised Holy Spirit

Act 2:2-4

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Acts 2:4

Pentecost was a Jewish festival, celebrated 50 days after the Passover. It was the time when the firstfruits from the wheat harvest were offered to God. Acts 2:1 could be translated 'in the fulfilment of the day of Pentecost'. When God poured out His Spirit on the disciples in Jerusalem. Peter preached the Gospel and many were converted as the firstfruits of God's harvest. Three phenomena accompanied the pouring out of the Spirit.

Firstly, there was the sound of the blowing of a mighty wind (v 2). This reminds us of the great wind God sent to hold back the waters of the Red Sea at the start of Israel's nationhood when He rescued them from Egypt (Exo 14:21). It also reminds us of the breath (spirit) God was to breathe into the dry bones of Israel to restore them back to life (Ezek 37:1 -14). God's Spirit was giving new life and restoration to God's people.

Secondly, there was fire (v 3). When God was forming His Old Testament people. He had led the nation of Israel out of Egypt with a pillar of fire by night. There was one pillar of fire for the whole nation. But here we see the tongues of fire distributed and resting on each of the believers. God, by His Spirit, was with His people - not just as a whole but also as individuals (Num 11:29).

Thirdly, there was the speaking of other languages (v 4). Jews from all over the known world who were in Jerusalem for the festival heard the believers speaking the mighty works of God in their own language! This was a reversal of the curse of Babel where God had confused the languages of the rebellious people and scattered them in judgment (Gen 11:1). God was now in the process of gathering His people from all over the world.

We who trust in Jesus have been given God's Spirit. We have also been given new life as God's people and made part of the harvest which God is gathering.

Give thanks to Him for His kindness to us!

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 2, WEDNESDAY

Act 2:14-47

CHRIST is RISEN

Act 2:38

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" Acts 2:36

Peter's speech at Pentecost focuses not on the Holy Spirit but on Jesus. This is consistent with the work of the Spirit who glorifies Jesus (Jn 16:14).

Peter begins his speech by explaining that the phenomena the Jews were seeing fulfils the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. This showed that the 'last days' had been ushered in (v 17) and so the 'day of the Lord' (v 20) - the day of final judgment - would come soon. But salvation from the judgment, according to Joel, would be given to all who 'call on the name of the Lord' (v 21).

Peter then reminds them of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God authenticated Jesus as Messiah by the various signs He did (v 22). Yet, as part of God's plan. He was handed over to the Jews, who with help from the Romans, had Him executed on the cross (v 23). God, however, raised Him from the dead (v 24) - a fact to which the apostles were eyewitnesses (v 32).

The resurrection shows that Jesus is the Christ - the 'Holy One' of Psalm 16:10 (vs 25-32). Although it was written by King David, the psalm was not about him because he did see decay. The true King, whom David pointed to, would not. Since Jesus was raised from the dead, He is the one who truly fulfils the psalm, and is therefore the true King.

The pouring out of the Spirit shows that Jesus is the Lord of Psalm 110. Jesus pours out the Spirit from the right hand of God (vs 33-34) while the Lord mentioned in Psalm 110 sits at the right hand of Yahweh. Psalm 110 goes on to declare that the Lord will rule from Zion and judge those who oppose Him.

The Jewish leaders had made a terrible mistake. They had crucified the one whom God made both Lord and Christ (v 36). They, with all who reject His rule, would face judgment when the 'day of the Lord' that Joel had spoken of arrives.

Have you submitted to the rule of the ascended Christ?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 3, THURSDAY

Act 3:1-26

A Second Chance

Act 3:6

"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." Acts 3:19

The apostles had been doing many signs and wonders (2:43). Here is another one: A well-known man, crippled from birth is healed (vs 1-10). A surprised crowd gathers in the temple to hear Peter explain the miracle.

Peter first of all denies responsibility for healing the man (v 12). It was done by God to glorify Jesus (v 13). Israel had rejected and killed Jesus. She had murdered the Holy, Righteous, Author of Life - whom God later raised from the dead (v 14-15) and in whose Name the man before them stood healed (v 16).

Peter then notes that they were ignorant of the fact that God was using their evil for good. For God was fulfilling His plan that His Messiah would suffer (v 18). But this does not make them less culpable for their actions.

Peter therefore urges them to repent and turn to God. If they do, they will receive a second chance. Their sins will be wiped out (v 19) leading to times of refreshment from the Lord (v 19 - reminiscent of Isaiah 35:1-7 where refreshment comes from the ministry of the Messiah) and the return of Jesus when the time is ripe for all things to be restored (v 21).

Peter tells them that Jesus is the prophet predicted by Moses (v 22). Moses had commanded that anyone who did not listen to Him must be cut off from the people (v 23).The true Israel is King Jesus and His people.

God promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through his offspring (v 25b).The Jews therefore were the first to receive the message of repentance (v 26).This was a second chance to turn to their true Messiah. How would they respond?

Do you need a second chance in your relationship with God?

'Repent and turn to God and your sins will be wiped out'. Reflect on what it means for your sins to be wiped out through the suffering of the Messiah.

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

JUN 4, FRIDAY

Act 4:1-31

Standing Firm

Act 4:12

"We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Acts 4:20

In verses 1–5 of this passage, we see Israel's response to the second chance they were offered in yesterday's reading. The religious leaders tried to silence the apostles (vs 1–3) but many ordinary Jews believed. Throughout Israel's history, God had always kept a minority of Israelites who were faithful to Him (e.g. the 7,000 of Elijah's day who had not bowed the knee to Baal). Here, God kept a significant minority of Jews for Himself who acknowledged His Messiah and came under his Kingship.

Peter and John were brought before the same Jewish council, the Sanhedrin that had conspired against their Lord. We can well understand if they were fearful for their own lives at the time. However, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to speak God's word boldly (v 8, Lk 12:1 1-12).

Peter affirmed that the healing of the crippled man was done in the name of Jesus - whom, he added, they had put to death, but God had raised (v 10). This was the fulfilment of Psalm 118:22 which speaks of the most important stone in the building being initially rejected by the builders (v 11). He concluded his speech with a clear declaration of the exclusivity of Christ: salvation is only to be found in Him (v 12). What great courage he showed in that situation!

When the Jewish leaders demanded that they stop preaching in the name of Jesus, the response of the apostles was honest, uncompromising and bold (vs 19–20). They would listen to God rather than men.

The message that salvation is only to be found in Jesus was not a popular message during the days of the early church and it is not a popular message today.

Pray that God will grant us the boldness to proclaim it fearlessly as we should.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 5, SATURDAY

Act 4:32-5:11

Deceit and Disaster

Act 5:3a

Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also." Acts 5:9

In 4:32-37, we see the generosity of the group of believers. They were a great example of Christian generosity - supporting each other and even liquidating their assets to help the needy among them. This was typified by Barnabas who sold a field and gave the apostles the proceeds for this purpose. Peter's comments in 5:4a show that the open-handedness of these believers was voluntary and spontaneous, not a legalistic membership requirement of the church. As the apostles spoke powerfully of the resurrection, the church clearly demonstrated the love of Christ in their relationships. What a potent combination!

Ananias and Sapphira were among the donors. Their story is in 5:1-11. They sold some property and gave a portion of the proceeds to the church but kept some for personal use. This in itself was quite acceptable. However, they pretended that they had given away the full amount in order to be seen to be more generous than they were. This led to judgment on each of them when God struck them dead. The response of the church to this was an appropriate fear of the Lord (v 11).

This incident at the beginning of the New Testament church reminds us that there will always be people in churches who pretend to be godly while really seeking their own glory. It also warns us from the start that God takes this seriously and will bring His judgment. While judgment may not be as immediate as it was on Ananias and Sapphira, it will surely come. We must therefore fear God.

Let us examine ourselves and seek God's forgiveness for the times when we have been like Ananias and Sapphira. Are we being deceitful in any way among God's people? Are we giving out of loving hearts or to seek glory for ourselves? And are we helping the poor among us as the early church sought to do?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 6, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 7, MONDAY

Act 5:12-42

The Way of Courage

Act 5:29

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!" Acts 5:29

In spite of the threat of persecution by the authorities, the apostles continued to regularly do signs and wonders among the people. And the people continued to turn to their true King in droves (vs 12-16). Finally, jealous of their influence, the high priest and other religious leaders were driven to arrest the apostles. But they were miraculously released, and went straight back to the temple to proclaim the Gospel (vs 17-21). The law of the Lord would go out from Zion (Isa 2:3) before spreading around the world.

The apostles were soon rearrested and brought back to the Jewish council (known as the Sanhedrin). Once again, Peter boldly declared their determination to obey God above men (v 29). He reiterated his message that the God of Israel had raised Jesus from the dead - the One whom that very council had condemned. Jesus, he declared, was exalted at God's right hand as Lord and Savior. Jesus offered forgiveness of sins to Israel if she would repent (vs 30-31). Both the apostolic testimony and the works of the Holy Spirit bore witness to these facts.

Although the council reacted with murderous rage, the respected teacher Gamaliel opened the Sanhedrin to the possibility that God was indeed working through the apostles, something they presumably had not considered before. (While Gamaliel's speech gives us an insight into the debates of the Jewish Sanhedrin, it should not be taken as an authoritative word from God. We cannot therefore use it to assert that every successful movement has God's approval.)

However, the council still flogged the disciples before releasing them, for they did not realize that to persecute the apostles was to persecute Christ. Amazingly, the reaction of the disciples was to rejoice that they were worthy to be persecuted for Jesus (v 41) - and they kept on preaching that He is the Messiah (v 42).

**Consider Peter's statement again in verse 29.
In what areas do we have to make a similar stand?**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 8, TUESDAY

Act 6:1-15

First Things First

Act 6:3-4

"It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables."
Acts 6:2

Verses 1-6 recount another internal issue which threatened the early church - allegations of discrimination in the distribution of resources. Jews from a Greek-speaking background (Grecian Jews) felt that their widows were not being treated as well as Aramaic speakers (Hebraic Jews). Notice how the apostles approached the issue. They gathered all the disciples together to acknowledge the perceived problem and they dealt with it in a just way.

First of all, they would not allow themselves to be distracted from their main task of prayerfully preaching the word of God (vs 2,4). This is an example for all who have been gifted and set apart for the ministry of the word. There are many possible distractions from this key task but it must remain the priority. Churches must ensure that their key teachers are not distracted from this ministry.

Secondly, they delegated responsibility to others. They asked the congregation to choose seven men to oversee the distribution of food (v 3a). The seven men chosen were Grecian Jews while the apostles were Aramaic Jews.

Thirdly, notice the qualifications necessary for this task. The men must be 'full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom'. Being 'full of the Holy Spirit' in Acts indicates pervasive godliness of life that comes from the sanctifying influence of the Spirit of God (c.f. Acts 11:24). It is very important that in our churches, the first requirement for ministry - even the so-called 'mundane' ministries like administering food distribution - is godliness.

The ministry of the seven permitted the apostles to concentrate on the word and prayer, enabled aid to be distributed justly, and kept the unity of the church. The indirect though ultimate result of this ministry was the spread of the word (v 7). Two of the men raised up here would also go on to be key preachers themselves as we will discover in the chapters ahead.

What ministry are you, or can you be, involved with in your church? How does what you do ultimately connect with the spread of the Gospel? How can you or your church best help your Bible teachers concentrate on the ministry of the word and prayer?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 9, WEDNESDAY

Act 7:1-8:1a

The First Martyr

Act 7:55

"Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered Him." Acts 7:52

Yesterday, we read how Stephen was falsely accused of blasphemy and brought before the Sanhedrin. He was accused of 'speaking against the holy place and the law' (v 13). Today, we see his response.

Stephen outlines the history of God's dealings with Israel, showing that God can act outside the temple. God called Abraham in Mesopotamia (v 2) and again in the land of Haran (v 4). He called Moses in the desert near Sinai (vs 30, 33) and did miraculous signs in Egypt (v 36). God was never limited to any one location. He also points out Israel's history of rejecting God's prophets like Moses (vs 25, 35) and God himself (v 39f). The eventual result of this pattern of rejection was the exile (v 43b).

Stephen then speaks about the tabernacle which was built under God's direction (vs 44-45) and the temple built by Solomon (v 47). He quotes Isaiah 66:1-2 to show that the temple is inadequate to house God. The word translated 'made by men' in verse 48 is literally 'hand-made' and was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to refer to idols (Lev 26:1,30). The temple had become an idol for these Jews - a shocking accusation indeed. In what way can we or our churches make idols out of our buildings and traditions?

Finally, Stephen berates the Sanhedrin for being like the rebellious Israelites of old - stiff-necked people (Exo 33:3) - with uncircumcised hearts (contrast with Deuteronomy 30:6) who resist the Holy Spirit by rejecting Jesus (v 52). They themselves did not keep the law yet they had accused Stephen of speaking against it (v 53).

The Sanhedrin's fury turns to action when Stephen tells them his vision: Jesus is vindicated and given all authority (compare verse 56 with Daniel 7:13-14). They were judging Stephen but Jesus would ultimately judge them. They stone Stephen to death while he cries to the reigning Lord Jesus to have mercy upon them.

More than 165,000 people are killed each year for the name of Jesus. Pray for Christians who are persecuted today - that they might be faithful unto death like Stephen.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 9, WEDNESDAY

Act 7:1-8:1a

"Why were the Jews allowed to stone Stephen but had to go through Pilate to kill Jesus?"

When Jesus was tried, Jewish religious leaders went through the Roman governor, Pilate, since they had no legal right to inflict capital punishment. When Pilate told the Jews to try Jesus according to Jewish law, they responded, "We have no right to execute anyone" (John 18:31). Later, however, a mob led by those same leaders stoned Stephen to death in Jerusalem (Acts 7:58). This seems to present a conundrum: if the religious leaders were not allowed to inflict the death penalty, why did they execute Stephen? Or, if they could administer capital punishment, why did they involve Pilate with Jesus' death?

The answer lies in the very different circumstances of these two incidents. In the case of Jesus, one of the religious authorities' concerns was that Jesus' immense popularity would somehow lead to Roman retribution (John 11:47–48). Specifically, they were afraid that, if Jesus started a revolt, Rome would blame the Jewish leaders. So, part of the motivation for involving Pilate was to prove—or at least give the impression—that the Jewish leadership was loyal to the Roman Empire. This is reflected in the chief priests' outrageous statement to Pilate, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).

There was no question that Jesus and the religious leaders had been in conflict (John 11:57) and that they wanted Jesus dead (verse 53). But it would have been impossible for them to kill Jesus without making obvious that they'd overstepped their legal bounds under Rome. Even a mob attack on Jesus would have aroused suspicion. On the other hand, having the Romans execute Jesus would give the Jewish leaders two layers of protection: Rome would not object—legally—to His death, and Jesus' supporters would be discouraged from attempting revenge.

Pilate was already in a precarious political position when Jesus was brought before him. Historical records suggest that Pilate had been criticized for being too violent in his response to Jewish unrest in the past (see Luke 13:1). So, when the Jewish leaders incited a mob to demand the death of Jesus, Pilate was more interested in political harmony than justice (John 19:4, 6, 15–16). The situation only grew worse for Pilate in the time between Jesus' crucifixion and the Stephen's stoning. In AD 36, a few years after Stephen's martyrdom, Pilate lost his governorship.

The difference in Stephen's case was that Stephen did not have an extensive history of antagonizing the Jewish religious leaders. Stephen was a relative unknown, and his stoning was not likely to attract any attention from Rome. The crowd who actually killed Stephen could always be blamed for taking matters into their own hands, without the official sanction of the Sanhedrin. And, given Pilate's growing political weakness, there was little chance he would respond to an incident of mob justice, from the Jews, against a Jew. Beyond that, Stephen's sermon seems to have so infuriated the crowd that it's possible nobody was thinking logically (Acts 7:54, 57).

The long and short of it is that the Jewish religious leaders did not have the legal right to exact the death penalty. However, Rome's interest in enforcing that rule was subject to many factors, not the least of which was whether or not the incident was—in Rome's view—worth pursuing. The stoning of Stephen by the Jews was technically illegal, but the Romans had no vested interest in the matter, and the temple leaders in Jerusalem rightly felt that Rome would not respond. Jesus, on the other hand, had caught the attention of many powerful people, and the Jews would not venture to violate Roman law by executing Jesus on their own.

JUN 10, THURSDAY

Act 8:1b-25

No Pain, No Gain

Act 8:17

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:4

This passage shows how the Gospel moved out from Jerusalem to the next stage in Jesus' plan - Judea and Samaria (1:8). Judea was the area of the former southern kingdom of Judah and Samaria was the area of the former northern kingdom of Israel. Persecution forced the church in Jerusalem to scatter and take the Gospel with them throughout these places.

Samaritans were hated by the Jews for their different religious beliefs. But when Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ with miraculous signs accompanying him (vs 4-7), many believed. The apostles Peter and John were sent to Samaria to pray for the Samaritan believers. When they did, the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans in a way similar to the way He had come upon the Jews at Pentecost (v 17). This showed that God accepted Samaritans who believed in Jesus just as He did the Jews - thus uniting them by the Spirit. The fact that God waited until Peter and John arrived to do so meant that the Samaritan and Jewish churches would be united under apostolic authority.

This event is of great theological significance, God's true people from both the old Judah and the old Israel were coming together under King Jesus, thus fulfilling the Old Testament promises (Ezek 37:15-28). The kingdom of Israel was being restored under her Messiah (1:6). Jesus will do even more through His apostolic witnesses (Isa 49:6).

In the midst of this great event, there was also disappointment. Simon's conversion initially seemed like a great victory for the Gospel. But his motives were exposed when he tried to use money to buy an apostolic privilege - and was severely chided by Peter. The gifts of God are not for sale and should never be peddled.

It was persecution in Jerusalem that triggered the spread of the Gospel to Judea and Samaria.

This reminds us that God is in control and is fulfilling His promises, even through things that look like setbacks. How can knowing this encourage you in your life and ministry?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 11, FRIDAY

Act 8:26–9:19a

Grace to the Worst of Sinners

Act 9:15–16

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:16

The first thing that stands out in this passage is the grace of God. God had every right to condemn Saul but instead showed him mercy and chose to use him. It didn't happen to everyone who persecuted Christians. But it did happen to Saul. We who are in Christ have also received God's grace. And like Saul, we must be thankful for God's kindness in choosing us to be His. Reflect on what Saul, later called Paul, wrote in 1 Tim 1:12-14.

Secondly, we see that no one is beyond the grace of God. Saul had been an accomplice in the murder of God's servants (7:58–8:1) and was desperately trying to stamp out the Christian faith. If Jesus' death could pay for Saul's sins, it can pay for ours also. Reflect on what Saul later wrote in 1 Tim 1:15-17.

Thirdly, we learn that Jesus identifies with His people. Jesus said, 'Why do you persecute me?' (v 4). If you are one of God's children, then God takes what is done to you personally. He will bring your persecutors to judgement - or to repentance and salvation - as you pray for them like Stephen did (7:60). Jesus cares about the persecution of His people.

Fourthly, we see from the example of Ananias that God uses ordinary people. Ananias was not an apostle but an ordinary disciple who was faithful to his task. His example encourages us to trust and obey God even if it means taking risks.

Finally, we are reminded that God is fulfilling His plan. God's plan has been for the Gospel to go out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, then to the ends of the earth (1:8). Now that Saul is 'grafted in' as an apostle (someone commissioned directly as a messenger by the Risen Christ), the stage is set for him to take the Gospel to the nations so that they in turn will be 'grafted in' to Israel (see Rom 11:11-24).

Praise God for His mercy and grace to Saul, to us, and to the nations.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 11, FRIDAY

Act 8:26-9:19a

"Who was the Ethiopian eunuch?"

The Ethiopian eunuch mentioned in the Bible was a high court official of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He was in Israel to worship the Lord at the temple, which means he was probably a Jewish proselyte. On his trip home to Ethiopia, he had a life-changing encounter with Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:26–40).

A eunuch is a man who has been castrated for the purpose of trusted servitude in a royal household (see Est 1:10; 4:4; and Dan 1:9). A king would often castrate his servants to ensure they would not be tempted to engage in sexual activity with others in the palace (specifically, the royal harem) or to prevent their plotting an overthrow (eunuchs were incapable of setting up a dynasty of their own). Eunuchs have been employed in many civilizations, including the Ancient Middle East, Ancient Greece and Rome, China, Korea, and Thailand. Jesus mentions them in Matt 19:12.

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 is a marvelous depiction of God's role in evangelism. The story starts with Philip, one of the seven original deacons, who had just preached the gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:4–8). Philip was visited by an angel who told him to go south to a road that ran from Jerusalem to Gaza, in the desert (Acts 8:26). Philip didn't ask why he was being sent to the middle of nowhere; he just went (verse 27). On the road, in a chariot, was the Ethiopian eunuch, who was just returning from Jerusalem. The eunuch was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. The Spirit of the Lord told Philip to go over and join the chariot, and when Philip drew close he overheard the eunuch reading from Isaiah out loud. Philip asked the Ethiopian whether or not he understood what he was reading. The eunuch replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" He then invited Philip to come sit with him in the chariot (verse 31). The passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading was this: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, / and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, / so he did not open his mouth. / In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. / Who can speak of his descendants? / For his life was taken from the earth" (Acts 8:32–33; cf. Isa 53:7–8). The eunuch was wondering whom the prophet was talking about, "himself or someone else?" (Acts 8:34). Philip used this opportunity to explain the passage: this was a prophecy about Jesus Christ, who meekly gave His life to save the world. As Philip explained the gospel, the Ethiopian eunuch believed. When they came to some water by the side of the road, the eunuch asked to be baptized (Acts 8:36).

Philip agreed to baptize him, and the Ethiopian eunuch "gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him" (Acts 8:38). As soon as the Ethiopian eunuch came up out of the water, "the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing" (v 39). Tradition says that the eunuch carried the gospel back home to Ethiopia and founded the church there. Philip found himself at Azotus, and he carried on preaching the gospel on his way to Caesarea (Acts 8:40).

There are many elements of God's providence and intervention in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. The account reveals the importance of these three things: the Word of God, the Holy Spirit's leading, and a human evangelist. In order for a person to accept the truth, he must first hear the truth preached (Rom 10:14). It is God's desire that the truth be preached everywhere (Acts 1:8). The Spirit of the Lord had been preparing the eunuch's heart to receive the gospel. As the eunuch read Isaiah, he began to ask questions, and at just the right moment the Lord brought Philip across his path. The field was "ripe for harvest" (John 4:35), and Philip was God's laborer in the field. This was no coincidence.

It was God's plan from the very beginning, and Philip was obedient to that plan.

JUN 12, SATURDAY

Act 9:19b-43

From Persecutor to Persecuted

Act 9:31b

All those who heard him were astonished and asked "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Acts 9:21

The newly converted Saul set out immediately to preach to the Jews in Damascus and show them from the Scriptures that Jesus is indeed God's promised King (vs 20, 22). People were initially stunned to hear him though eventually the shock wore off and the enemies of the faith tried to kill him. The believers in the city had to smuggle him away in a shrewd maneuver (v 25). Saul had now changed roles from being the persecutor to being the persecuted (c.f. 9:16). He was willing to suffer for Christ, the mark of the true believer.

When he came to Jerusalem, Saul encountered the suspicions of believers who doubted his conversion (v 26). It must have been hard for Saul being both persecuted by unbelievers and suspected by fellow believers. However, Barnabas vouched for him (based on the evidence of his behavior in Damascus) and introduced him to the apostles (v 27).

Saul was a bold preacher who was unafraid of arguments even with the Grecian Jews who had incited the action against Stephen (v 29). They now turned on him but the believers again sent him away (v 30). This was wisdom, not cowardice, as Saul would be needed for other ministries. After the fiery ordeal that began with the martyrdom of Stephen, the church then enjoyed a period of peace (v 31). Persecution is to be expected as normal but it is not necessarily constant. The God who used persecution to spread the Gospel (8:1) also uses calm to consolidate and grow the church (v 31). He is in control of all things and works all things to His glory. Whether we live in times of persecution or times of peace (or both), we can be confident that God is fulfilling His purposes.

In some countries, converts to Christianity are regarded with suspicion by local Christians who fear they may be 'spies'. What lessons can we learn from this passage about situations like that? What signs did Saul show to indicate his faith was genuine?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 12, SATURDAY

Act 9:19b-43

"Who was Dorcas / Tabitha in the Bible?"

Dorcas, or Tabitha, in the Bible lived in the town of Joppa, a city on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Dorcas was also called Tabitha—Dorcas is a Greek name meaning “gazelle,” and Tabitha is the Aramaic rendering of the same name. Dorcas, or Tabitha, was a charitable person who made things, especially clothing, for the needy in Joppa. The story of Dorcas in Acts 9 is notable because Peter raised her back to life after she had died.

Dorcas was known for her good works and acts of love for the poor (Acts 9:36); she was much loved in the community of Joppa. When she became ill and died, the believers who knew Dorcas heard that Peter was in the nearby town of Lydda, and they sent for him. The Bible does not specifically say that the disciples at Joppa were hoping for Peter to resurrect Dorcas, but they did call urgently for him (Acts 9:38). When Peter arrived at the home where Dorcas’ body had been laid out, he went up to see the body. There were many widows there, weeping. They all showed Peter “the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them”—tangible evidence of Dorcas’ loving service (Acts 9:39).

What happened next is proof that our God is full of glorious, unrestrained power: “Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:40–42).

Bringing Dorcas back from the dead was not done for Dorcas’ sake—Peter knew she was in paradise, with Jesus, and that her life after death was preferable to her life on earth (see Luke 23:43). Peter’s motive, at least in part, for raising Dorcas to life may have been for the sake of the widows and others in Joppa who needed the help Dorcas could provide. The resurrection of Dorcas was also a major reason so many people in Joppa believed. This miracle performed in the name of the Lord led many to faith in Christ.

Dorcas is a fine example of how we are to meet the needs of those around us. Christians are to “continue to remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). Part of “religion that God our Father accepts” is “to look after orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). This was the type of religion Dorcas practiced.

We also see in the story of Dorcas how the Body of Christ functions as a whole. We are united in Christ, and the believers in Joppa mourned the loss of Dorcas as a close family member. “There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25–26). Dorcas was one of their own, and her absence left a huge void in their lives.

JUN 13, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Acts 9:32-16:5

The first passage of this section of Acts (9:32-10:1) prepares for the spread of the Gospel beyond the Jews (chapter 10 onwards) since Lydda was semi-Gentile in population. In accordance with Jesus' words (1:8), the Jews would come to belief with the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, then the Samaritans and the God-fearing Ethiopian in Acts 8, followed by the important incident of the conversion of Paul (9:1 -31) who will be the Lord's 'chosen instrument' before the Gentiles and Jews (9:15).

Paul's opposition has been dealt with by the Lord and Luke summarises this continued progression of the Gospel with a theme he repeats throughout, the added strength in numbers as well as strength in the Lord (9:31). Thus, when Acts 9:32 turns the attention back to Peter, it is in line with this progress of the Gospel, and its further movement across the centuries-old Gentile barrier in chapter 10.

From Acts 13, Paul is the central character of the book. Luke also is now part of Paul's journeys and he demonstrates Paul fulfilling his commission given in 9:15-16. The story of Paul's 'work' is also the story of God's work and thus it is summarised by Luke in the report given by the missionaries to the church at the end of the first missionary journey: 'On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles' (14:27).

Nearly 2000 years later, Gentile recipients of the Gospel in East Asia believe that they have been commissioned by God to take the Gospel back to Jerusalem. In the process, every nation they pass through must be won for the Lord. The risks they face are similar to those faced by the apostles as many of these nations are hostile to the Gospel. As we follow these readings in Acts let us be inspired to pray for them and follow their example to share the Gospel.

JUN 14, MONDAY

Act 10:1-23a

Crossing Borders

Act 10:15

The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Acts 10:15

The Spirit's direction and initiation in God's plan of bringing in from the Gentiles a holy people (15:14) is remarkably clear. God prepares Peter to be a witness to the Gentiles. He sends Paul and Barnabas on the first Gentile mission according to Jesus' instruction (13:2-4), and the Jerusalem council makes its decision with regards to their status before God and His law (15:28).

The tentative first step to this recognition of the conversion of Gentiles is narrated here for Theophilus' and our sake. Here the point specific in the vision to Peter and vital for the church's acceptance of the Gentiles is clear: what (or who) God decides is clean, is not up for negotiation. God judges and saves impartially. All men who come to Him in fear, repentance and faith will be saved.

Thus it is that the entire story of the gift of the Spirit to the Gentiles has the character of 'witness'. The Jewish requirement of three witnesses is met in God's thrice-spoken teaching to Peter in verses 9-16: Cornelius sends three men to get Peter so that he can witness to them what has been 'commanded by the Lord' (10:33). Peter brings double the requirement of witnesses from the church in Joppa to Cornelius' household, a point he himself uses to witness to what happened (11:12). In Peters own explanation of the Gospel to Cornelius' household, the word 'witness' is used self-consciously four times (vs 39, 41,42, 43).The incident itself is recounted three times (Acts 10, 11, 15). God is making it very clear by His Spirit through His servants to His church, that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. In every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him (10:35-36).

It is more than unfortunate then that we continue to allow age-old barriers to influence our thinking and practice on this subject. We who are included by God's mercy, who were once not a people but are now His people, practice double standards when we refuse fellowship with those whom God has accepted but we have not.

Let us rejoice and give thanks to the Lord who receives all repentant men and women who come to Him through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 14, MONDAY

Act 10:1–23a

"Who was Cornelius in the Bible?"

Cornelius in the Bible was a centurion, a commander in the Italian Regiment of the Roman military. He lived in Caesarea. His story in Acts 10 is important because it was in Cornelius's household that God publicly opened the doors of the church to the Gentile world. The apostle Peter was present to see it happen, just as he had been a witness to the opening of the doors to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Jews (Acts 2).

Despite being a Roman, Cornelius was a worshiper of God, a Jewish proselyte known and respected by the Jewish community (Acts 10:22). Cornelius was a devout man who regularly prayed and gave to charity (verse 2). One afternoon, while Cornelius was praying, he saw a vision of an angel of God, who told him that God had heard his prayers (Acts 10:30–31). The angel told Cornelius to find Peter, who was staying in Joppa at the house of Simon, a tanner (verse 32). Cornelius immediately sent two of his servants and a devout soldier to Joppa to find Peter and bring him back.

Meanwhile, God was preparing Peter's heart to minister to his coming Gentile visitors. God gave Peter a vision of an assortment of animals, both clean and unclean (Acts 10:11–12). Peter heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat" (verse 13). Peter resisted this command, having never eaten non-kosher food before (verse 14), but the voice replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (verse 15). This vision was repeated three times, and then Peter heard the Spirit saying that three men were looking for him and that he should go with them without hesitation (verses 19–20). Peter found Cornelius's two servants and the soldier, and they told Peter of Cornelius's visitation by an angel and asked him to come and speak to Cornelius (verse 22). Peter invited the men to stay the night, and the next day Peter followed them back to Caesarea (verse 23).

When Peter entered Cornelius's home, the centurion fell at Peter's feet in reverence, but Peter lifted him up, saying, "Stand up . . . I am only a man myself" (Acts 10:25–26). Peter then reminded Cornelius that it was against Jewish law for Peter to be associating with Gentiles. However, Peter explained, God had shown him in a vision not to call any person common or unclean. Peter understood that the animals in his vision were symbolic of the Gentiles, to whom God was preparing to give the gospel (Acts 10:28–29). Cornelius then told Peter about the angel who had told him to seek out Peter. Both Peter and Cornelius saw that God had acted to bring them together.

Peter then said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right" (Acts 10:34–35), and then he preached the gospel to everyone gathered in Cornelius's house. As Peter was speaking, the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by speaking in tongues, and were baptized with water (Acts 10:44–48). Peter and the Jews who were with him saw the beginning of something new God was doing: "They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have" (verse 47). The "mini-Pentecost" in Cornelius's house was proof positive that the gospel was for all people, not just Jews (see Luke 2:10; Matthew 28:19).

In considering the story of Cornelius in the Bible, it is important to note that being religious is not enough to save a person. Cornelius was as devout as they come, and he worshiped the one true God. Yet he still needed to hear the gospel and respond to it positively. That's why God sent Peter, so that Cornelius could hear of the death and resurrection of Christ, which Peter clearly preached (Acts 10:39–40, 43). It was only after Cornelius and his household received the message about Jesus that they received the Holy Spirit and were born again. The story of Cornelius not only shows the necessity of the gospel but it indicates that God will move heaven and earth to bring the gospel to those who are ready to receive it.

JUN 15, TUESDAY

Act 10:23b-48

God's Witness to His Promise for the Gentiles

Act 10:34-35

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." Acts 10:34-35

Peter's words upon entering the household summarizes the first part of what God has already done in Joppa to remove the first barrier to presenting the Gospel to the Gentiles: 'it is against our law, but God has shown me' (v 28).The second is given in verses 33-35: the Gentiles want to hear from the Lord's apostle. God has made the arrangements and so Peter is there to present the Gospel without fear or favor (11:14).These points are in fact in accord with the content of the Gospel message Peter then shares. It is 'the message God sent to the people of Israel', but its implications are for universal humanity since it is 'the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all' (v 36).

This Lordship was demonstrated by all that Jesus did (vs 37-38), as witnessed by those God chose (vs 39-41) who are commanded to testify regarding Jesus' death and resurrection. His Lordship as Judge and the availability of forgiveness for all who believe in Him (vs 42-43). As Peter was carrying out the task he had been chosen for, God's will to save the Gentiles was manifested openly (vs 44-47).They were given the Holy Spirit 'just as we have' i.e. in a manner which authenticated that what was happening was the same giving of the Holy Spirit as had happened for the Jews during the recent Pentecost (Acts 2).

This is without doubt a momentous event, since according to Acts 1:8, the witnessing of the Gospel and giving of the Spirit has just crossed into the last phase: 'the ends of the earth'. God's Spirit has now been given not just in Jerusalem, but also in Gentile territory, not just to the Jews but also to the God-fearing uncircumcised Gentiles. The next occasion in which God will signify a giving of the Holy Spirit will be in Acts 19 where some disciples have been prepared for Jesus by the baptism of John the Baptist and needed to be brought up-to-date.

In Christ both Jew and Gentile as one can have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph 2:13-18).

Thank God that all who put their trust in Jesus can enjoy what Moses wished for all of God's people in Numbers 11:29.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 16, WEDNESDAY

Act 11:1-30

As God is My Witness

Act 11:17

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." Acts 11:18

Asian Christians may appreciate the significance of meals for fellowship but the objections by the 'circumcised believers' (v 2) to Peter's fellowship with God-fearing Gentiles may be less comprehensible. The point of concern and unhappiness is 'you ate with them'. Table fellowship with Gentiles was unacceptable even if they were Christian Gentiles.

The tensions of the Gospel's advance in the early church seem a long way from us. Even with all the tension vested in the issue, Peter simply retells the details of the Gospel events 'precisely' as God had directed them (v 14). The character of God's witnessing to Peter and the church comes through in Peter's narration: 'this happened three times' (v 10), 'three men who had been sent to me' (v 11), 'these six brothers also went with me' (v 12). All persons of the Trinity are also included in this witness: 'The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them' (v 12), 'Then I remembered what the Lord had said' (v 16). So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us' (v 17). Against this impeccable line of witnesses, it is no wonder then that the 'circumcised believers' in Jerusalem 'had no further objections and praised God' (v 18).

However, although they ceased their opposition in this instance, it is unlikely that all of them grasped it fully, since the attempt was made later to impose more on the Gentile Christians for their salvation (15:1). Certain brothers from Jerusalem insisted that to be saved, the Christians of the Antioch church needed to be circumcised, among other things. However God's witness is unmistakably clear. In Peter's own narration here, it was through the hearing and believing in of the Gospel message and the Lord Jesus Christ that people could be saved (11:14, 17).

Even though God has revealed His will clearly in the Scriptures, people still question the basis for a person's salvation. Many today would add other criteria that both Jews and Gentiles did not possess when God gave them His Spirit. All additions to the Gospel of salvation are false.

Lord, thank you again for the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Help us to walk in Your truth.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 17, THURSDAY

Act 12:1-24

The Unstoppable Gospel

Act 12:5

Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to increase and spread. Acts 12:23-24

It is no coincidence that the opposition to the Gospel in the form of the attack on the apostles by Herod comes after the Gospel's expansion to the Gentiles in Antioch. It is also no coincidence that the time of this persecution is the Passover - the time of Jesus' own sacrifice. Even the Jews' approval of the persecution (v 3) is hauntingly familiar. In accordance with Mark 10:39. James died during this persecution (v 2). The Lord did not send an angel to rescue James, such that he died like his Lord who did not use the twelve legions of angels at His disposal (Matt 26:53). But it was God's will that an angel was sent for Peter so that he would survive this ordeal to live for Christ ... and to die for Christ another day.

Persecution is met often with mixed feelings. As Christians who bear the name of the Christ who suffered in glory, we tend to one extreme or another. Yet the portrayal of the early church is one of acknowledgment of God's sovereignty (12:12). The disciples continued to acknowledge what God had done, and was doing with James' death, as compared to how they reacted in the aftermath of Jesus' death. Nonetheless, their initial response to God's will for Peter being delivered from 'Herod's clutches' was initial disbelief (v 16). But in all this 'the word of God continued to increase and spread' (v 24). As has been the tone from the beginning (6:7) the word of God marches on.

As Christians, therefore, we live neither to avoid death, nor to seek martyrdom. Instead His grace is sufficient for us, and to live is Christ, to die is gain. We live this life between the two coming of Christ, seeking to proclaim the Gospel in season and out of season, as witnesses of Him who died for us.

Lord, whether we live or die, we serve You, the King. Our prayer is that in life and in death, as Peter, James and Paul demonstrated in their lives and eventual deaths, we will serve Your purposes. We pray for the church, that our understanding of Your sovereignty will express itself in Christian behavior and attitudes to persecution, and our focus will ever be on the Gospel and its work in the world.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 18, FRIDAY

Act 12:24-13:12

Service in the Spirit

Act 13:2-3

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Acts 13:2

In 11:25, Barnabas, the 'good man full of the Holy Spirit and faith', had gone to Tarsus to recruit Saul for the work of evangelism and teaching. Significantly, Saul from here on is called Paul (v 9) and he begins to take center stage. The phrase 'filled with the Holy Spirit' is used to describe him in his opposition to Elymas (v 9). Both Barnabas and Paul were set apart by the Holy Spirit (vs 2-3) for a 'work' that would take them till their report back at Antioch in 14:26-27. This 'work' was to teach and preach the 'word of God' (vs 5,7). Thus it is that the Holy Spirit instructs the release of the church's gifted teachers for the Gospel's spread. Further, in Paul's encounter with Elymas, striking the same note as in the earlier accounts of Peter's ministry, we see that to oppose or reject the word of the Lord's witnesses is to pervert 'the right ways of the Lord' (v 10) and incur His hand against us (v 11). The blindness that Elymas suffers typifies his blindness to the ways of the Lord and echoes the blindness Paul suffered before he was restored to sight (9:1-20). There, Paul was blind for three days neither eating nor drinking, before he was restored with his 'sight' and 'filled with the Holy Spirit' to serve the Lord (9:17). We are reminded of this as we see Paul proclaiming the Gospel faithfully and fearlessly in the face of opposition which he himself once instigated. Because of this 'teaching of the Lord', the proconsul 'believed' (v 12).

Many in our Christian culture today speak of being filled with the Spirit in ecstatic or exclusive terms. Yet here and in 4:8,4:31,6:3,5,8,9:17, 13:52, we find that to be 'filled with the Spirit' is the expression describing Christians full of joy, grace, faith, power, wisdom and boldness in speaking the word. It describes the thoughts and actions of the person who once was lost and in rebellion, but has now turned to God in repentance and faith. It describes the everyday ordinary Christian who by God's indwelling, is capable of extraordinary things in the name of Christ.

**What a wonderful privilege it is to have God's Spirit!
May our lives, thoughts and deeds express this fully.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 19, SATURDAY

Act 13:13-52

The Messenger of the Gospel

Act 13:39

"Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath." Acts 13:26-27

Paul brings a 'message of encouragement' to the Jews in the synagogue (v 15). This message of encouragement is straight from the Old Testament, the textbook of the early church (vs 16-22) but more importantly it has the latest update, its fulfilment in Jesus. We see this repeatedly in the idea of promise and fulfilment: 'From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised.' This is further elaborated in verses 27 and 32-35. This message culminates in the announcement of 'the good news', the fulfilment of what was promised to their Jewish ancestors (vs 32-33) 'that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses' (vs 38-39).

It has become popular in our day to 'empty' the Gospel of all its salvation history in order to 'make it relevant'. There is an implicit fear that the plan of God's salvation in both Testaments is not the 'power of God for salvation' (Rom 1:16). But in Paul's time even the pagans gathered to hear the exposition of God's work and purposes in human history (v 44) - an entire city gathered to hear what the Jews themselves who possessed the law, abused and ultimately rejected.

The challenge for us is clear. The message must be preached as it has been revealed in the Scriptures according to God's plan of promise and fulfilment. And we must speak in the spirit of the Isaianic servant (compare verse 47 with Isa 49:6) for the sake of 'salvation to the ends of the earth'. Had Paul been more audience-centred, prosperity-driven, culture-bound, more parochial, more racist, more 'relevant', he might not only have stuck to his own kind, he might also have modified the message to please the home crowd. But for him, as it is for us, neither the word nor the belief of our hearers is determined by us (v 48). As faithful servants we must execute our duties. The word of the Lord will continue to spread (v 49) and opposition should not faze us. The people who have the Lord's Spirit can rejoice in His witness.

Our loyalty to the Lord can be called into question when we are less than faithful to the word He gives by His spirit. Do we know what 'Gospel' it is we preach?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 20, SUNDAY – Father's Day

What does the Bible say about Christian fathers?

The greatest commandment in Scripture is this: *"Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength"* (Deut 6:5). Going back to verse 2, we read, *"So that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life."* Following Deut 6:5, we read, *"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up"* (vv. 6-7).

Israelite history reveals that the father was to be diligent in instructing his children in the ways and words of the Lord for their own spiritual development and well-being. The father who was obedient to the commands of Scripture did just that. This brings us to Prov 22:6, *"Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."* To "train" indicates the first instruction that a father and mother give to a child, i.e., his early education. The training is designed to make clear to children the manner of life they are intended for. To commence a child's early education in this way is of great importance.

Eph 6:4 is a summary of instructions to the father, stated in both a negative and positive way. *"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."* The negative part of this verse indicates that a father is not to foster negativity in his children by severity, injustice, partiality, or unreasonable exercise of authority. Harsh, unreasonable conduct towards a child will only serve to nurture evil in the heart. The word "provoke" means "to irritate, exasperate, rub the wrong way, or incite." This is done by a wrong spirit and wrong methods—severity, unreasonableness, sternness, harshness, cruel demands, needless restrictions, and selfish insistence upon dictatorial authority. Such provocation will produce adverse reactions, deadening children's affection, reducing their desire for holiness, and making them feel that they cannot possibly please their parents. A wise parent seeks to make obedience desirable and attainable by love and gentleness.

The positive part of Eph 6:4 is expressed in a comprehensive direction—educate them, bring them up, develop their conduct in all of life by the instruction and admonition of the Lord. This is the whole process of educating and discipline. The word "admonition" carries the idea of reminding the child of faults (constructively) and duties (responsibilities).

The Christian father is really an instrument in God's hand. The whole process of instruction and discipline must be that which God commands and which He administers, so that His authority should be brought into constant and immediate contact with the mind, heart, and conscience of children. The human father should never present himself as the ultimate authority to determine truth and duty. It is only by making God the teacher and ruler on whose authority everything is done that the goals of education can best be attained.

Martin Luther said, "Keep an apple beside the rod to give the child when he does well." Discipline must be exercised with watchful care and constant training with much prayer. Chastening, discipline, and counsel by the Word of God, giving both reproof and encouragement, is at the core of "admonition." The instruction proceeds from the Lord, is learned in the school of Christian experience, and is administered by the parents—primarily the father, but also, under his direction, the mother. Christian discipline is needed to enable children to grow up with reverence for God, respect for parental authority, knowledge of Christian standards, and habits of self-control.

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16-17). A father's first responsibility is to acquaint his children with Scripture. The means and methods that fathers may use to teach God's truth will vary. As the father is faithful in role modeling, what children learn about God will put them in good standing throughout their earthly lives, no matter what they do or where they go.

PLEASE PRAY FOR ALL FATHERS INCLUDING SPIRITUAL FATHERS & GRANDFATHERS
-Thank God for them and Pray God's Blessing Upon Them.

JUN 20, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 21, MONDAY

Act 14:1-28

The Gospel Divides

Act 14:3

The people of the city were divided: some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. Acts 14:4

At Iconium we see a repeat of what had happened at Pisidian Antioch, where in the midst of people believing in the Gospel, some Jews stirred up persecution. It is a pattern that will be repeated throughout the missionary journeys. But there is no doubt that it is 'the message and not the messenger' which provokes this response: in verse 1, the message was spoken such that a great number believed, and in verse 3, the Lord 'confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders', an example of which we see in verses 8-10.

The word of the Lord has a divisive effect (v 4, recall Luke's recording of Jesus' words in Luke 12:51-53). Luke uses a stronger description of the Jews in verse 2: they 'refused to believe'.

Whatever the opposition, they continued. In fact. Paul and Barnabas spent 'considerable time there'. It may have taken a while for opposition to build, but in the face of agitated opposition and 'poisoned' minds, the apostles spoke 'boldly in reliance on the Lord'. The ground of their confidence was the Lord. This attitude of trust in the Lord as they faithfully minister the word is seen in verse 6 where though 'they ... fled' from Iconium but when they got to the Lycaonian cities 'they continued to preach the good news' (v 7). The section also ends on this important note of trust in God (v 23).

In Lystra the 'opposition' comes in a different form. The apostles are worshipped as local deities on a house call (v 11)! But Paul and Barnabas are faithful to their call, and the fickle uncomprehending crowd is duly won over by the Jews and turn against their previously idolized 'gods'. They leave Paul for dead (vs 14-19). However. Paul got up, and moved on to the next city. Derbe, where 'they preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples' (v 21).

There are no shortcuts to Heaven. We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (v 22). Pray that we may live out this understanding of the nature of Gospel ministry in this present world where not all have 'bowed their knee' to Christ as Lord.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 21, MONDAY

Act 14:1-28

Synopsis of Paul's first missionary journey

The apostle Paul went on three pioneering missionary journeys, followed by a trip to Rome. His first missionary journey, most likely in the years AD 47 through 48, started in Syria and took him to Cyprus and Asia Minor. After Paul witnessed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), was confronted and converted by Jesus (Acts 9), and visited Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30), the church leadership tucked him safely away in his hometown of Tarsus on the southeastern coast of modern Turkey. Meanwhile, the persecution in Jerusalem grew, and believers fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch, which wasn't too far from Tarsus (Acts 11:19–30). The dispersed Christians brought the gospel with them, and when the leaders in Jerusalem learned how quickly the church was growing, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to verify what was happening.

Barnabas confirmed that the gospel was spreading and that the church in Syrian Antioch was indeed a work of God (Acts 11:23). Barnabas then went to Tarsus to collect Paul, whom he had earlier mentored in Jerusalem. Paul returned to Antioch with Barnabas to provide leadership for the fledgling church. After about a year, the prophet Agabus foretold a great famine. The believers in Antioch raised support for the church in Judea and sent it to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:19–30). After delivering the gift, Barnabas and Paul traveled back to Antioch with John Mark, Barnabas's cousin (verse 25). While the church in Antioch was worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to a special work in spreading the gospel (Acts 13:2). After more fasting and prayer, the church laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them off with John Mark (verse 3). Thus began the first missionary journey, led by the Holy Spirit (verse 4).

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark walked to Seleucia on the coast, then sailed southwest to Salamis on the island of Cyprus, where Barnabas was from. They preached in the synagogue there and traveled the whole island, apparently without seeing much fruit, until they arrived at the city of Paphos in the southwest. The island's Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, summoned the missionaries to listen to their message. Unfortunately, the proconsul's associate, Bar-Jesus (aka Elymas), was a magician and Jewish false prophet who contradicted the gospel message and tried to keep Sergius Paulus from converting. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul made Bar-Jesus go blind, and Sergius Paulus believed in Christ (Acts 13:4–12).

Paul, Barnabas, and John-Mark sailed from Paphos to Perga in the region of Pamphylia in south-central Asia Minor. For reasons the Bible does not detail, John Mark left the other two missionaries and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). It doesn't seem Paul and Barnabas spent much time in Perga but headed north to Pisidian Antioch and preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In his sermon, Paul, a credentialed Pharisee, gave a synopsis of the Israelites' exile in Egypt, the judges, Kings Saul and David, and John the Baptist. He showed the Jews in Antioch how only Jesus, who died and rose again, fulfilled the Jewish prophecies. Many believed, and they asked Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath. The next week, almost the entire city showed up, but the Jewish leadership was jealous of the crowds and tried to silence their message with abusive language. Paul and Barnabas pointed out that the Jews had had their chance and had rejected Jesus, so Jesus' message was going to be brought to the Gentiles. The gospel spread through the whole region, but, eventually, despite the new converts' enthusiasm, the Jews in Pisidian Antioch stirred up persecution of the missionaries, and Paul and Barnabas traveled east to Iconium in Galatia (Acts 13:14–52).

Paul and Barnabas stayed quite a while in the city of Iconium, preaching boldly and performing miracles. Many Jews and Greeks believed, but many didn't. The missionaries caught word that the unbelieving Jews, Gentiles, and city leadership were planning on stoning them, so they fled to the nearby cities of Lystra and Derbe in Lycia (Acts 14:1–7).

While Paul was preaching at the gates of Lystra, he noticed a lame man listening intently. He healed the man, and the crowd declared that Barnabas must be Zeus and Paul Hermes, as Hermes was the messenger and chief spokesman of the gods. The priests of the temple of Zeus joined the crowds and attempted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas—sacrifices that were barely prevented by Paul and Barnabas's insistence that they were just men. As a counterpoint, the unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived at Lystra and stirred up the crowds against the gospel. The resulting mob stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city. When the disciples gathered around his lifeless body, Paul stood up, completely well, and went back into the city (Acts 14:8–20).

The next day, Paul and Barnabas went east to Derbe, situated across the mountain range from Tarsus, and made many disciples. It was in the region of Lystra and Derbe that young Timothy heard the gospel from Paul and was saved. From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas backtracked through Asia Minor, visiting Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch and strengthening the young churches and appointing elders (Acts 14:21–23).

Paul and Barnabas returned to the seaport city of Perga to preach, and then they hopped over to Attalia, a few miles west, and preached there, as well (Acts 14:24–26). They then sailed back to Syrian Antioch. "On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles" (verse 27).

On his second missionary journey, Paul travelled through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch again on his way to Troas. He visited the cities again on his third missionary journey on his way to Ephesus. Sometime between Paul's first and second missionary journeys (and after the Jerusalem Council), Paul wrote the epistle of Galatians to these cities of southern Galatia.

JUN 22, TUESDAY

Act 15:1-35

Accepted in the Beloved

Act 15:8-9

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. Acts 15:8

The issue that surfaced at this time stemmed from a concern for God's law. At the council itself, it was the Christians who belonged to the 'party of the Pharisees' who spoke for Gentile circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses (v 5). It was this concern that drove some of them to go to the new churches among the Gentiles to urge circumcision and the accompanying Mosaic law (v 1). Can a person be accepted by God and be 'saved' (v 1) without the law? At the council, the question is settled by looking to God's witnesses.

After much discussion, God's star witness, Peter, stands up and recounts the events of chapter 10. Peter's choice of words is telling. God knows the heart, and He showed 'he accepted them' by giving the Holy Spirit, just as He did to the Jews. He purified both by faith, since neither the Jews nor the Gentiles are able to bear the law in a way that would be acceptable to God (vs 7-10). Justification is by faith in Jesus the Lord alone. God's second witness is the works He did among the Gentiles through Barnabas and Paul (v 12). God's third witness is His Scripture (vs 15-18), which James quotes from Amos 9, in which the spiritual context is interpreted as fulfilled in the Gentile mission: the fallen fortunes of David's house are restored by raising Jesus as the Davidic King who will rule the 'nations' (the word for Gentiles) by their bearing His name.

The matter is therefore to be settled along the lines of this witness and in an echo of Peter's own statement in chapter 11: No obstacle should be placed before Gentile conversion (v 19). Instead, the instruction to them would concern their sanctification, their life in Christ and holiness that involved turning away from idolatry and the immorality of this world. James' speech is significant in what it does not mention. It affirms that God is taking the Gentiles as a people for Himself without any mention from God of circumcision or other markers of separation. A person is not one of God's people by any ritual or merit, but by being circumcised in the heart by faith.

Lord, thank you for accepting us into Your household. Thank you that we can bring nothing in our hands. It is only by grace through faith in the finished work of our Savior on the cross.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 22, TUESDAY

Act 15:1-35

The meaning and importance of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)

In the earliest days of the Christian church, the church was comprised predominately of Jews. In Acts chapter 8 the gospel spread to the Samaritans (who were ethnically mixed Jews-Gentiles), and many Samaritans received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Acts chapter 10, the apostle Peter was the first to take the gospel specifically to the Gentiles, and many received Christ as Savior. In Acts chapters 13–14, Paul and Barnabas had a very fruitful ministry among the Gentiles. All of these Gentiles turning to faith in Christ caused concern among the Jewish believers, first expressed in Acts 11:1–18, and the issues that caused concern were ultimately decided upon at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). **The issues centered on two questions: Do Gentiles first have to become Jews before they can become Christians? Do Gentiles have to observe the Mosaic Law after they become Christians?**

The impetus for the Jerusalem Council is given in Acts 15, verses 1 and 5, “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ . . . It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the Law of Moses.” Some Jewish Christians were teaching that Gentiles had to observe the Mosaic Law and Jewish customs in order to be saved. Since this teaching clearly contradicted the fact that salvation was by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone (Acts 15:11), the apostles and church leaders held the first Christian council to settle the issue. In verses 7–11, the apostle Peter spoke of his ministry with the Gentiles, as recorded in Acts chapter 10. Peter focused on the fact that the Holy Spirit was given to uncircumcised Gentiles in precisely the same manner the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles and Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost. This led Peter to the conclusion that there should be no “*placing a yoke on the neck of the [Gentile] disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear*” (Acts 15:10).

Jesus’ half-brother James, who had become a leader of the church in Jerusalem, agreed with Peter and declared, “*It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God*” (Acts 15:19). The Jerusalem Council then proceeded to give four “rules” that Gentile Christians should live by. These were not rules the Gentiles must follow in order to be saved. Rather, the rules were to build harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the first century. The four rules the Jerusalem Council decided upon were that Gentile Christians should abstain from food polluted by idols, sexual immorality, the meat of strangled animals, and blood. The instructions were not intended to guarantee salvation but to promote peace within the early church.

It is interesting that the issue the Jerusalem Council was dealing with is still very much an issue in the church today. There are groups still teaching that Christians must obey the Old Testament Law. Whether it is the Sabbath day or the food laws or all of the Old Testament Law outside of the sacrificial system—there are groups that declare observance of the Law is either required for salvation or at least a crucially important aspect of the Christian life. Sadly, these groups either completely ignore or grossly misinterpret the decision of the Jerusalem Council. The specific goal of the Jerusalem Council was to decide what aspects, if any, of the Old Testament Law Christians must observe. The Jerusalem Council, for the sake of melding the Jewish and Gentile cultures within the Antioch church, said that the Gentiles should eschew their former pagan practices associated with idolatry. There was no mention of the Sabbath whatsoever. Further, the Jerusalem Council made it abundantly clear that these rules were not requirements for salvation by reaffirming that salvation is by grace for both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 15:11). How many arguments would be solved if the church today would simply follow the principle set by the Jerusalem Council—limit your liberty for the sake of love?

Overview of Galatians

During the 30 years or so between his conversion on the road to Damascus and his imprisonment in Rome, the apostle Paul travelled widely throughout the Roman Empire. He established churches in the Roman provinces of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia (northern Greece) and Achaia (southern Greece). He followed up his visits with letters which gave counsel and direction to the churches on issues they faced.

Among his earliest letters was the Epistle to the Galatians which he wrote around AD 48-49. It was a letter addressed to the churches of Galatia (I:2). There is some dispute among Bible scholars as to the location of these churches. The majority say that they were in the cities of Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, cities that Paul visited during his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). During Paul's time, Galatia and the whole of Asia Minor were under Roman imperial control.

Paul had reason to write this letter. Some members of the Galatian church had questioned his apostolic credentials and had also been influenced by the Judaisers. These were Jewish believers who maintained that to be saved it was not enough to have faith in Christ; they would also have to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. Paul counters their arguments by first stating his credentials (chapters 1-2), and then by pointing out to them the superiority of the Gospel over the Law and circumcision (chapters 3-6).

Paul's teaching on the freedom we have in Christ (chapter 5) is especially relevant for us today when freedom is equated with the license to do as one pleases. It is in this letter that Paul lists out in its entirety the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23). As we embark on these readings, let us desire this fruit in our lives so that we may grow to be more like Jesus.

JUN 23, WEDNESDAY

Gal 1:1-24

Defend the True Gospel

Gal 1:3-5

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Gal 1:6-7a

Have you ever had your work obstructed by people? People who say the opposite of what you have been saying? Paul had been preaching that to be saved, the Galatians had only to put their faith in Jesus Christ. But some Jewish believers (Judaizers) from Jerusalem were telling them that that was not enough. They had also to be circumcised and believe in the Law of Moses.

Paul begins his defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ by pointing to the source of his authority, God Himself. He calls himself an apostle ‘sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.’ It is this very same God who raised Jesus from the dead. It would seem that the two major issues were his apostleship (vs 1-3) and the nature of the Christian Gospel (vs 6-10).

The crux of Paul’s defense is laid out in summary form from verses 6-9. The main topic is about the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what it is as Paul defines it for the Galatian believers. The central section for his arguments for the Gospel of Jesus Christ is from Galatians 1:6–4:11. Paul begins by saying that he is astonished that the Galatian believers he had preached to and seen coming to faith in Jesus Christ were suddenly deserting Christ. At the end of his argument in Galatians 4:11, he fears that he might be wasting his efforts of trying to win them back to the true Gospel.

They had left the true Gospel for a ‘different’ Gospel which to Paul was no Gospel at all. Some people (the Judaizers) had thrown the believers into confusion and were trying to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such people preached a different Gospel from the one Paul preached to the Galatian Christians. With strong words, Paul condemns them (vs 8-9).

Like Paul, we must be prepared to defend the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps, there are people even now, within and without the church, who are adding or even subtracting from the core beliefs of our true Gospel. Would you defend it just as Paul did? Do you know the crux of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and are you able to tell people what the truth is?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 24, THURSDAY

Gal 2:1-21

Be Accountable to Others

Gal 2:20

For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. Galatians 2:8

Paul need not have given an account of his ministry to the Galatian Christians. He was, after all an apostle sent by the Lord Jesus Christ. But he did it, anyway.

Paul had mentioned earlier that three years after his time in Damascus he had gone up to Jerusalem and spent 15 days with Peter, the apostle to the Jews (1:18, v 8). Then, 14 years after his time in Syria and Cilicia, he returned to Jerusalem, this time in response to a revelation (v 2). He went to Jerusalem together with Barnabas and Titus, and meeting privately with those who seemed to be leaders, told them about the Gospel that he had preached to the Gentiles. These leaders who were Jews did not ask that Titus be circumcised even though he was a Greek (vs 1-5).

The Jerusalem church leaders validated Paul's ministry to the Gentiles. He did not receive any reproof or orders from them. They agreed that Paul should minister to the Gentiles while they to the Jews. The leaders - James, Peter and John - gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the Lord's grace upon Paul's ministry. They only asked Paul to continue to remember the poor which he was glad to do as a sign of unity with them (vs 7-10).

When faced with contentious people who want to dispute our ministry perhaps it is best to outline clearly the ministry. It is humbling to have to explain ourselves to others whom we thought would support us. But we do so to clarify matters and to maintain unity in the Spirit.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 25, FRIDAY

Gal 3:1-25

Do Not Be Foolish

Gal 3:11b

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. Gal 3:1

Our passage today begins with these words from Paul: '*You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*' He then devotes a whole section of his letter to prove that it is faith in Jesus Christ and not the observance of the Law of Moses that saves. The section ends in Galatians 4:11 with another rebuke: I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. Also note 3:1-5 and 4:8-10. In today's passage, we see Paul using experiential (vs 1-5) and scriptural (vs 6-14) arguments to make his point to the Galatian Christians. Paul asks the Galatian believers to consider their experience of the Holy Spirit working in their lives. Why would they want to go back to human effort? Had God given them the Spirit and their miracles because they observed the law or because they believed the Gospel that they heard from Paul?

Turning to Scriptures, Paul suggests that the Galatians consider Abraham who believed God and this was credited to him as righteousness. It was Abraham's faith which justified him and it is also by faith that all believers in Christ receive the promise of the Spirit.

Christ's death on the cross (vs 1, 13) puts an end to all legalistic enticements for saving ourselves. Paul centers his Gospel on the cross of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, believing faith, and being in Christ.

Have we somehow put other ideas into our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Let us hold fast to true Biblical content.

Let us return to the word of God and be steadfast.

Let not the winds and waves of 'new' teachings toss us around.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 26, SATURDAY

Gal 3:26-4:7

In Christ We Are God's Children

Gal 4:6

So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.
Gal 4:7

In Asian movies, nine times out of ten, the adopted child is never welcomed with open arms into the family. Things get nasty especially when a fortune is involved. However, under Roman law, the adopted son has full rights as a son of the family and is eligible to inherit the family wealth.

When we are 'in Christ' (vs 26-29), we are called to live out our lives in new relationships (4:1-7). Paul declares to the Galatian Christians that as believers, they are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. They have 'clothed' themselves 'with Christ' (vs 26-27).

In the new relationships in God's family, they are neither Jew nor Greek (ethnicity), slave nor free (economic/political status), male nor female (gender). They all belong to Christ and are heirs to the kingdom (v 28). Now that they are sons of God, God has sent His Spirit into their hearts so that they can call Him 'Abba, Father'. They are no longer slaves but sons and daughters and as such, heirs of the Father (4: 6-7).

We need to know who we are 'in Christ'. We are then to consciously live out that identity in our daily lives. Every day we need to consciously live out our being 'in Christ' wherever God has placed us. These would include the home, the workplace, in our schools and colleges, in the parks and playing fields, in the public and social spheres of our lives. 'In Christ' we are God's sons and daughters, and a Spirit-filled lifestyle marks us out as children of God.

Christianity is Jesus-centred while Judaism is Torah-centred.

What is the centre of our Christian lives? Is it some kind of prescribed 'Christian' behavior similar to what the Judaisers were asking the Galatian Christians to adopt?

If it is, we would be going back to the Law.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 26, SATURDAY

Gal 3:26–4:7

What does it mean that God is our Abba Father?

In Scripture there are many different names used to describe God. While all the names of God are important in many ways, the name “Abba Father” is one of the most significant names of God in understanding how He relates to people. The word *Abba* is an Aramaic word that means “Father.” It was a common term that expressed affection and confidence and trust. *Abba* signifies the close, intimate relationship of a father and his child, as well as the childlike trust that a young child puts in his “daddy.”

Abba is always followed by the word *Father* in Scripture, and the phrase is found in three passages. In Mark 14:36, Jesus addresses His Father as “*Abba, Father*” in His prayer in Gethsemane. In Romans 8:15, “*Abba, Father*” is mentioned in relation to the Spirit’s work of adoption that makes us God’s children and heirs with Christ. In Galatians 4:6, again in the context of adoption, the Spirit in our hearts cries out, “*Abba, Father*.” Together, the terms *Abba* and *Father* doubly emphasize the fatherhood of God. In two different languages, we are assured of God’s care for His children.

Many claim that all people are “children of God,” but the Bible reveals quite a different truth. We are all His creations and under His authority and lordship, and all will be judged by Him, but the right to be a child of God and call Him “*Abba Father*” is something that only born-again Christians have (John 1:12–13). When we are born again (John 3:1–8), we are adopted into the family of God, redeemed from the curse of sin, and made heirs of God (Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7). Part of that new relationship is that God now deals with us differently, as family.

It is life-changing to understand what it means to be able to call the one true God our “*Father*” and what it means to be joint-heirs with Christ. Because of our relationship with our *Abba, Father*, He no longer deals with us as enemies; instead, we can approach Him with “boldness” (Hebrews 10:19) and in “full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22). The Holy Spirit “testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17).

Becoming a child of God is the highest and most humbling of honors. Because of it we have a new relationship with God and a new standing before Him. Instead of running from God and trying to hide our sin like Adam and Eve did, we run to Him, calling, “*Abba, Father!*” and finding forgiveness in Christ. Being an adopted child of God is the source of our hope, the security of our future, and the motivation to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). Being children of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords calls us to a higher standard, a different way of life, and, in the future, “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade” (1 Peter 1:4).

When Jesus taught His disciples to pray, He began with the words *Our Father*. There is much truth in those two words alone. The holy and righteous God, who created and sustains all things, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, not only allows us but encourages us to call Him “*Father*.” What a privilege is ours. What amazing grace that God would love us so, that Jesus would sacrifice Himself for us, and that the Holy Spirit would indwell us and prompt our intimate cry of “*Abba, Father!*”

JUN 27, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 28, MONDAY

Gal 4:8-31

Plead Passionately For Christ

Gal 4:31

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you ... Gal 4:19

A person who pleads with another to turn away from wrongdoing will, usually, become very emotional.

It is a very emotional Paul who writes to the Galatian converts. He uses strong words like 'I fear for you' (v 11), 'I plead with you' (v 12), 'My dear children' (v 19) and 'I am perplexed about you!' (v 20).

He reminds them about the warm response they had given him and his message (v 13-14). Now that he has heard of their turning away from the Gospel he preached, Paul must have felt frustrated and heavy-hearted.

It is devastating for a spiritual father to watch his spiritual children going the wrong way. We see the heart of a true evangelist and a loving pastor in the emotion-filled words Paul writes to bring the Galatian believers back on to the right path. Their welfare was his biggest concern. He had to win them back. To do that, Paul countered the wrong teaching that was confusing his flock. He had to correct what the Judaizes were saying regarding the Christian life. He clarified that the Hagar-Sarah event meant that believers in Christ had freedom in Him.

**One cannot be overly concerned for proprieties
especially when what is at stake is people turning away from Christ in apostasy.
Like Paul, we must plead passionately for the cause of Christ
both inside and outside the church.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 29, TUESDAY

Gal 5:1-26

Be Free To Serve One Another

Gal 5:14

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Gal 5:1a

Freedom in Christ enables us to be all that He wants us to be. Paul was concerned that the Judaizing influence was taking freedom away from his converts - the freedom they had in Christ Jesus. He makes a strong declaration that it is for freedom that Christ has set us free (v 1a).

He exhorts and warns the Galatian Christians against accepting the false message of Judaizers (vs 1 b-4). He gives them a concise statement of the Gospel (vs 5-6) and then makes a series of remarks about the issues being discussed (vs 7-11a). The concluding discussion ends with a statement about the offence of the cross (v 1b) and a further remark about the Judaizers (v 12).

Paul explains that freedom in Christ did not mean libertinism of any kind. He tells them not to use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather they are to serve one another in love (v 13b). Apparently, there was an indigenous freedom without restrictions in the Galatian lifestyle. Paul speaks against it even as he speaks about their freedom in Christ. He counters the unfettered freedom of the Galatian culture with instructions about the attitude and behavior that they are to demonstrate. They are to bear each other in mind even as they serve one another or they will end up destroying each other (v 15).

Unfettered freedom is freedom to ‘do as you please’. However, whatever pleases you can become a bondage be it drugs or porn or power and authority.
Freedom in Christ is the only true freedom.
**Let us celebrate our freedom in Christ by becoming more like Him
 in our love and service to others.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 30, WEDNESDAY

Gal 6:1-18

Do Good To All

Gal 6:2

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Gal 6:10

Paul continues to tell the Galatian Christians what it means to 'live by the Spirit' and here in this portion of our Galatian readings, he draws out some practical implications.

Paul says that we, as spiritual persons, must restore gently others entrapped by sin and other oppressive burdens (vs 1-2). Often we are quick to condemn people who sin and perhaps even those who tell us about their burdens regarding temptations but why is it that we are so slow in restoring them gently?

We are to share all good things with those who instruct us in God's word (v 6). Here is another practical implication that Paul suggests for our attention. We who are being instructed in the faith (by teachers) are to share all good things with those (the teachers) who instruct us in the faith. It's a puzzle why Paul would raise this for the consideration of the Galatian Christians. Perhaps it had something to do with their forgetfulness of those who had brought them up in the faith. However, here, Paul is not speaking for himself but for teachers of the faith in the midst of the Galatian Christians.

Another practical implication of living in the Spirit is that we are to sow to please the Holy Spirit. The harvest then is eternal life. If we sow to please our sinful nature, the fruit of our labor is our destruction (v 8). What seeds will bring forth a harvest that pleases the Holy Spirit? I suggest they are the seeds that will produce the fruit of the Spirit (5:22-23) in our lives.

Finally, Paul challenges us not to become weary in doing good. We should never give up doing good. When the opportunity arises, we are to do good to all people, especially those who are fellow believers (vs 9-10).

People living in the Spirit do good wherever God places them. The good they do to others is done to all without discrimination. What good deed will you do this week?

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of James

James writes to a community that is divided. Perhaps the most visible division is between the rich and the poor. But more insidiously, there are those who spread worldly wisdom, and through their careless talk and judgement, make those who are not blessed materially feel like second-class citizens in the Christian community.

Those who are suffering need help. Those who are rich need to see beyond their riches, and those who are destroying the community with their tongues need to be rebuked and instructed.

James cuts through all these issues by pointing out that true spirituality is seen in the life that a Christian leads, not in wealth, nor status, nor the ability to confound people with words. 'Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.' You can judge then which is more real. His down-to-earth message brings us back to basics and helps us to see beyond the tangle of conflicting circumstances and issues, to 'the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.' God sees. He knows. And while you can get by with a counterfeit faith, you cannot get past Him.

At the same time, James encourages the suffering Christian to be patient and persevering, and to participate in and be sustained by the life of the community. Finally, they are encouraged to look beyond their temporary suffering, to the enduring prize of Christian maturity and completeness, the crown of life.

JUL 1, THURSDAY

Jam 1:1-27

Flabby or Fit?

Jam 1:5

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2

These days our flabby lifestyle has led to a proliferation of weight loss programs, all promising no exercise, no diets, and no more flab. Even if these programs may help us look better, they will not really help us to be more fit and healthy. For strength, stamina and fitness, our lifestyle must embrace the disciplines of healthy exercise and sensible diet.

Similarly, our faith needs to be exercised in order for it to be fit and strong. Otherwise, we will be prone to double-mindedness and instability (v 8), unable to take trials and troubles that may come our way (v 11).

When things get tough, understand that this is God's perfect gift to you, to help you grow fit faith wise, so that you may be perfect and complete. Therefore, be patient, be faithful, be steadfast, and let God's fitness program have its full effect.

Are you facing some difficult circumstances?

Have you been crying out to God for a while?

Respond to God with courage, resolve and determination. Yes, even with joy.

Because, if your circumstances did not arise out of sin, then you have nothing to fear.

God is our Father. And if your circumstances arose out of sin, repent and be forgiven.

God is still our Father. The time for moaning is over.

Now is the time for courage, steadfastness, and strength.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 2, FRIDAY

Jam 2:1-26

Divide or Unite?

Jam 2:26b

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. James 2: 12

Favoritism seems harmless, unless you are the person out of favor. It can inflict deep psychological scars that are very difficult to erase. Society creates divisions all the time but, in the Gospel, there is freedom and equality. All are equally sinful, and all enjoy the grace of God. There is no Jew or Greek, no male or female. We are to love one another without discriminating. A key distinctive of the Christian community is unity.

So, to bring divisions into the family of God is to betray Christ, our Lord.

Verses 5-7 are obviously an argument from a local context. Not all who are rich exploit and not all who are poor keep the faith. The larger picture must be kept in view, that society's divisions create avenues for sinful exploitation, and we must not blindly follow the ways of the world.

To truly glorify Christ, we must abandon the values that our society imposes, and instead follow after Christ. The Christian community is a wonderful haven for weary down-and-out sinners – rich or poor, male or female. All of us who enter, enter as sinners undeserving of mercy. May we then continue to speak and act as a people who have found and received mercy.

Look for the most ignored person in your church, perhaps the one who thinks he or she is unimportant, unloved and powerless. Look for the very shy and quiet person, someone not 'pillar of society' material, a divorced person or a notoriously naughty child. Make special efforts to help this person realize that he or she is just as much a beloved member of the family of God as everybody else.

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

JUL 3, SATURDAY

Jam 3:1-4:10

Small But Deadly!

Jam 4:8

All of us struggle to control our tongues. James himself concedes that no one can tame the tongue (v 8). As Christians, we tend to be guilty of the sin of the lips. No wonder James measures our spirituality in terms of how we tame our own tongue (1:27).

Why does James issue a warning that teachers would be judged with greater strictness in verse 1? The reason is that teachers might use their tongues wrongly in instructing others. An incompetent teacher can cloud the truth, rather than make it lucid. A lazy teacher can even distort the truth by not investing time in a careful study of the text and in prayer for spiritual enlightenment.

Next, James describes the tongue as a fire (v 6). The analogy here highlights the destructive power of the tongue. This helps to explain why Scripture classifies gossip (Romans 1:29) and slander (Ephesians 4:31) as sin. James also points out that the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (v 8). It can inflict deep and permanent wounds in people's hearts when used diabolically. Jesus warns us that God will judge the utterance of every careless word (Matt 12:36-37).

James further argues that as Christians, we can no longer use our tongues to bless and curse others at the same time (v 9). Our tongues should only be employed to speak gracious words to encourage and edify others (Eph 4:29).

'Remember your tongue is in a wet place; it is likely to slip often.'

Pray for forgiveness for the slips it has made.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 4, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 5, MONDAY

Jam 4:11–5:20

Curse or Blessing?

Jam 5:16

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. James 4:1 7

Jesus tells us that when much is given by God, much is expected. We, on the other hand, feel that when much is given, much is to be enjoyed. And so, we use our superior position to sit in judgement of others who appear less fortunate, and we spend our lives in pursuit of even more wealth.

James tells us that when we do not do the good that we know we should, we sin. Consequently, the blessings of intelligence, talents and wealth would become a curse if we do not employ them to bless others.

There is nothing wrong with being involved in commerce or benefiting from our talents and training. James is not really against planning or moving ahead. What he speaks against is a lifestyle, a life pattern that does not acknowledge that we are ultimately under the will of God. Such a life pattern is reflected in our speech.

A Christian in submission to God knows that he has nothing to boast of and thus will not slander or exploit others. A Christian under God knows he lives to do God's will and so his plans are subject to God's will.

But the rich and arrogant ultimately will be judged by God and their wealth, talents and deeds will turn around to become their accusers on that day.

There is so much that those who are wealthy, gifted and talented can do to make life better and more hopeful for those who are less fortunate.

If you know that you have been blessed, think about what God wants you to do so that you can bless another person.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 6, TUESDAY

Acts 15:36–16:5

A Friend in Failure

Acts 15:39–40

On November 27, 1939, three treasure hunters accompanied by film crews dug through the asphalt outside of the Hollywood Bowl amphitheater in Southern California. They were looking for the Cahuenga Pass treasure, consisting of gold, diamonds, and pearls rumored to have been buried there seventy-five years earlier.

They never found it. After twenty-four days of digging, they struck a boulder and stopped. All they accomplished was a nine-foot-wide, forty-two-foot-deep hole in the ground. They walked away dejected.

To err is human—we all fail sometimes. Scripture tells us that young Mark walked away from Paul and Barnabas on a missionary trip “and had not continued with them in the work.” Because of this, “Paul did not think it wise to take him” on his next trip (Acts 15:38), which resulted in a strong disagreement with Barnabas. But in spite of his initial failings, Mark shows up years later in surprising ways. When Paul was lonely and in prison toward the end of his life, he asked for Mark and called him “helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). God even inspired Mark to write the gospel that bears his name.

Mark’s life shows us that God won’t leave us to face our errors and failures alone. We have a Friend who’s greater than every mistake. As we follow our Savior, He’ll provide the help and strength we need.

By: James Banks

What mistakes or failures have you faced recently?

In what ways have you discovered God’s strength as you shared them with Him in prayer?

*Jesus, thank You for being there whenever I want to talk to You.
I praise You for the comfort and hope only You can give!*

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of Acts 16:6–28:31

I have stayed the course in government service. Soon I will be retiring. Consider this if you are planning to quit serving God. Quitters never win. Winners never quit. Many of life's failures involve people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up.

Consider also Paul's ministry as recorded in Acts 16-28. Had the Holy Spirit written off Paul as too old and frail, the book of Acts would have ended at chapter 12. Barnabas' and Paul's first missionary journey to plant churches in Cyprus and Galatia wouldn't have happened (Acts 13-14). Had the Jerusalem Council rejected Paul's apostolic calling and phenomenal success among the Gentiles and had Paul quit the ministry because of his sharp disagreement with Barnabas, the book of Acts would have ended at chapter 15. Praise God. Paul did not retire despite his age, poor health and ministry tensions.

And because he did not quit, God richly blessed his ministry as recorded for us in Acts 16-28.

In Paul's missionary journeys, he spearheaded the advance of the Gospel into Europe and Asia Minor (Acts 16-20). In less than 40 years, he planted churches in no less than 40 cities in the Roman Empire. Paul boldly defended the Gospel in Jerusalem, the religious center of Judaism (Acts 21-23). Paul unashamedly preached the Gospel to the Roman authorities each time he made his appeal to Rome, the political center of the Roman Empire. In Rome, Paul proclaimed the Gospel to all who would listen. He also wrote many of the 14 Pauline epistles of the New Testament there (Acts 24-28).

Other than Jesus Christ, no man has shaped the theology and history of Christianity more than Paul. What was Paul's consuming passion? Why didn't he quit at the height of his success or in the depths of his discouragements? What made Paul serve God resolutely until God called him home? As we meditate on Acts 16–18 we will find some answers. May we be inspired to serve the Lord more passionately till He calls us home. It's always too soon to quit. Do not retire prematurely unless God says so. Age is simply mind over matter. If God doesn't mind, it shouldn't matter.

JUL 7, WEDNESDAY

Act 16:6-40

Divine Appointments

Act 16:31

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9

When God disposes what man proposes, God's appointments replace man's disappointments. Twice Paul planned to do God's work instead of working God's plan. Twice he was disappointed because God's appointment for him then was not Asia but Europe. Twice, Paul was Spirit-directed away from Asia (vs 6-7). He was vision-called to Europe (v 9). Paul then concluded it was God's will for him to bring the Gospel to Macedonia (v 10). Leaving disappointment behind, welcoming God's appointments ahead, Paul eagerly proceeded to Philippi, the gateway to Europe.

Coincidence is a man-made word. Miracles are God-made realities. A coincidence is an incident arranged by God who prefers to remain anonymous. Paul's encounter with Lydia was no coincidence. The church at Philippi that was established in Lydia's house was by divine appointment (vs 13-15).

Signs and wonders not only authenticate the preacher and his preaching; they also demonstrate God's power to those favored by Him. At the appointed time and place, God unleashed supernatural power for their benefit. Two dramatic examples illustrate this:

- The deliverance of the demon-possessed slave girl.
- The violent earthquake at the Philippian prison.

In both instances, God intervened supernaturally for the sake of Paul and Silas, the slave girl and the Philippian jailor because the appointed time of their deliverance and salvation had arrived (vs 18, 30-34).

Whatever happens to us is measured by the hand of God for our supreme good. Terrible circumstances do not alter God's goodness. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (Ja 5:16). Paul and Silas understood this. That's why they could rejoice and praise God in prison in spite of the false charges, severe flogging and unwarranted arrest. They rightly believed God put them in prison for His purposes (vs 31-34). They rightly believed God would free them once His purposes had been fulfilled (vs 35-39).

Live each day by God's appointment and you will be at the right place at the right time impacting the right people for the right reasons.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 8, THURSDAY

Act 17:1-34

Persevering Obedience

Act 17:26

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage - with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Tim 4:2

When faithfulness is most difficult, it is most necessary. It's better to declare the truth and be rejected than to withhold it just to be accepted. Better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and despair. Do not fear what lies ahead because God is with you. Do not fear the perils around you because God's eye is upon you. Don't pray for persecution to stop. Don't pray for a lighter burden. Pray for a stronger back to endure. Continue to trust in God. Continue on in courage in spite of your fears. These instructions could have been Paul's encouragement to Silas as they headed for Thessalonica after what they had experienced in Philippi.

At Thessalonica, many were saved (v 4) after Paul had diligently presented the Gospel to them (vs 2-3). The Jewish leaders could not refute Paul's teaching. Out of jealousy they incited a mob and started a riot. Paul was accused of troublemaking and treason (vs 5-9).

No longer safe, Paul and Silas left for Berea (v 10). This pattern of instant revival followed by violent protests was repeated in Berea (vs 11-13). Once again, Paul had to leave the church he had planted and the dear people he had come to love, this time for Athens (vs 14-15).

God did not exempt Paul from persecution but enabled him to endure. Difficulty from the hand of God was but a future blessing in disguise. In the darkest of circumstances, God was there with the greatest of blessings. It was in the most discouraging and impossible of situations that God was mightily at work. There are no closed doors, only great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations. It wasn't Paul's ministry. It was God's work. It wasn't what Paul was doing for God but what God was accomplishing through Paul. These events might have been God's encouragement to Paul when he left for Athens alone without Silas and Timothy (v 14).

**'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).**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 9, FRIDAY

Act 18:1-18a

Blessed Assurance

Act 18:9-10

One night the LORD spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid: keep on speaking; do not be silent. For I am with you, and no-one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." Acts 18:9-10

Paul arrived at Corinth alone in weakness, fear and trembling (I Cor 2:3). He had been assaulted, imprisoned and expelled from Philippi. His life was in danger in Thessalonica. He was smuggled out from Berea. He had been mocked in Athens. Eighteen months later, Paul left Corinth a different man. He had been refreshed and reignited in Corinth. What changed him can be deduced from Acts 18. Paul made three important decisions that turned his ministry around.

- Henceforth he would preach simply in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:1-4).
- Henceforth he would preach to the non-Jews (v 6).
- He made a vow to God and fulfilled it before he left Corinth (v 18).

In response, in a vision (vs 9-10), God turned Paul's ministry around by giving him three commands and three promises.

- The three commands: Fear not. Speak out. Don't quit.
- The three promises: I am with you. No one can harm you. Many in Corinth belong to Me.

Paul obeyed and God kept His promises. Gallio dismissed Paul's adversaries without calling for Paul's defense. This judicial judgment protected Paul and paved the way for the spread of the Gospel. Paul could from now on minister long-term on a permanent basis, free from harassment (vs 14-16). Frustrated, the Jews turned against Sosthenes, who had agitated them against Paul (v 17). Sosthenes later became a Christian and a minister of the Gospel (I Cor 1:1). God not only protected Paul but converted the leader of Paul's opposition. Other than Sosthenes, God blessed Paul's ministry in Corinth with many significant converts and notable workers, some of whom are mentioned in Acts 18 and his epistles.

What changed Paul? What turned his ministry around? Paul had humbly reassessed his ministry, reset his priorities and wholeheartedly obeyed God's vision that was revealed to him. God can also transform you and revitalize your ministry. Seek God for a fresh mandate. Redefine your mission. Reprioritize your objectives. Realign your life.

The grace of God will bring to you the constancy of purpose to serve and the capacity to serve tirelessly.

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

What does it feel like to be forced out of an exciting event? You have started a project and it is going and growing well. Then some people come along, get your supervisor upset with you, and the next thing you know, you are out of it!

That was Paul's experience in Thessalonica. The Jews and Gentiles had turned to faith in Jesus and the numbers in the synagogue were affected. The Jews decided to sabotage the work of Paul (read the whole account in Acts 17:1-14) and Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica. Paul was so concerned for the new believers that he sent Timothy back to encourage them (1 Thes 3:1-2, 5).

Finally, when he was in Corinth, he wrote this letter to commend them for their growth, to defend his motives in his earlier ministry with them, to encourage them to stand firm in the face of persecution, and to educate them about the second coming of Christ.

When we read Paul's letter, we find him referring to faith, hope and love both in commendation as well as in further education. We will also find this letter eschatological (about the second coming of Christ) in nature with related verses in every chapter.

Christ who began the good work of faith, hope and love in the Thessalonian believers and in every believer will bring it to completion at His return.

2 THESSALONIANS :

Since there is a preceding epistle - I Thessalonians, it is not surprising at all that much of what we read in 2 Thessalonians is in the form of reminders and reinforcements. The great theme of the Lord's return continues to dominate. However, several other key themes emerge in the three chapters of 2 Thessalonians:

Chapter One - Perseverance

The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels.

Chapter Two - Deception

The man of lawlessness will be revealed but the secret power of lawlessness is already at work.

Chapter Three - Dedication

The Lord is faithful to strengthen and protect us from the evil one. So be faithful.

JUL 10, SATURDAY

1 Th 1:1-2:16

A Great Start

1 Th 1:3

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 1 Thes 1:2

What a great start the Thessalonian believers had - lives marked by faith, hope and love, deep convictions, repentance, joy in the word of God, and much more! This was remarkable because they were living in a community that was strongly opposed to the progress of the Gospel. Paul came before God in prayer, thankful for the believers and encouraged by their faith.

Coming to faith in Christ can be a great challenge in Asia. Often, there are challenges from the community we live in or from our own families. Our friends may think we are weird and sometimes it becomes difficult to continue as a believer and we feel like giving up.

Let us take a closer look at the Thessalonian believers and learn how we can start well and continue to do well in the faith. They were having a hard time but they became models to all the believers beyond Thessalonica.

Note the characteristics of the Thessalonian brethren that gave Paul reason to rejoice (vs 3, 6-10). We can also look at believers in Asia who started well and continued well (John Sung, Sadhu Sunder Singh) and learn from them. If they can do it, by the grace of God, we can too!

As we draw close to the celebration of Christ's birth, pray that God will open the eyes of people in communities that oppose Christ and are hostile to the Gospel.

Pray for friends and family by name.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 11, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 12, MONDAY

1 Th 2:17-3:13

Our Glory & Joy

1 Th 2:20

Indeed, you are our glory and joy. 1 Thes 2:20

Paul had a great heart for the Thessalonian believers. He wanted to nurture them himself. When he could not be present, he sent Timothy to make sure they were strong and encouraged in their faith. He wanted to be sure they were strong and would not buckle under trials and persecution. They were so precious to him that he considered them his hope, joy, and crown in which he will glory in the presence of Jesus when He returns.

The rapid pace of urbanization in Asia has affected relationships. Families are separated by work demands and people are separated by job changes and transfers. Even pastors get transferred and we are often left with the feeling that they have left us. How we yearn for those relationships that support our growth and wish that they would return. But they do not and we need to get on with life and learn to depend on God.

There are also those of us who yearn for the precious ones into whom we have poured our lives. They are now separated from us because we had to move. How we feel for their continued growth especially if they are new believers. We try to keep in contact but more importantly, we need to be prayer warriors upholding them at the Throne of Grace.

'There is nothing that makes us love people so much as praying for them.'

-William Law –

Thank God for the significant people in our lives. Pray for them by name.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 13, TUESDAY

1 Th 4:1-5:11

Do the Right Thing

1 Th 4:7

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality. 1 Thes 4:3

Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to do the right thing. This has to do with holiness in relationships. Paul urged them to love each other more and more, and he warned them to avoid sexual immorality.

Sexual permissiveness has rocked traditional Asian culture and overtaken the younger generation in many of our countries. Relationships have been abused. Today, sexual relationships with the opposite sex outside of marriage are rampant and seen as a form of recreation. In many Asian countries, sexual relationships with the same sex are acceptable and these have come into the church as well.

Scriptures warn us against taking advantage of another person in relationships (often in the name of love). Often, we end up using others for our own selfish immoral ends. An important safeguard is to extend true, genuine, pure love to each other.

Ask God for wisdom and courage to conduct ourselves properly in our relationships with family and friends.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 14, WEDNESDAY

1 Th 5:12-28

No Matter What

1 Th 5:16-17

Today we hear about backbiting and slander in the church itself. So much of pain is caused by dissension among brethren. It is easy to talk about everything under the sun, but when it comes to loving across the board in church, it simply gets difficult to go beyond talk.

When the Word of God is taken lightly, there is usually not much ministry to others. These were Paul's concerns even as he wrote his last words to the Thessalonians. Brotherhood and what it really means seem to be his focus.

First, he talks about the attitude towards their leaders. They were to hold them in high regard. Then they were to live peaceably with each other. Their love was to extend also to those among them who were weak and timid. They were to correct, care and be patient.

Finally, in their gatherings, they were to be joyful and thankful. Paul also asked them to test everything and hold on to what was good. 'God who calls you is faithful; He will do this.' If they did this, they would be kept blameless until Jesus comes again.

Think of the church community you belong to. What is your relationship with your leaders and with one another? What about ministry to one another? List the weaknesses in your church and pray for renewal.

**Father, grant me a spirit of brotherhood towards all,
especially those whom You have appointed to lead.**

To the weak, give me a generous heart that will go all out to strengthen them.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 15, THURSDAY

2 Th 1:1-2:12

God is Just: He will Pay Back

2 Th 1:6-7

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you. 2 Thes 1:6

If ever we have idealized the world in which the early Christians lived, the opening chapter of 2Thessalonians should deliver an effective dose of corrective reality. In the history of the church, persecution, in a variety of forms, has been a painful and yet permitted attendant.

In a fallen world, where the Lord Himself has forewarned that Christians will have tribulation, we continue to ask, 'Lord, why are You not doing something?' The source of persecution could be members of one's family, colleagues at work, a majority people or state-permitted or even state-sponsored groups.

The answer to our oft-asked question is in verses 5-6. The 'just way God does things, for He is using your sufferings to make you ready for His kingdom, while at the same time He is preparing judgment and punishment for those who are hurting you' (TLB). Whatever the circumstances, the apostle Paul insists that 'God is just' (v 6) and that 'He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled' (vs 6-7). The 'persecutions and trials you are enduring' (v 4) are 'evidence' that 'God's judgment is right' (v 5). God's judgment will be seen in the punishment He will dispense (vs 8-10).

That is not all: His judgment will also be seen in the giving of 'relief to you who are troubled', those who are 'worthy of his calling' (vs 5, 11). His power is working in us to 'fulfil every good purpose' (v 11) and our glorification in Christ by His grace (v 12).

In difficult circumstances, it is always easier to be miserable than to be grateful.

Lord, instruct us in Your ways that we may learn to give thanks to You.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 16, FRIDAY

2 Th 2:13-3:18

Brothers and Sisters, Stand Firm

2 Th 2:15

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thes 2:15

Christians frequently equate salvation to immunity from the storms of life. As Christians, we feel that we should be granted 'the most-favored party' status when it comes to serving and living for Christ. We expect an easier time than non-Christians.

We cannot find a theological basis for that sentiment anywhere. Not even here when it clearly says that Christians are loved by the Lord (vs 13, 16). And it is not because God flip-flopped on His intention to save us, for verse 13 unequivocally states that 'from the beginning God chose you to be saved.'

Though we are free from the power of sin ('saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit', v 13), we are not free from the sinful actions of others as in persecution. The logic for Christian living runs opposite to what we expect. As Christians, we can expect persecution and hardship. In the words of another apostle, 'Dear friends, don't be bewildered or surprised when you go through the fiery trials ahead, for this is no strange, unusual thing that is going to happen to you. Instead, be really glad – because these trials will make you partners with Christ in his suffering' (1 Pet 4:12-13 TLB).

God's unchanging intention to love us is not to save us from trouble; rather, it is to strengthen us for trials and persecutions.

Stand firm.

Firstly, 'hold to the teaching we passed on to you' (v 15) which is biblical teaching.

Secondly, pray so that the Lord who loves you will 'encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word' (v 17).

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 17, SATURDAY

Act 18:18b-19:22

Eloquent, Yet Humble

Act 18:26b

I admire people who can articulate their beliefs and persuade others with their rhetoric. Some call it “the gift of gab” or “having a way with words.” Others call it “eloquence.”

Apollos had that gift. We are told that he was “an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). But although he taught accurately about Christ, he preached only of the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance from sin (v.25; 19:4).

Apollos knew about Jesus’ teachings but may not have known about His death and resurrection and that the Spirit had now come (Acts 2). His teaching was incomplete because he didn’t know about being filled with the Spirit for daily empowerment.

So, Priscilla and Aquila, a wife and husband who were friends of Paul, invited Apollos into their home to correct his teaching. Although he was highly educated and knew the Scriptures well, Apollos humbly accepted their instruction. As a result, Apollos was able to continue his ministry, but with newfound understanding.

Psalm 25:9 reminds us that God “guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way” (NIV). If we have a spirit of humility, we can be taught by God and be used to touch the lives of others.

By: Cindy Hess Kasper

**More like the Master I would ever be,
 More of His meekness, more humility;
 More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,
 More consecration for work He bids me do. —Gabriel**

The place of humility is the place of power.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 18, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 Corinthians

The sociological and historical context that emerges as the backdrop to 1 Corinthians is one of a predominantly Gentile community. As former worshippers of idols and other 'gods', these believers brought a Hellenistic / pagan worldview to the Christian faith. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, they were still greatly influenced by the worldview of the Corinthian world. Their behavior required a major overhaul and correction. This is what Paul attempted to do in his letter to the church.

Paul wrote I Corinthians as a response to a letter brought to him by Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus. Readers need to realize that I Corinthians makes most sense when it is read and understood as a response from Paul to the church who wrote their reply to an earlier Pauline letter (this is at least Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church).

Given the argumentative tone of much of his response, it seems highly likely that in the earlier Corinthian letter, the church had disagreed with Paul in various matters. A key issue was the question of Paul's authority as an apostle of Christ and founder of the church. A second area of concern was the modifying of the Gospel towards a pagan worldview and philosophy. For Paul, these two matters were crucially related: it was not so much his person at stake in their denial of his apostolic authority, it was the Gospel he preached to them.

It has been pointed out that most likely, the key issue between Paul and the Corinthian church is a basic theological problem of what it meant to be *pneumatikos*, i.e. spiritual.

JUL 19, MONDAY

1 Co 1:1-17

That They May Be One

1 Co 1:10

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1 Cor 1:10

When any group is together long enough, there will be strife and tension. Churches are no exception. There are deep-seated traditions to guard, honor to defend, and fragile status-conscious egos to protect, even among 'spiritual' Christians. Paul has much to speak to us about the need for unity.

The main cause of tension in the Corinthian church was the abuse of spiritual gifts by some of the members. This led to the creation of factions. Members chose to be followers of a particular leader while opposing another.

While many churches in Asia have witnessed a revival of the more visible gifts of the Spirit, there is a need to guard our attitudes. We are all vulnerable to the danger of either over-focusing on the more spectacular spiritual gifts which could lead to spiritual pride or totally rejecting such giftings for the church today. Like the Corinthian church, churches may end up in disunity and disarray. Different churches may claim to be more blessed, more right and more righteous than other churches.

It is heartening that Paul could still start his letter with thanksgiving, even for the very gifts that were the subject of disagreement. Paul recognized these gifts as evidence of God's grace in the church, and he directed the church to focus on God, the Giver of the gifts. We err when we focus on our differences and not on God.

**Pray for church leaders in our country to recognize the work of God
in a Kingdom that is His and not man's.**

**Are we guilty of using spiritual gifts that are intended to build us up,
to tear us apart instead?**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 20, TUESDAY

1 Co 1:18-2:5

Wiser Than Man's Wisdom

1 Co 1:25

For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 1 Cor 1:25

We often forget that to the world the Gospel of Christ is foolish, weak and powerless. Paul reminds us not to add human 'wisdom' to improve the acceptability of the cross. The truth is that the cross stands in stark contrast to human wisdom.

Firstly, the Gospel's message is of a crucified Christ Messiah (v 23). This contradicts human wisdom. Secondly, the Gospel's recipients seem to be foolish people called to be God's kingdom-citizens (v 26). Finally, the Gospel's preacher - Paul, was also a picture of a weaking trembling in fear (v 3).

We may try to soften the apparent foolishness of the Gospel, but God will not be so easily boxed-in. God's love for such undeserving and weak people as we are is the true scandal and a stumbling block to those who think of themselves as righteous with no need of forgiveness.

Michael Card writes 'When we in our weakness believed, we were strong, He became helpless to show we were wrong.'

To those who know they are undeserving, unlovable and unsaveable, this is the Gospel indeed. The preaching of the cross of Christ precludes all human boasting, and it alone has the power to set ragamuffins like us free.

**We are called to follow God's Christ.
Many see us as foolish to place our faith in Christ.
But we rejoice in Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 21, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 2:6-3:23

God Reveals by His Spirit

1 Co 3:16

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 1 Cor 2:12

Paul had been arguing against a Corinthian/human attitude towards ‘wisdom’ that sees the Gospel as foolish. Paul now argues that God acted by means of His own Wisdom (1:21). He made Christ to become true Wisdom for us, and He revealed this through His Holy Spirit.

Paul makes three points:

- Firstly, God’s wisdom was held ‘in mystery’, hidden from the present age;
- Secondly, because we have been chosen by Him in grace, we are let in on the ‘secret’ through the Holy Spirit;
- Thirdly, the difference therefore between ‘natural’ and ‘spiritual’ people is the ability or inability to understand God’s Wisdom and receive the Spirit’s revelation of God’s heart.

We need wisdom from the Holy Spirit. The Gospel cannot be grasped by the philosophical, humanistic reasoning of man, but only by the Holy Spirit of God.

As we commemorate Pentecost Sunday, it is worth highlighting here the role and reality of the Holy Spirit in Paul’s theology and ours. The Holy Spirit makes all the difference for He alone grants understanding of God’s will and ways.

We must be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking, like the Corinthians, that the gift of the Spirit leads to a special status among believers. Being ‘spiritual’ does not lead to elitism, but instead to a humble and deeper appreciation of God’s profound mystery of salvation.

Pray that God will grant each of us the mind of Christ through the Holy Spirit’s revelation. Pray we will be obedient and keep in step with the Spirit in our lives.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 22, THURSDAY

1 Co 4:1-21

Do Only as I Say

1 Co 4:20

Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 1 Cor 4:16

The hardest task for leaders is to say, 'Imitate me.' It is far easier to give church members a Bible and say, 'Do as I say, and not as I do ...' Paul's 'way of life in Christ Jesus' (v 17) was above reproach. Paul reasserts his apostolic authority and re-establishes his right to discipline misbehavior.

In changing the metaphor from 'farm' to 'household', Paul appeals to the church as a father would appeal to his children. They should 'imitate him' in his role as their spiritual father. And if a father's 'gentleness' will not change their persistent disobedience, he threatens, then, to visit them with a 'rotan' (cane) instead.

We note the tensions that exist in leadership in Christian ministry: how to be biblically authoritative without being harsh, and how to impose church discipline without assuming the leader is above or removed from the members' sins. All leaders struggle like Paul for the behavior and attitude of their flock to conform to the Gospel. The task is made more difficult when members think they know better.

For Paul, the coming judgment of Christ (v 5) was not just theological truth. It is the one reality that must dictate, condition and influence the church's present reality and entire existence. The certainty of Christ's return should 'radicalize' the church's present practices and perceptions. Leader or parent, the call is to bring those under our care to a confrontation with Christ's claims over us.

Pray for parents to have spiritual wisdom and moral strength to disciple and discipline their children in the ways of God.

**Are we able to put our lives forth as an example and testimony to all around us, and say,
'Imitate me, as I imitate Christ?'**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 23, FRIDAY

1 Co 5:1-13

Get Rid of the Old Yeast

1 Co 5:7b

Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 1 Cor 5:6

Paul warns the church against mixing and mingling in any way with people who call themselves 'believers' of the Gospel, but who choose to perpetually live in sin. Keeping company with them will inevitably affect our walk and relationship with God.

In this account of an incestuous man, what is unusual is that though Paul speaks little of the 'sin' and the 'sinner', he is greatly concerned with the attitude and reaction of the church.

The Corinthian church excused the sin (when even pagans would not). What caused even more concern was that they were arrogant about it. The problem is not simply a careless attitude toward sin, but their boastful attitude, presumably leading to justification and condoning of the practice.

What was at stake was ultimately the attitude of the Corinthian church to sin. More importantly, would the church continue in its present 'spirituality' - one that tolerated such sin?

Our church today needs to relearn measures of discipline that involve the whole church (especially when the sin is known by all), and to take measures that are remedial and reconciliatory (not judgmental). The church must know how to act when sin impacts the community.

In an age where standards are modified to fit one's present purposes, we need to remember that Christ died for us not simply to give us sure passage to heaven. He died that we might conform to His image. Individually and corporately, we are to express the character of God by the way we live in the world.

Do we look more like our surroundings or do we look more like our Lord Jesus?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 24, SATURDAY

1 Co 6:1-20

And They'll Know We Are Christians

1 Co 6:19

... you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Cor 6:20

Again, Paul's primary concern here is not so much with the individual 'sinners' and 'sins', but with the attitude of the church towards sin.

Paul applies the principle of the church not judging those 'outside' but only those 'inside' to cases where one church member has a disagreement with another. If the church does not 'judge' those outside, neither should it take its internal affairs outside for judgement.

For Paul, allowing church members to be judged by 'the ungodly' (v 1) is to show that the church has very little awareness of who she is in Christ. These actions will destroy the testimony of God's people before the world.

Let us pay heed to Paul's fundamental expectation that our experience of God's grace must show in the way we live our lives. We, who have been saved by grace, often fail to live out this grace in our actions. The spiritual must inevitably influence the natural and physical.

The Corinthian church did not allow their spiritual experience of God's grace to affect what they did with their physical bodies. We too fail to realize that what we do with our bodies (pornography, overdose of TV, sexual immorality) is intimately linked to our spiritual well-being. The doctrine of the sanctity of the body and its disciplines needs to be urgently taught in the church today. Our bodies belong solely to our Lord and Master Jesus. Let us live in submission to His will.

Pray that individuals and families learn anew the wealth and value of spiritual disciplines. Could we have periods of fasting from things like TV, mobile phone and the internet?

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 25, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 26, MONDAY

1 Co 7:1-40

The Ministry of Marriage

1 Co 7:23

When one thinks of ministry, it is probable that images of preachers behind pulpits and missionaries in faraway lands come immediately to mind. Few would think of marriage as being a 'ministry'. Yet if we consider that a husband's love for his wife mirrors the love of Jesus for the Church, and parenting children is an expression of the nurture of Father God, we must be challenged to consider that being a spouse and a parent is being thoroughly involved in imaging God to a needy world. Surely in that light, marriage is ministry as unto the Lord.

Marriage is a commitment to share. No other relationship calls for more self-sacrifice. Paul speaks of how even the body of the spouse is no longer subject only to the spouse concerned. There is always a consideration of the other – a seeking for commonality of faith, hope and success.

Marriage is a commitment to care. It is a call to actively demonstrate love even when both do not see eye to eye in all matters. Paul wrote of how a believer ought not to leave an unbelieving spouse but to continue to care as long as the other was willing to stay.

Marriage is a commitment to life-long faithfulness. While it appears that Paul seemed to lean towards singlehood and its advantages, he nevertheless urged that those who were already married should not contemplate returning to the single state. To Paul, marriage is a partnership for life. While acknowledging the possibility of conflict, he urged that the marriage bond be maintained so that the desired environment for the children and spiritual blessing is protected.

**Thank You, Lord, for Paul's teaching on marriage.
It helps me understand that marriage is a ministry to glorify Your Name.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 27, TUESDAY

1 Co 8:1-13

Tearing Down or Building Up

1 Co 8:3

Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. 1 Cor 8:9

This passage looks at the issue of participation in cultic meals. Some believers had insisted that they were free to participate in these meals and saw nothing wrong in them.

The church believed incorrectly that their conduct could be based on what they 'knew'. The knowledge they had gave them the right and freedom to act as they wished.

Paul, however, insisted that 'knowledge' is the wrong basis for determining Christian behavior. Knowledge often fills us with pride (here, the 'knowledge' that the idols are harmless). Knowledge is also often used to bully or to condescend to other people. Knowledge is not irrelevant or unimportant, but it cannot be an end in itself. Paul argues that their 'knowledge' was ultimately imperfect and incomplete. While Paul agrees with their 'knowledge' that the idols to which food is offered are nothing, he reminds the believers that these same idols may have a different 'reality' to other believers. Thus, their actions must take into consideration both their relationship with other believers and their own relationship to God.

Paul urges the believers to base their conduct not on 'knowledge' but on love. The approach is not an insistence on one's own rights and freedom, but rather the giving up of the very same rights and freedom so as not to cause others to stumble in their faith.

Before you start to argue, pause to think as to how you can, in love, do the right things.

Pray that we will not let the knowledge we acquire fill us with pride, but instead that what we learn will change our lives to be more Christlike.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 28, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 9:1-27

Free of Charge

1 Co 9:22b

What then is my reward? just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. 1 Cor 9:18

Paul starts off with a strong presentation of his rights. But later, he explains why he has not used any of these rights.

In many churches, full-time workers are subtly reminded that because they have chosen the path of 'full-time' service to God, they should not expect rich earthly rewards. This rationale is unfortunately often used by the church to abdicate from the responsibility of ensuring their workers are sufficiently taken care of.

While Paul argues strenuously against any abuse of the servants of the Lord, his central message is that there be 'no hindrance to the Gospel.' Neither concerns over rights nor arguments for what is 'enough' should be the focus; instead, the real concern and concentration should be the Gospel.

Paul's renunciation of his 'rights' to material support here is not because he expects his 'rewards to be in heaven' nor because he 'trusts the Lord to provide' though both would be true. His stand arises from his singular passion for the Gospel: everything is done so as not to hinder the Gospel.

Paul explains that he is under compulsion to proclaim the Gospel, and because it is not 'voluntary' labor (v 17) he cannot expect to be 'paid' for it. When the Gospel is given 'free of charge' he is free from any obligation to anyone. This is so that he can 'freely' become a 'slave' to all.

**The church needs to re-learn the power of the changeless Gospel.
We also need to learn how to be all things to all people.**

O Lord, quicken my spirit so I will experience the compulsion to proclaim the Gospel.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 29, THURSDAY

1 Co 10:1-11:1

The Glory of God

1 Co 10:13

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Cor 10:31

Paul returns to the matter of attending cultic meals in pagan temples.

Participation in cultic meals in pagan temples is prohibited for two reasons:

- i. the sacred meal is an act of 'fellowship' with the deity being worshipped
- ii. idols are not 'gods' in themselves, but demons are the objects of idol worship

This passage is relevant to us in Asia. As one commentator noted, 'What Paul is finally forbidding is any kind of relationship with the demonic.'

While eating food offered at the temple meals is absolutely forbidden because it involves the worship of idol-demons, eating offered food out in the public market was a different matter (v 25).

When the children of Israel ate of the sacrifice, they participated in the worship of God. When the pagans sacrificed, they did so to demons. The Corinthian Christians were participating at the Lord's Table. How then could they also have a part at the table of demons? Participation in one meal (the Lord's) is absolutely incompatible with participation in the other (at the temple of idols).

Let us renew our commitment to the Lord.

Let us partake of the Lord's Table with devotion and gratitude.

Pray for believers who live with family members who are not yet believers.

Pray that they will be like the sweet fragrance of Jesus in their homes.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 30, FRIDAY

1 Co 11:2-34

Receive and Welcome One Another

1 Co 11:26

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 1 Cor 11:28

Paul here speaks against the abuse of the Lord's Supper. The Corinthian church was in danger of despising the church of God and humiliating the poor members in their midst. Instead of sharing in unity, there was obvious division. It appears that the rich members were eating their own generous portions that were not being shared with the poorer members. Paul had no praise for well-to-do Christians who had no regard for their poorer brethren. Paul reminds them that because they all eat of one loaf, they together constitute the one body of Christ. Their 'divisions' at the Table destroy that unity.

Furthermore, such an abuse of the 'body' is an abuse of Christ Himself. They were abusing the One who through His death and resurrection, brought life to them and called them His body.

The Lord's Supper is essentially a constant reminder of the sacrifice of Christ and the price He paid for the redemption of His people.

Thus, the Table is not a place of condemnation, but of grace and acceptance. A believer will never be 'worthy' to be at the Table; we come because of the finished work of Christ. Scriptures exhort us to examine ourselves before we partake of the bread and wine so that we will not regard lightly the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus for our sins.

When we next partake of the Lord's Supper, let us receive, accept, welcome and wait for each other. Let us also confess our sins, repent and desire to live to bring glory to the Lord.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 31, SATURDAY

1 Co 12:1-31

Diversity Within Unity

1 Co 12:7

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. 1 Cor 12:4

Paul echoes here the previous theme of unity in the one body of Christ. After setting out the criteria for differentiating what comes from the Spirit and what does not, Paul emphasizes the need for diversity of gifts and manifestations in the unity of the one Spirit. He continues with the theme of 'one body with many parts'. However, the Corinthian church had forgotten what that spirit of unity meant.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in outward power and observable spiritual gifts makes it easy for God's people to think of the power and gifts as the only evidence of the Spirit's presence. In this case, 'spirituality' is external, 'showy' and dazzling.

However, God's people forget that the ultimate criterion and test of the Spirit's activity is the exaltation of Jesus as Lord. Whatever takes away from and diminishes this centrality begins to move away from Christ to a more carnal/fleshly fascination with spiritual activities as an end in themselves.

Hence, any exaltation of gifts at the expense of the Giver grieves the Spirit, and detracts from the core activity of the Spirit which is to exalt Christ above all.

The desperate need of the church is for a sovereign work of the Spirit to do among us what all our 'programmed unity' cannot: TO MAKE US ONE.

**Let us pray for our families and churches to recognize diversity within unity:
let us seek for a wide variety of manifestations and gifts of the one Spirit within the church.
And let us exalt Christ above all else.**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 1, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 2, MONDAY

1 Co 13:1-13

The Most Excellent Way

1 Co 13:13

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 1 Cor 13:4

This continues from the previous chapter and addresses the issue of the manifested gifts of the Holy Spirit being a source of disunity. The problem is quite obviously related to an abuse of the gift of tongues. This chapter begins and ends with references to 'tongues.'

Paul does not set the ideal of 'love' against the 'gifts', nor even places 'love' as better than 'gifts'. Love is the way in which the spiritual gifts are to function. Love is not set forth in contrast to tongues, but as the necessary ingredient for the expression of all spiritual gifts.

Love acts with the desire to earnestly seek expression of the Spirit not as an end in itself. Love edifies and builds up the community. To Paul, the desire of the Corinthian members for the gift of tongues was further indication of their failure to love one another. Tongues, if un-interpreted, cannot benefit or edify. It is evidence of self-interest. In contrast, love seeks the benefit of all believers.

The Corinthian Christians were in danger of practicing a religious 'spirituality' but were lacking in the love of Christ. Speaking in tongues was unquestionably a genuine activity of the Spirit. But the church also tolerated illicit sex, greed, idolatry, and pride. Their 'spirituality' was religious but where was the love of Christ?

Heed the warning! We could be actively involved in various 'religious' ministries and activities, but this would not benefit us or others if our lives are not also characterized by God's love.

Let us pray for our family and church that we will serve one another in love.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 3, TUESDAY

1 Co 14:1-40

Follow the Way of Love

1 Co 14:33a

So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church. 1 Cor 14:12

Paul begins this passage by exhorting the Corinthian church to follow the way of love. ‘And eagerly desire spiritual gifts’, he exhorts. But they were to remember that the goal of their spiritual zeal was to be the edification of the church.

For Paul, the edification and building up of the church can be achieved if there are the twin characteristics of intelligibility in speech in the gathered assembly and order in the conduct of the church.

Paul argues for intelligibility for the sake of both fellow believers (that they might be edified) as well as for the sake of unbelievers (that they might hear the word of the Lord and be converted). In the exercising of the gift of tongues, Paul explains that it can be used privately as much as one pleases, but in the community it is to be used only for the purpose of edification. And this requires intelligibility. Furthermore, those who speak in tongues must also do so in an orderly sequence.

Thus, the church needs to avoid thinking that being ‘spiritual’ has to do only with the visible and the audible signs. Instead, ‘spirituality’ is all about the edification of the church, the true expression of love for the saints.

The desired end-result of corporate worship and our ministries is not only enriching our personal experience in the Spirit, but the building up the church itself.

Pray for your church that it may express the love God calls us to display.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 4, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 15:1-34

Do We Believe Heaven Really Exists?

1 Co 15:12

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 1 Cor 15:14

Some of the Corinthian believers were contending that there was no resurrection of the dead.

Paul responds firstly (vs 1-11) by reaffirming and re-establishing the event of Christ's death and resurrection as a fact and objective reality.

Secondly (vs 12-34), Paul highlights the contradictions inherent in the beliefs held by the Corinthian church. They affirmed Christ's resurrection but denied their own future resurrection.

Paul points to the absurdity and futility of their faith if Christ had not been raised from the dead. Let us consider again the centrality of the resurrection of Christ and assess how this determines our 'life-style' today. We do not want to just live out our days and have the hope of resurrection as an added bonus.

Rather, Christ's resurrection must completely alter our present and future. Christ is the first fruits of those who are His, and we will all share in what is His.

**The resurrection of Christ must surely revive us and revolutionize the way we live.
Let it also shape our times of worship as we worship the Lord with joy and glorious hope.**

**Let us also pray that we will be lights shining into the darkness
to bring resurrection hope and joy to friends and family.**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 5, THURSDAY

1 Co 15:35-58

The Resurrected Body

1 Co 15:58b

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 1 Cor 15:55

In what form will the dead be raised? The answer: 'In a new body.' This body is 'new' because it will be heavenly, 'spiritual', and incorruptible, in contrast to our present earthly, 'natural', decaying body.

Had the Corinthian church misunderstood the 'resurrection' to be the reanimation and resuscitation of the body? Paul points out that Christ's resurrection was obviously the transformation of His human physical body into a 'glorified body'.

Paul attempts to explain the idea of a 'spiritual' (heavenly/glorified) body by comparing it to seeds and plants. When one wants to grow a plant, one does not put a full-grown plant into the soil. It is the seed that undergoes a marvelous metamorphosis into a different type of 'body' altogether. The seed and the plant are one and the same, the former transfiguring and transforming into the latter in one continuous reality.

Since the present body is under the original curse of sin, it must be transformed. The perfected body is imperishable and incorruptible, enabling believers to appropriately enter their heavenly dwellings. 'Corruptible must be clothed in incorruptible.'

Let us give thanks for Christ's resurrection.

Without this cornerstone truth, all will be lost.

Let us take time to reflect on what the finished work of Christ has won for us.

And let us give grateful thanks.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 6, FRIDAY

1 Co 16:1-24

Stand Firm

1 Co 16:13-14

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 1 Cor 16:13

Our possessions do not belong to us. It is useful to note the matter-of-fact way the issue of giving is approached. The church was asked to set money aside weekly according to the measure the Lord had prospered them. There is no cajoling, no gimmicks, no emotional blackmail to motivate members to give.

A material need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of meeting it. In our day of highly visible ruthless campaigns for money, there is something to be said for the more quiet consistent, purposeful approach outlined here.

Our ministry does not belong to us. Paul's statement about sending Apollos is a clear indication that Paul does not see his ministry as exclusively 'his' ministry. The work, the ministry and the church are God's and God's alone. Apollos would otherwise not be on Paul's invitation list to Corinth.

The church does not belong to us. The epistle ends on a note similar to its beginning. There is evidence of tension between what they are and what they will yet become in terms of obedience to Christ.

Christians must continually live in the tension between the 'already' and 'not yet'. What they must not do is to excuse themselves from obedience just because they are not yet fully there. The grace of the Lord and the hope of His coming should cause all to heed the words of this letter so as to be watchful and to do all things in love (vs 13-14).

We belong to God alone.

Reflect and thank God for all the lessons He has taught us through I Corinthians.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 7, SATURDAY

Act 19:21-20:1

Global Missions

Act 19:21

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." Acts 19:21

Why leave Ephesus for Rome?

Global missions was Paul's consuming passion. He had already planted churches in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 12-14). He had established churches in Europe (Acts 15-18). From Ephesus the Gospel was rapidly penetrating Asia (Acts 19). The important cities from Jerusalem to Rome had been evangelized. Paul felt it was time for him to consolidate the church in Rome, the world's center of influence and power. God confirmed this for Paul through subsequent events in Ephesus (vs 23-41).

Why first to Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia?

Other than global missions, Paul was mindful of his other obligations as an apostle. The welfare of the saints in Judea was in his heart. They were suffering because of a famine. Before heading for Rome, Paul planned to visit Jerusalem with a love offering collected from churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Unable to leave immediately, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead. They were to encourage the churches in Europe and raise funds for the saints in Judea. Paul demonstrated what is important in ministry, namely global missions, the welfare of the suffering saints, the edification of believers and churches and the sending forth of disciples.

What had Paul learned from the riot in Ephesus?

Paul left Ephesus a wiser man because he had learned these 3 lessons:

- Expect opposition wherever the Gospel is preached in power, lives are transformed and society impacted (vs 23-28).
- It would be futile and foolish for Paul to defend himself, his friends and the Gospel against a frenzied hostile mob (vs 29-34).
- God was in control despite man's manipulation. God overruled the evil intentions of the schemers and dissipated the rage of the mob. Wisdom was given to the city clerk to dismiss the illegal assembly without harming Paul and his friends (vs 35-41).

'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

AUG 8, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 2 Corinthians

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul continued to tackle the issues and problems facing the church. The most pressing concern was the infiltration of false teachers into the church. That had resulted in much confusion among the believers.

The false teachers were not only undermining the teaching of sound doctrine, but had also launched attacks on Paul's personal integrity as well as his apostolic claims. Obviously they had succeeded in some measure as we read of Paul having to present a solid defense of his calling as well as his ministry.

Paul also dwelt at length on his change of plans to visit the Corinthians. Apparently, the false teachers had exploited the change of plans and accused Paul of being fickle and not being a man of his word.

True to his calling to be a servant of Christ and a minister of God's word, Paul faithfully taught about comfort and suffering, the present life and the glory ahead as well as the ministry of reconciliation. He exhorted the Christians at Corinth to live holy lives, separated from the wickedness of the world, to give generously to those in need and to forgive the offenders.

The letter ends appropriately with stern warnings to set their house in order before he visited them. He stamped his authority as their spiritual father as well as his being 'an apostle of Christ, by the will of God'.

AUG 9, MONDAY

2 Co 1:1-11

Hast Thou No Scar ?

2 Co 1:3-4

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Cor 1:5

No one likes to suffer. Hardships of any kind are most unwelcome. This is evident when the electricity supply is disrupted even for a short while. How we dislike the heat and the inconveniences of a blackout! Yet, for the disciple of Christ, suffering is part of the package deal. In fact, the Lord Jesus Himself left us an example of suffering - that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21).

The apostle Paul did just that. He endured great hardships and oftentimes he 'despaired even of life' itself (v 8). His list of sufferings would put any other disciple to shame. He was imprisoned, repeatedly flogged, persecuted, pressured and was in much distress. Even as we cringe in our seats and wonder if we can ever make that kind of grade, Paul's words of sweet assurance soothe the soul. He testifies that in the midst of it all, he tasted in deep measure, the comfort and compassion of the Heavenly Father. There we are! Suffering is inevitable but the comfort and love of the Father will bring us through.

Are we familiar with suffering? Specifically, suffering for the sake of Christ? It is hard to think of suffering as a way of life. It cuts right across our natural desire for a life of comfort and ease. Yet, the Lord's terms of discipleship are unmistakably clear. If anyone would come after Him, he must take up his cross and follow Him (Lk 9:23). The cross is synonymous with suffering. We may not be called upon as yet to suffer physical abuse for the sake of Christ; yet in so many ways, every true disciple should bear some scars of suffering. Do I?

‘No wound? No scar? Yet as the Master, shall the servant be
And pierced are the feet that follow Me; But thine are whole.
Can he have followed far, Who has no wound? No scar?’ -Amy Carmichael –

When it comes to service in the Lord’s work,
do I back off because it is inconvenient and troublesome?

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 10, TUESDAY

2 Co 1:12-22

Please Bear With Me

2 Co 1:20a

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 2 Cor 1:20

People, ourselves included, are not always lovable. Whatever our racial descent, sinful people like us can be really ugly. Sadly, even among the Lord's people, relationships often bring heartaches and deep disappointments. The apostle Paul had a lion's share of that.

The Christians in Corinth had caused him much sorrow, as their sinful nature reared its ugly head. In spite of all that, Paul maintained an attitude of 'holiness and sincerity' in his relationship with them (v 12). In that frame of mind, Paul could look beyond the struggles and failures of the Corinthians to that glorious day when he could actually be proud of them in the presence of the Lord Jesus (v 14).

How could Paul cherish such lofty hopes for a church so marred by disunity, immorality and immaturity? What could Paul possibly be proud of about them? Read verses 20-22 carefully. Paul's basis for such optimism was not dependent on the conduct of the Corinthians. Instead, his confidence rested solely on the fulfilment of all God's promises in Christ (v 20). Paul believed that God would make them stand firm in Christ. Hadn't God anointed them and set His seal of ownership upon them? Hadn't He given them the Spirit as a guarantee of the glories to come?

Thus it was not the people and their dismal performance, but Christ's perfect work on the cross and God's faithfulness that gave Paul such assurance. As we fumble and flounder in our relationships with one another in God's family, may we learn to look beyond the imperfect persons, to the hope securely ours in Christ! Let us relate in 'holiness and sincerity' too!

'Please bear with me, the best is yet to be.'

Is there someone in your church family who rubs everyone up the wrong way?

Pray for this person and reach out to him/her.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 11, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 1:23-2:17

Love Outside The Box

2 Co 2:15-16

For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. 2 Cor 2:4

Being involved in people's lives can be very troublesome. It is far easier to just live our own lives and steer clear of the problems of other people. Yet Christ's disciples cannot be islands, isolated and self-existing. The Lord's command is that if we are His, then we must love one another as He has loved us (Jn 13:34-35). To love, as the Lord loves, demands total involvement, sacrifice, and even death.

The apostle Paul obviously took the Lord's command to heart. In spite of all their faults and failures, Paul loved the Christians in Corinth dearly and paid a high price for that love. Just as his Master paid with His blood, Paul's love cost him 'great distress, anguish of heart, many tears and grief' (vs 4-5).

No wonder many shy away from such love for the brethren! A glib profession of love is much easier by far. Christ's kind of love makes us vulnerable, for when we truly love, we inevitably suffer anguish of heart and soul when the loved one does wrong. The one who does not love does not care. Whether others stand or fall is of no concern to him. In closing his heart to the well-being of other believers, he remains uninvolved and unaffected. Incidentally, he also fails miserably in the Lord's litmus test for those who say they love Him (Jn 21:15-17).

I wonder if our hearts are scarred with hurts and wounds like Paul's? If they are, then we can count ourselves among those who are truly blessed, for we follow in the footsteps of the great apostle and his (and our) greater Master.

Memorise John 13:34-35:

A new command I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

List three ways Christians can demonstrate Christ's kind of love towards one another.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 12, THURSDAY

2 Co 3:1-18

Must I Go Empty-handed ?

2 Co 3:3

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 2 Cor 3:3

Every one of us is entrusted with 168 hours each week. Whether it is the char kuey teow (noodles) hawker by the roadside or the CEO in his plush office, no one gets more hours and none gets less either. How we use the hours given to us, week by week, will yield results accordingly. For the apostle Paul, the time he spent preaching the Gospel resulted in the establishment of the church at Corinth. They were the fruits of his labor (v 3).

So often, our constant complaint is that we just do not have enough time. Yet Paul worked harder than most people. In 2 Thes 3:8, we read that Paul worked night and day so that he would not have to depend on others financially. His end purpose in life was clear and focused: he was a ‘minister of the new covenant’. He lived to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Do we? What kind of fruits are we laboring for? What do we invest our time in?

No doubt, the seeming mundane things of earthly life occupy much of our time. We need to sleep and work and discharge our social responsibilities. However, the crux of the matter is not the allocation of how many hours to each activity. Rather, it is our whole outlook towards life. What is the end purpose in all our undertakings? Like Paul, will what we invest our time and energies in, be fruits that last for eternity? Let us be careful what we live for, lest at the end of our earthly life, we leave to meet our Creator, empty-handed and with nothing that is of eternal value.

**‘Let me hold lightly things of this earth,
Transient treasures, what are they worth?’**

**What are some ‘robbers’ of time,
and how can we ensure that we are not robbed of precious time each day?**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 13, FRIDAY

2 Co 4:1-15

Pass It On

2 Co 4:5

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Cor 4:5

We know that awful, sinking feeling when we suddenly remember that we have forgotten to pass a message. It is always a grave responsibility to be entrusted with important messages. Solemn indeed is our responsibility, as Christians, entrusted with the message of the Gospel. It is a matter of life or death, of forgiveness or condemnation, of heaven or hell.

The apostle Paul understood clearly that no human resource was adequate for such a task. Therefore, he resolved:

- not to be discouraged (v 1).
- not to be deceptive (v 2).
- not to distort the word of God (v 2).

Instead, his dependence was on the 'all surpassing power that is from God, and not from us' (v 7). Spiritual work requires spiritual resources. It is God who causes the light to shine in people's hearts so that they can understand and believe. It is also divine strength that sustains when the going gets really tough, as Paul found out (vs 8-9).

Today, there is much emphasis on information technology and multimedia presentations. These can be excellent tools for communicating the Gospel. However, at best, technology and methods only communicate. They cannot bring about conviction of sin or conversion. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces people of sin and turns their hearts to repentance and belief (Jn 16:7-9).

By all means, employ new approaches and tap on the rich resources available today, but never neglect to pray. Let us not harbor sin in our lives so that we may be clean channels for God to use. Unless God works through us, the audience may be impressed, yet remain unconvinced and unconverted. All efforts would be in vain.

Pray for members of the family who have not heard the message of the Gospel and also for those who have heard but have not believed.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 14, SATURDAY

2 Co 4:16–5:10

Afraid Of Going Home?

2 Co 5:7

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 2 Cor 5:9

'Death' or any word related to it was considered taboo during my growing up years in a Chinese home. The very word evoked much fear of the unknown. In spite of scientific/technological advances today, death remains a feared eventuality.

In sharp contrast, the apostle Paul spoke positively of death. To him, death was the gateway to 'eternal glory' (v 17). It was merely a leaving behind of the physical body and going home to be with the Lord. So sure was Paul of the 'the eternal house in heaven' (v 1) that he categorically stated that death was to be preferred to life (vs 6-8). Try telling some people that!

Interestingly, Paul did not even use the word 'death'. Instead, he viewed death as 'the earthly tent being destroyed' (v 1), as 'being clothed in our heavenly dwelling' (v 2) and as being 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (v 8). What an absolutely triumphant description of an event so feared by the human race!

Which child would dread going home if he knew that elaborate preparations have been made to welcome him (1 Cor 2:9, 1 Pet 1:4), and that his loving Father waits to receive him? This is what awaits us! Unless, of course, the child is estranged from the Father and does not love Him. Perhaps he loves his earthly home better. How grieved the Father's heart must be when, in spite of all the love lavished upon them, His children dread going home to Him!

If we love the Father, why should we dread returning home to Him?

Pray for a right attitude towards death, especially if there are older members in the family.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 15, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 16, MONDAY

2 Co 5:11–6:13

Don't Drop The Baton!

2 Co 5:15

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Cor 5:20

A popular game in Sunday School and youth groups is one where the teacher or leader whispers a message in the ears of the first player. The child, in turn, whispers the same message to the person next to him. In hushed tones, the same message is passed on from child to child until it is finally relayed back to the teacher. It is most amusing to discover how the message gets distorted along the way!

However, when it comes to the message of reconciliation passed on to us, it is no laughing matter. That message must never be allowed to become distorted. From the apostles the baton was passed on to disciples like Barnabas, Silas and Timothy in the early churches (Acts 13, 16). Through the passage of time, godly men and women like Jim Elliot, Hudson Taylor, and Amy Carmichael went into all the world as bearers of the same message. Thanks be to God that the message of reconciliation has come to us with such Conviction and clarity!

It definitely was no easy route for the apostle Paul and the scores of missionaries after him who sought to deliver the message. If not for their unwavering conviction, obedience and sacrifice we would not have received God's grace nor even heard of such a salvation plan. Christ's love compelled them and in full conviction, they came, bearing the message of reconciliation. Christians in many countries today continue to be faithful messengers and are prepared to lay down their lives that others may hear the Gospel and be saved.

Today the baton has been passed on to us. Compelled by the love of Christ, let us pass on the baton so that the message of reconciliation will continue to be heard in our time and after us!

2 Tim 2:2: *All the things you have heard me say... entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.*

Christianity is caught rather than taught.

**Pray that your family may have a living faith that is evident in everyday life and
that this living faith may be passed on to the generations to come.**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 17, TUESDAY

2 Co 6:14-7:1

Guard Your Heart

2 Co 6:16b

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Cor 6:14

The older folk in our society have this ammunition ready whenever the clash of opinion with a younger person heats up. 'Look,' they say, 'we have eaten more salt than you have eaten rice.' That supposedly settles the issue at hand. Experience over naivete. Yet, many honest parents would readily admit that they have made many mistakes. They are not infallible. How wonderful, then, to know that God, our Heavenly Father, is all-wise, perfect and never errs. Therefore, when God gives a command, it is always for our ultimate good.

God commands that no child of His must ever marry one who does not belong to Christ. He graciously explains the reasons (vs 14-16). As Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:4-6), casting doubts in her mind about God's intent, today he uses the same ploy. He even comes as an angel of light, seemingly on God's side (11:14). How many promising young Christian men and women have fallen into his snare! His subtle lies:

'Does God really forbid a Christian from marrying a non-Christian?'

'But this relationship is so special! It will work out, I know.'

'Who knows? Perhaps God has brought him into my life so that he can come to know Christ through me.'

Tragically, like Eve, in seeking their own desires, many have been ensnared. No matter what the circumstances, God's command stands unchanged. It is a sin, a deliberate act of defiance and disobedience, to enter into marriage with one (no matter how upright and good) who does not belong to Christ. Obey the command for your own good. Defy it and you reap the consequences.

Read 1 Kings 11. Pray and resolve to obey God in this all-important matter.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 18, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 7:2-16

Speak That Word Of Encouragement

2 Co 7:10

Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 2 Cor 7:2

It can get pretty lonely at the top. Whether it is the corporate world, the academic fraternity or the local church, those in positions of greater responsibility can be very lonely. They may mingle well and get on famously with those they work with, but they carry certain burdens on their shoulders that they cannot share with others. In our local churches, pastoral workers constantly walk a lonely road. Much is shared in strict confidence and their only solace is at the Throne of Grace.

Church leaders often suffer a sense of loneliness. Sometimes, decisions have to be made that are not popular with the congregation at large. A contentious flock can cause leaders to feel rejected and isolated.

Catch the depths of emotion in today's Bible passage. The apostle Paul was often lonely. In his heart, he carried much love for the people he had worked with. He writes of his 'great confidence', his 'great pride', of being 'greatly encouraged' and of 'joy that knows no bounds' (v 4). He had had to correct the Corinthians and must have felt alienated from them for a while. Then Titus had come and brought the glad news that they had repented of their wrongdoing and had expressed such deep concern and longing for Paul. That was the shot in the arm the embattled soldier of the cross needed! What balm to his lonely heart!

Many in the front line in the Lord's work, specifically the leaders, pastors, evangelists and teachers, need reaffirmation of love and concern from those they minister to. Beneath the surface of strength and a reservoir of knowledge, there are tender human hearts that need words of affirmation and encouragement.

Front liners are the first to get hit by the enemy.

Don't stab them in the back as well!

Pray for your church leaders. Is there some way to encourage them?

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 19, THURSDAY

2 Co 8:1-15

Give Till It Hurts

2 Co 8:5

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 2 Cor 8:2

Do you find it hard to give? Not necessarily money, but possessions as well? It is easy enough to give away what we do not need and even easier to give what we do not want. However, it is pretty tough when it comes to parting with hard-earned money. Many of us probably feel that we could do with a little more ourselves, let alone give away some!

Yet, it is precisely this kind of giving for which the Lord Jesus commended the widow. She gave out of her poverty and parted with all that she had (Mk 12:44). Now that is a tough act to follow!

Giving is not an option. It is, in fact, the test of our sincerity of love for others (v 8). If we love, we cannot be indifferent to the needs of those we love. Like the Macedonian churches, we will count it a privilege to be able to share in the meeting of others' needs.

Giving is also not a privilege to be enjoyed only by the rich. The Macedonian churches gave generously out of their 'extreme poverty' (v 2).

Giving is not to be neglected. It is as important to the Christian character as the other hallmarks of faith and love (v 7).

If we give without feeling the pinch, then we are guilty of giving out of our excess. If we give and it costs us something, then we are on the right track. However, if we give to the extent of denying ourselves basic necessities, then we fall in line behind the widow to receive the Lord's commendation. Have we learnt to give like that? Incidentally, that is the only kind of giving the Lord commands!

It is not how much we give, but rather, how much we are keeping back for ourselves.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 20, FRIDAY

2 Co 8:16-24

Be On Your Toes

2 Co 8:21

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. 2 Cor 8:21

No Christian, however mature, is above temptation. As long as we are in our bodies of flesh, we can be tempted and can fall into sin. Hence, the need to be vigilant, especially in areas where we are more vulnerable to temptation. One such danger zone is the handling of money. Note the apostle's desire to be totally transparent and accountable in the administration of the money collected for the needy Christians (vs 20-21). He sought to be above reproach before God and man in this matter. We do well to heed some pointers from Paul in this area.

First, he made sure that it was a shared responsibility. No one person was to handle the money all by himself. That would leave him open to temptation. We, too, need to learn to discern potential dangers and seek to protect one another. There is always safety in numbers when it comes to handling money.

Second, note the selected representatives. Titus was Paul's own trusted partner and fellow worker (v 23). Another was a brother 'who is praised by all the churches for his service to the Gospel' (v 18). The third was a 'brother who has proved to us in many ways that he is zealous' (v 22). These were all men of caliber, who had served well and proven themselves to be 'an honor to Christ' (v 23). These men were entrusted with the task of carrying the money and administering it.

Aside from money, there are other areas of vulnerability. Temptation lurks as the enemy seeks our downfall (1 Pet 5:8). Let us keep a sharp lookout for ourselves and for others in God's family.

**Take time to talk with a trusted friend about personal weaknesses or your areas of vulnerability.
Pray together for strength and protection.**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 21, SATURDAY

2 Co 9:1-15

Stagnant Water or Wide Ripples?

2 Co 9:7

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Cor 9:11

A pebble cast into the lake will cause ripples in the water. The harder the impact, the wider the ripples. Likewise, our actions have an impact on others, creating favorable responses or otherwise. Most times, the ones affected are those closest to us. Sometimes the ripples caused are far-reaching, extending way beyond our little circle.

The Corinthian church was one such example. So eager were they in their desire to help the needy Christians that their enthusiasm caused a ripple that reached up north to the Macedonian church. The impact was that it 'stirred most of them to action' (v 2). That was a terrific effect! One generous church inspiring another to give!

Besides, Paul exhorts that when they give generously, they themselves will reap a harvest of blessings, for God is no man's debtor. When His people learn to hold their earthly wealth in open palms, sharing freely with others in need, God ensures that they would be 'made rich in every way' (v 11).

Still, the ripples did not stop there. Those who received the generous gift and had their needs met, would in turn overflow with thanksgiving to God. They would praise God for the obedience shown by His people in supplying their needs (v 12).

To cap it all, they would bear up the generous givers before the Throne of Grace, praying for them ardently (v 14). With such heartfelt prayer support, surely the Corinthian church would go on from strength to strength, doing what is right and creating further ripples along the way. What a glorious picture of the blessings and praises that can abound when we take simple steps of obedience!

Don't live in stagnant waters; create ripples that spread wide to God's glory.

Reflect and thank the Lord for those who have left a strong impact on your life.

If possible, send them a word of grateful acknowledgement.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 22, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 23, MONDAY

2 Co 10:1-18

Down, But Not Out!

2 Co 10:18

For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.
2 Cor 10:18

The ones we love most are also the ones who can hurt us most. It is acceptable, to an extent, when other people misunderstand us. However, our expectations of our loved ones are different. They, of all people, should know us so well that they would not think unkindly of us. How very hurtful when let down by the ones dearest to us! Already persecuted and hard-pressed from without, Paul had to contend with accusations and criticisms from within.

Some accused Paul of living 'by the standards of this world' (v 2). Others criticized his person as being 'unimpressive' and his speech as 'amounting to nothing' (v 10). Others added to the vendetta against Paul.

Just how does one cope with a volley of unkind criticism, and that from the very ones he loves? Paul stood his ground and rebutted each allegation. He reaffirmed the authority given to him by Christ Himself (v 8). He called as witness the effectiveness of his ministry by the power of God (vs 4-5). He reminded them that it was he who had first come to them with the Gospel (v 14, Acts 18:1-17).

Like the apostle, we, the Lord's servants, must be prepared for accusations and criticism from within the ranks of those we love and minister to. Much as it hurts, we need to stand our ground and be able to affirm the mandate given by the Lord Jesus. The fruit of our labor should also bear testimony that God's power is at work through us. As Paul reminded the Corinthians of his dealings with them in bringing the Gospel, we too, should be able to remind our strongest critics only of the good we have done towards them. How do you respond to criticism and accusations?

**Don't bite the hand that feeds you!
Pray that we may repay love with love, and not with hostility.**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 24, TUESDAY

2 Co 11:1-15

Who Will Mind The Babies?

2 Co 11:3

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 2 Cor 11:2

The birth of a baby sets off a flurry in any household! The baby needs to be constantly cleaned, fed and cared for. It is but the beginning of a long journey of tremendous responsibility. Similarly, when someone is born into God's family, it is also the beginning of a lifetime journey of following Christ. The babe in Christ needs to be nourished and nurtured by the word of God (1 Pet 2:2) and to be cared for in so many ways. Who is responsible to care for these babes in Christ?

The apostle Paul brought the Gospel to Corinth and he took it upon himself to watch over the flock there. The Corinthian Christians had faced many challenges as they sought to obey Christ. This time round, however, the false teachers had come among them and discredited Paul and his teachings. The Christians were swayed by what they heard and apparently, were quite ready to cast aside what they had learned from Paul.

The apostle came on strong, staking his claim on them and affirming his love for them. He had won them for Christ and they belonged to the Lord (v 2). Paul was not going to give them up and lose them to the false preachers without a fight! They were his 'babies' and they needed protection from the counterfeit apostles. Do we help to shoulder the responsibility of caring for younger believers? Today, as never before, there is much to distract the believers from a 'sincere and pure devotion to Christ'. Let us stake our claim and be jealous for Christ and watch over the babes among us (1 Thes 2:12).

Abandoned or neglected babies in God's family?

Unthinkable, when the Father's resources are in such abundance.

Pray for the babes in Christ in your church and especially for those who are caring for them.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 25, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 11:16-33

Are You For Real?

2 Co 11:30

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 2 Cor 11:30

Talk about transparency! The apostle Paul had to bare all, so to speak, to seek to bring the Corinthians back to their senses. Obviously, they had fallen prey to the deceit and lies of those who professed to be from Christ but in truth, were not. In the tough tussle to win them back, Paul had to 'impress' them with his own credentials. Against his better judgment, Paul revealed to them all that he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. He contended that if anyone was qualified to represent Christ, he certainly was.

Paul was not afraid to put his life under scrutiny. He had nothing to hide. Whatever the claims of the false teachers, Paul could match them one by one (vs 22-23). In fact, he had been so obedient to the cause of Christ that none could even come close to what he had suffered. His disclosures only served to stamp the mark of authenticity on his apostleship. Clearly, Paul was in a class of his own, a true servant of Christ.

Today, there are so many who bear the name of Christ but live in total disregard of Him. Many have strayed from the word of God and have subscribed to the world's value system. What sets us apart from the rest of the pack? What is our mark of authenticity as disciples of Christ? The Lord Jesus Himself warned that it is not enough to profess to have faith in Him or even to be found doing things in His name (Matt 7:21-23).The bottom line is a life of obedience to the Father's will. Paul had no problem with authenticity. Under scrutiny, his life stood the test. Would yours and mine?

It's not what we profess, but what we practice that matters.

**In your small group, take turns to share about your faith
and how you know you are the genuine stuff.**

**If you are concerned that someone is merely a professing Christian,
how would you go about sharing the truths of discipleship with this person?**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 26, THURSDAY

2 Co 12:1-10

The Best Time Is Now

2 Co 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Cor 12:9

When she was in her forties, a lady in church was approached to help out in the Sunday School. Her answer was an immediate 'No'. Her children were all in school and she felt she had too much on her hands. 'Later,' she said, 'when the children are grown.' Into her sixties, she was asked again if she could lend a helping hand. Her reply was again an immediate 'No'. She had grandchildren to visit now. 'Perhaps later on,' she mumbled.

How many of the Lord's people are deceived into thinking that someday, there will be the ideal circumstances in life to serve the Lord. Meanwhile, there are just too many things to attend to right now. How familiar the refrain. 'Not now, but later.' The present circumstances that seemingly are not conducive for service could be job pressures, aging parents, young children, examinations or any kind of demand or uncertainty. The irony is that as soon as the particular situation eases up, some other urgent matter will crop up.

We can go through life immersed in our inconvenient circumstances and wait in vain for the perfect circumstances before we embark on service for the Lord. Believe me, this is a delusion. The enemy will ensure that precious opportunities will pass us by.

Had the apostle Paul waited for the right circumstances, he would never have started out! The odds were always stacked high against him: 'weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties' (v 10). Instead, his sufficiency was grace from the Lord and His power made perfect in weaknesses (v 9).

Be in time!

Memorize Ephesians 5:16. Read Luke 9:59-62.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 27, FRIDAY

2 Co 12:11-21

Make It A Joyful Reunion!

2 Co 12:12

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 2 Cor 12:20

Reunions are such happy occasions. After a period of separation, how the heart looks forward to meeting up again with loved ones who have been dearly missed! Yet, when Paul was preparing for a reunion with the Corinthian church, he was full of apprehension and misgivings. The church had been so embroiled in problems and especially now with the so-called 'super apostles'. Paul sought to straighten the situation somewhat before he actually met them face-to-face. He was anxious lest 'when I come, I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be' (v 20).

How these words challenge our hearts as we anticipate Christ's return! Will the Lord find us as He wants us to be? Paul's list of fears about the Corinthians could well serve as our checklist too. If we want the Lord to find us as He wants us to be, we need to keep these sins out of our lives:

Quarrelling	Slander	Impurity	Jealousy	Gossip
Sexual sin	Arrogance	Debauchery	Factions	Disorder
Outbursts of anger				

Where the Lord is concerned, there is nothing about Him that will disappoint us. We will only marvel that He exceeds all our highest expectations. The only letdown would be not hearing His words of commendation because we have lived carelessly.

Paul tried to prepare the Corinthians for a glad reunion. Likewise, in preparation for His coming, the Lord Jesus has equipped us with the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26), the word of God (Jn 20:31) and the body of believers (Eph 4:16). Let us not be found wanting.

'We have waited for His advent, and have listened for His feet.'

- Sankey's 'Sacred Songs and Solos' Hymnbook-

Talk about the Rapture. Pray that each member of the family will be ready for this great event.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 28, SATURDAY

2 Co 13:1-14

Don't Misrepresent God

2 Co 13:11b

I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others. 2 Cor 13:2

A church member was horrified to discover that a child had been disciplined during Sunday School. Her grounds of protest: children should experience only love and kindness in the house of God, and not sternness and discipline. I beg to differ, and I believe many of you would too.

Paul's closing words to the Corinthian Christians were stern and threatening. Paul was not going to tolerate any misbehavior among them. They had better set their house in order before his visit! With the authority given to him by Christ, he was ready to take harsh measures, if necessary, to uphold the honor of that same sacred Name. He warned that he would not spare any who bore the name of Christ, yet persisted in sin and refused to repent. While he loved the Christians dearly, he could not ignore nor make light of their wrongdoing and sin. That would be in total conflict with the very character of the holy God he served (Rom 11:22).

Likewise, the church, being God's representative on earth, must reflect the attributes of God. While God is love. He is also righteous and holy. He loves and forgives but also judges with sternness and wrath (Heb 10:31). We, too, show love and compassion, but where there is defiance and wrongdoing, we need to mete out proper discipline. The child needs to know the consequence of disobedience. Failure to discipline him is to allow him to continue to do wrong.

If you are in a position of authority, whether as a Sunday School teacher or as an elder, do not take it lightly. Be careful to uphold order and holiness in the house of God and among His people (Heb 12:7-11).

**Pray that we may always have a reverent attitude
towards our loving and holy Heavenly Father.
'At the cross of Calvary, love and justice meet'.
How would you explain this to a non-Christian friend?**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 29, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 30, MONDAY

Overview Of Romans Chapters 1 to 8

The letter to the Romans is one of the most important letters written by the apostle Paul. It presents a helpful introduction to the rest of his teaching and addresses some of the great themes found in other parts of the Bible, such as sin, justification, faith, and election.

In this letter we also find Paul presenting an extended explanation of the Gospel that he was so eager to proclaim. As someone has said, Romans is the 'fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the Gospel in the New Testament.' In fact, it might be argued that the theme of this letter is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, Romans is far from being just an academic treatise. This Gospel is the good news of how people are liberated from their slavery to sin and death and given new lives by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Thus, it is not surprising that generations of Christians have acknowledged the importance of this letter. The great reformer, Martin Luther, was struggling with how his sinfulness made it impossible to face a holy God when he discovered in Romans, God's grace and forgiveness through faith in Christ. Luther writes that the Gospel message in Romans had become to him 'a gateway to heaven.'

Years later, Luther's own understanding of Romans would profoundly affect John Wesley. As he heard the preface of Luther's works on Romans read out, Wesley recounts, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine.'

God in His great mercy has continued to grant us access to this letter. Let us pray that He will work in our hearts and minds through His Spirit as we study this part of Romans.

We pray that we too may find, as Luther and Wesley before us had found, that the great message of the Gospel serves to assure us that the way to heaven has been decidedly opened for us through Christ.

AUG 30, MONDAY

Act 20:2-3a, Rom 1:1-17

The Power Of God

Rom 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 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." Rom 1:16-17

Sharing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus with others is a scary task for many of us for various reasons. One major reason is the fear of rejection or ridicule. This is understandable. After all, is the Gospel not considered irrelevant, foolish, confrontational or even repulsive by many non-Christians? Understandably, we might be ashamed to confess we believe, leave alone try to convince them to believe in it.

The apostle Paul had his fair share of ridicule and persecution. Yet he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he has experienced for himself that this very Gospel is God's powerful means to save people. For in the Gospel God's righteousness is revealed (v 17). In the Gospel we are shown how the righteous God will declare sinful (unrighteous) people righteous. Paul will explain how this happens later in his letter. However, in this passage, he gives us a hint that this acquittal of guilty sinners is made possible because of the Son of God (vs 2-4).

The word Gospel means Good News. It is the good news of how people are made right with God through His Son. We are told that this is available through faith in Him (and as we shall see in a later chapter, only through faith in Him). Salvation is for all who would hear this Gospel and trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. In the Gospel, Paul finds the solution to humanity's most dire need. This is great news that he could not be ashamed of.

In the milieu of religious tolerance, insistence on absolutes in religion is often frowned upon. This may cause us to shy away from proclaiming the Gospel. Christians must indeed be sensitive and loving to their neighbors. However, the highest expression of love must be a desire to see people reconciled to their God and Judge.

Let us not be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is God's power for their salvation.

P.R.A.Y

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AUG 31, TUESDAY

Rom 1:18–2:16

The Wrath Of God

Rom 1:20

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Rom 1:18

Yesterday we read how Paul was eager to proclaim the Gospel - the great news of how God would make unrighteous people righteous. However, instead of developing this, we find, quite unexpectedly, the apostle writing at length about how hopelessly lost in sin humanity is and about God's wrath against sin. Paul realizes that the Gospel would only be desired by those who understood how badly they need it. Thus, before continuing to tell them the great news about righteousness by faith, he will begin with the bad news of human sin and God's wrath.

Humanity is under a damning indictment. They think it is unnecessary to know God appropriately (v 28) and have exchanged the proper worship of God with the worship of man-made images (vs 23, 25). They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and consequently worship His creation rather than the Creator (v 25). This has led them to engage in unnatural relationships and indecent behavior (vs 24- 32). Ignorance of God is an inadmissible plea to this atrocity, for the invisible God has clearly revealed Himself to them in His creation (vs 19-20). Therefore, because of this inexcusable wickedness and godlessness, God's wrath is on humanity. God is not ambivalent towards evil, He abhors it. And His wrath is not capricious. It is the righteous judgment of a holy God on sinful people.

Sinners persist in their sin. So in punishment, God gave them up to their wicked ways. The consequence, as someone has written, is that they 'enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved.' The list in 1:21-32 may not be a politically correct list. But it is God's list of what is unnatural and godless. Paul has good news for us. But before getting there, he needs to make us understand the state that we are in so that the Gospel will truly be good news to our ears.

**Pray for a recognition and acknowledgement of what is evil in our lives
and for God's strength to confess and repent.**

P.R.A.Y

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"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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