

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

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

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

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

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

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

SSMC's VISION

Transforming Lives, Expanding His Kingdom

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

Just a quick recap on BWJ 2021:

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

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

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

Blessed Continuing BWJing 2021

Ps Swee Ming

20th July 2021

Acknowledgements:

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GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sometimes it’s also helpful to ask :

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

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

GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

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

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

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

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

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

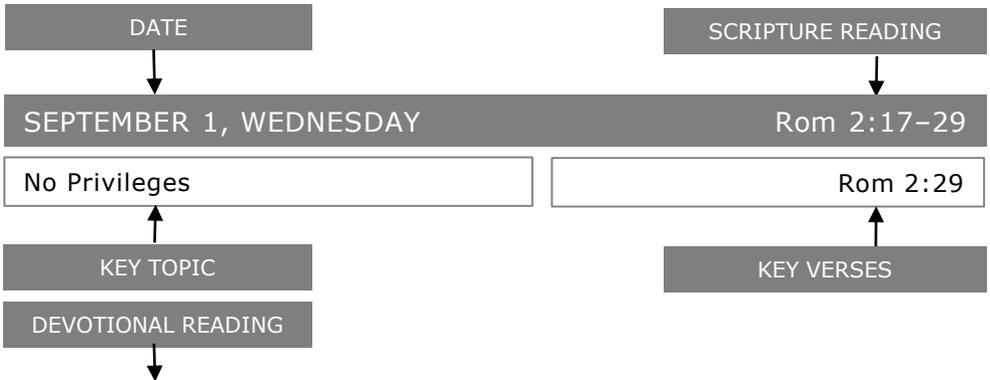
"To the degree & to the extent that I yield and submit to the Holy Spirit in my life, God's Kingdom will come more and more into my life, my family, my Discipleship Group, my work, my Church & my community."

Closing Thanksgiving Prayer

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

GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

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



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

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

REFLECTIVE STATEMENTS & QUESTION(S)

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

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

JOURNAL YOUR REFLECTIONS, IMPRESSIONS, THOUGHTS, LESSONS HERE.

ALSO PRAYER NEEDS FOR YOURSELF & OTHERS

SOURCE
REFERENCE

SEP 1, WEDNESDAY Rom 2:17-29

No Privileges

Rom 2:29

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

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

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

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

SEP 2, THURSDAY

Rom 3:1-31

No Escape For Anyone

Rom 3:23

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 3, FRIDAY Rom 4:1-25

Justification By Faith Alone

Rom 4:7-8

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 4, SATURDAY Rom 5:1-11

The Love of God

Rom 5:8

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 5, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 6, MONDAY

Rom 5:12-21

The Life that Brought Death & the Death that Brought Life

Rom 5:17b

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 7, TUESDAY Rom 6:1-23

To Sin Or Not To Sin

Rom 6:23

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 8, WEDNESDAY Rom 7:1-25

Freedom From The Law

Rom 7:24-25a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview of Romans 8:18–16:27

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

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

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

Three Groans

Rom 8:28

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 11, SATURDAY

Rom 9:1–29

In God's Mercy There Is Always Hope

Rom 9:25

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 12, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 13, MONDAY

Rom 9:30-10:21

Salvation By Faith is Simple and for All

Rom 10:9

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 14, TUESDAY

Rom 11:1-24

A Chain Of Blessing Starting & Ending with Israel

Rom 11:20-21

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 15, WEDNESDAY

Rom 11:25-12:8

Offering Yourself As A Living Sacrifice

Rom 12:1-2

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 16, THURSDAY

Rom 12:9-13:7

Love Your Neighbors & Even Evildoers

Rom 12:18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 17, FRIDAY

Rom 13:8-14:12

Live In Love & Light

Rom 14:8

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 18, SATURDAY

Rom 14:13-15:13

Three Warnings To The Stronger Christian

Rom 14:17

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 19, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

SEP 20, MONDAY

Rom 15:14-16:27

Paul's Ministry

Rom 16:25-27

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

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

Paul's Farewell journey (vs 1-5)

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

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

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

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

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Unwavering Steadfastness

Act 21:13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 23, THURSDAY

Act 21:40-22:29

Paul's Testimony

Act 22:14-15

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

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

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

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

For Paul it looked like the end of the road, but God had bigger plans for him. God's missionary will get to Rome under protective custody, all expenses paid for by the Romans. God knows the end from the beginning. We can trust Him with everything in between. He who abandons himself to God will never be abandoned by God.

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 24, FRIDAY

Act 22:30-23:35

God Was There

Act 23:11

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 25, SATURDAY

Act 24:1-27

Testify Truthfully, Judge Justly

Act 24:16

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts. Zechariah 8:1 6

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 26, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OVERVIEW OF PHILIPPIANS 1 - 4

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

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

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

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

SEP 27, MONDAY Phi 1:1-30

Let Love Abound

Phi 1:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SEP 28, TUESDAY

Phil 2:1–30

Imitate Christ's Humility

Phil 2:3–4

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

SEP 29, WEDNESDAY Phi 3:1-4:1

In Christ Alone

Phi 3:10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emulate Me

Phi 4:13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 1, FRIDAY Act 25:1-27

God Overrules Man's Rule

Act 25:11b

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 2, SATURDAY Act 26:1-32

Walk Your Talk

Act 26:16-18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 3, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 4, MONDAY

Act 27:1-26

Timely Comfort

Act 27:22-25

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

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

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

Difficult circumstances do not alter God’s goodness. God does not exempt us from trials. He sees us through them. God can be trusted in the typhoon as well as in the calm. Nothing is too big for God to accomplish, nothing too small for Him to notice. You will never know that God is all you need until God is all you've got. Those who trust God can walk in courage in spite of their fears. Paul understood this after he had received God’s timely assurance (vs 23-24). He gently rebuked the centurion for ignoring his advice (v 21). He boldly declared God's promise of safety for all in the ship (v 22). He confidently proclaimed his faith in God and His promises (v 25).

When your world is falling apart, trust Jesus to hold it together. A trusting heart is the answer for a worried mind. No one is more secure than those who are in God’s hands.

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

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 5, TUESDAY

Act 27:27–28:10

Glorifying Life

Act 27:34–36

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 6, WEDNESDAY

Act 28:11-31

Finishing Faithfully

Act 28:31

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

Introduction to Philemon

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 7, THURSDAY

Phm 1:1-25

Love That Forgives

Phm 1:4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of Colossians

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 8, FRIDAY Col 1:1-23

Created by Him for Him

Col 1:10-12

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 9, SATURDAY Col 1:24-2:23

Don't Exchange Truth for Deception

Col 2:6-7

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

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

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

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

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

***We already have victory in Christ (v 15).
Everything else is less so let's not exchange our position in Christ for anything else.***

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

OCT 10, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 11, MONDAY Col 3:1-4:1

Lifestyle Christians

Col 3:1-2

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

When Paul tells us to set our hearts and minds on things above, he does not mean for us to become escapists, to be 'so heavenly minded' that we are of 'o earthly use'. He means the opposite. He urges us to have the right kind of relationship with Christ so that we can live a full and meaningful life on earth.

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 12, TUESDAY Col 4:2-18

Prayer and Witness

Col 4:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview Of Ephesians 1-6

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

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

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

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

In summary, Ephesians deals with three basic issues —

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

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

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

OCT 13, WEDNESDAY Eph 1:1-23

No More Aliens

Eph 1:3

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

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

These are:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 14, THURSDAY

Eph 2:1-22

Salvation - Life on Higher Ground

Eph 2:8-10

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 15, FRIDAY

Eph 3:1-4:16

Mystery Revealed

Eph 3:20

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

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

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

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

a) The mystery is about Christ (v 4)

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 16, SATURDAY

Eph 4:17-5:20

Walk away From Your Old Self

Eph 4:26-27

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

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

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

A Christlike person:

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

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

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

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

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

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

***How we think and act determines our character.
Pray that we will always be doers of God’s will.***

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 17, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

OCT 18, MONDAY

Eph 5:21–6:24

Happy Homes Celebrate Marriage

Eph 6:14–18

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview Of 1 Timothy

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

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

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

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

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

OCT 19, TUESDAY

1 Ti 1:1-20

Stop People from Teaching False Doctrine

1 Ti 1:15

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

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

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

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

There are two tests for any teaching. They are:

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

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

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

OCT 20, WEDNESDAY 1 Ti 2:1-3:13

Please God in Worship

1 Ti 2:5

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. 1 Tim 2:1

Churches practice different worship styles at their Sunday services. Some emphasize good stirring music and songs to help their members engage emotionally with God. Others may prefer a quiet meditative liturgical approach. God is a God of variety and He welcomes His children to worship Him in different ways.

Worship is all about Jesus, not about us. We seek to please Him, our Savior who wants all men to know Him and be saved. Our worship should draw others to Him, not turn them away. We must be reverent in worship and only allow that which points people to Christ and not distract them from Him.

There are certain central elements that should be present in our church worship:

- **Prayer**
We should pray and give thanks for everyone especially the ruling authorities so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This will facilitate the sharing of the Gospel so that all men can come to a saving knowledge of Christ. We should lift up our holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.
- **Modest Attire**
We should dress decently and modestly. The church should not be a place for fashion parades. Women, especially, are not to be influenced by fashion fads and are not to dress to draw attention to themselves.
- **Order**
There should be order in worship. There is to be no chit-chatting when God’s word is being taught in church.

May we all honor the Lord each time we gather in His Name.

***Is Christ pleased with the way we worship Him in our churches?
Do my dressing and my conduct in church glorify God?***

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

OCT 21, THURSDAY

1 Ti 3:14-4:16

Godliness is Not Rules and Regulations

1 Ti 4:12

*For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.
1 Tim 4:4*

Many non-believers do not want to become Christians because they perceive Christianity as a hindrance to their progress and enjoyment of life. They are put off by the dreaded long list of dos and don'ts they think every Christian must follow in his daily life. They want to be free to do what they like instead of having to submit to rules and regulations. But a godly life is not a life governed by a man-made list.

Godliness in Christ is a mystery because it is based on believing in the finished work of Christ when He came and died for us. It is not based on our own good works lest anyone should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

In the latter times, people will be deceived by demons working through false teachers. They will love self above God. They will use others to get what they want. Such predators, often disguised as Bible teachers, will even be found in churches and Christian circles. They will demand that their followers do not marry or must abstain from certain foods.

Everything God has created is good and to be enjoyed with thanksgiving. The prohibitions only apply to that which harms us. We are thus free to enjoy life to its fullest in Christ. Let us give thanks to the Lord, enjoy His good gifts and live the abundant life promised to us in Christ (Jn 10:10).

Pray that we will live such joyful abundant lives that non-believers will be attracted to Christ.

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 22, FRIDAY

1 Ti 5:1-6:2

The Right Way to Care for Others

1 Ti 5:17

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tim 5:8

A common fear among many Asian parents is that once their children become Christians, they would stop being filial to them and not care for them in their old age. It is like losing a son or daughter to the church. This fear arises out of the many bad examples they have seen or heard from their friends who have 'lost' their children. However, the truth is that becoming a Christian should make you a better son or daughter than before your conversion.

There is no room for individualism in God's family. Those who live selfishly slander the Name of God. We are admonished to care for others, especially our own relatives (v 8). This is completely in tune with our traditional Asian values of looking after our extended family members and the needy in our midst.

Loving others practically does not mean just giving handouts indiscriminately because this will foster indolence, causing more damage in the long run. We help those who are really in need by providing for them; we encourage the rest to work to support not only themselves but others as well. This will ensure that relationships run smoothly, family members do not harbor resentment against the church and the Name of Christ is upheld. Purity and respect for each other in relationships are very important to this end.

Pray that we will treat one another, our relatives and friends, with love and respect so that Christ's Name is honored.

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 23, SATURDAY

1 Ti 6:3-21

The Money Trap

1 Ti 6:6

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Tim 6:10

Money, money, money! Asian society, in particular, envies and looks up to the rich. While its usefulness cannot be denied, there is a dark side to money. If wrongly handled, it can lead us away from God and bring much grief into our lives. We are warned against using religion for financial gain which is all too common in this money-mad world. Those who do so twist God's truth into false doctrines that promote controversies and strife while enriching themselves. Beware of these conceited preachers who are only after your money to finance their luxurious lifestyles.

The antidote to greed is godliness with contentment. Our basic needs can be easily met but if we are not content with that and want more, we open ourselves to temptation. Many have backslidden and pierced themselves with multiple griefs because of their eagerness to accumulate more money. We cannot take any of it with us when we die, so money should be used to bless others instead of being hoarded.

We can make money our master or our servant. If money is our master, then God will be displaced from His throne in our lives and we will suffer the consequences of our foolish choice. We need to be delivered from greed in our lives before we can deal openly and generously with others to promote peace instead of strife.

Pray that we will not be greedy but be grateful for all that God has given to us.

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 24, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Titus 1 - 3

We know very little about Titus. Just that he was a Greek by birth and that he had been with Paul as early as the time when Barnabas went to Tarsus to bring Paul back to Antioch (Gal 2:1). Over time, Titus earned Paul's trust and represented him in the matter of the collection for the Christians in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:16-24).

Paul also called on Titus to deliver his 'corrective' letter to the Corinthians. Hence, it was no surprise that Paul left him in Crete to deal with the false teachers there and to strengthen, correct and stabilize the churches.

Crete is an island in the Mediterranean, situated south of Greece and Asia Minor on a north-south line bisecting the Aegean Sea. The Cretans had a nasty reputation attributed to them by a quote from the poet Epimenides (1:12). Paul, however, applies the quote not to all Cretans but specifically to the false teachers present in the Cretan church.

Paul left clear instructions about the careful selection and appointment of church leaders (1:5-9), about the damaging effects of false teaching (1:10-16), and especially about working out Christian teaching and ethics in the church (1:5-6), in the home (2:1-15) and in the world (3:1-11).

I have found John Stott's commentary in the BST series and Philip Towner's commentary in the IVP NT Commentary series, particularly helpful.

OCT 25, MONDAY

Tit 1:1-2:15

Our Public and Private Personae

Tit 2:11-14

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. Titus 1:5

If we are honest, we will admit that basic character flaws, besetting sins and addictions are still very much part and parcel of our lives. Fears and anxieties continue to trouble us. Complete faith and trust in God elude us. Our private personae very often differ from our public personae. Yet the elders whom Titus was to appoint in Crete had to be blameless! This point is repeatedly stressed (6a, 7a). Who can thus, qualify?

However, the Greek word used, anenkletos does not mean flawless or faultless. Rather it means 'without blame', or 'unaccused'. That is, elders must be people of 'unquestioned integrity'. Their lives are to be such that they leave no reason for people to accuse them of any wrongdoings. In particular, elders need to be blameless in their marriage and family life. This is one area where their private life at home must match public expectations. If elders cannot manage their families, how can they manage God's family? Further, they are to be blameless in their character and conduct. Again, private and public personae must match. Finally, in view of the need to counter false teachers, elders must be blameless in their doctrinal beliefs. They must have the gift of teaching to encourage believers and to refute false teaching. Calvin clearly understood this dual role of pastors. He wrote: 'A pastor needs two voices, one for gathering the sheep and the other for driving away wolves and thieves.'

In contrast, the false teachers were rebellious people. Their character matched the poet Epimenides's description of Cretans as liars, evil brutes and lazy gluttons. Most destructive, however, was their false teachings which were strongly denounced.

The glory, honor and holiness of God and the purity of the church in terms of character and teaching cannot be compromised. Under the constant threat of false teachers and their teaching, Paul's strategy was to increase the number of true teachers. We will know them by their character and true teaching, which are in line with apostolic doctrine.

***Sound teaching and a blameless life are inseparable.
Let us resolve to put godly, blameless elders in our churches!***

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 26, TUESDAY

Tit 3:1-15

Christians in the World

Tit 3:5

Remind the people ... Titus 3:1

Remind. This is one of Paul's favorite methods of encouragement. In Philippians 3:1 we read, 'It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.' Most of the time we already know what we ought to do. What we need are constant reminders.

The Cretans had been under Roman rule since 67 BC and had continuously tried to throw off the Roman yoke. It was not easy for them to submit and to pray for their rulers and authorities. Many Asian Christians find it equally difficult to submit to their totalitarian and unjust governments. A radical change in mindset and attitude is required. True repentance is costly.

However, as Christians, we do not give the state unconditional allegiance. If our duty to God clashes with our duty to the state, then our loyalty to God must come first. Nonetheless, the state's authority has been delegated by God (Rom 13) and it is thus, the Christians' duty to submit to the state.

Paul further addressed the way Christians ought to relate to people in society at large. We are not to slander and not to be quarrelsome. We are to be considerate and show true humility.

The logic behind how we should conduct ourselves in the world is clear. As John Stott points out in his commentary: 'Remind them to be conscientious and considerate citizens, because (Greek: gar) we were ourselves once anti-social, but He (God) saved and changed us.' Our experience of God's salvation, Paul reminded Titus, gave us the incentive and encouragement to commend others to be socially involved as well. This account of salvation is recounted in verses 4-7.

Finally, Paul concludes the letter with a list of things for Titus to do. Titus was to avoid profitless controversies and pointless theological arguments. He was to discipline difficult divisive people and if necessary, after giving appropriate warnings, to excommunicate them. Christians in general should be dedicated to good works. In the final analysis, unlike the Cretans depicted by Epimenides, the Cretan Christians are urged to live productive lives.

Are we leading productive lives for God? What changes do we need to make?

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview Of 2 Timothy 1 - 4

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was again a prisoner in Rome, in chains for preaching the Gospel (2:9). A number of his co-workers had deserted him in fear and he knew his martyrdom was near.

Paul wrote his last letter to his dear son in the faith and missionary partner, Timothy, who was pastoring the church in Ephesus. Often considered his last will and testament, 2 Timothy is more personal than 1 Timothy as Paul pours out what is closest to his heart to his friend. He longed to see Timothy one last time. 'Come', he says, 'before winter. And please bring my cloak and my books' (4:13). A prisoner he might have been but Paul meant to keep learning, to keep going till the very end!

The greater part of this letter concerns Paul's charge to Timothy. Paul had finished the race and was ready to pass on the baton to Timothy. His protege, however, was of a timid nature, wary of facing challenges. Paul saw beyond that to his genuine faith, trustworthiness and his untapped potential. Though anxious about placing the heavy responsibility of carrying on his work on young Timothy's shoulders, Paul knew he had no one like him (Phil 2:20).

So, Paul encouraged Timothy to remain faithful and urged him to guard and preach the Gospel in the face of opposition from false teachers. He did not leave Timothy a lot of methods and techniques to follow but a role model - that of himself. Paul had fought the good fight and won.

Like Timothy, let us look to Paul's example, take to heart his teaching, his good counsel and his words of encouragement as we continue in our Christian race.

OCT 27, WEDNESDAY 2 Ti 1:1-18

Be Not Ashamed

2 Ti 1:12

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 2 Tim 1:8

According to sources that monitor the persecution of Christians worldwide, more Christians were martyred for their faith in the last century than in all the centuries combined. In some Asian countries, persecution also takes the form of forced conversion to another religion.

All who love the Lord will face persecution in one form or another. How we respond is what matters. Paul’s message is clear - do not be ashamed, rather be prepared to suffer (v 8). Have we sometimes been ashamed of the simple Gospel and the crucified Christ? Have we equated health, wealth and success with God’s favor, and suffering with shame?

Timothy, Paul’s timid young protege, must have felt anxious and afraid when Paul was imprisoned. Was the Gospel worth the suffering? Paul’s reply was an unashamed ‘Yes!’ He was a prisoner of the Lord, not Caesar (v 8). He was on death row for preaching a Gospel that gave LIFE (vs 9-10) and above all, he knew that his God was absolutely trustworthy (v 12). Are we like Paul, courageous in our convictions? Or are we like Timothy, in need of the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome our fears and testify boldly to the Gospel?

Onesiphorus is a fine example of one who fearlessly and unashamedly stood by a believer in prison and ministered to him. May we be like him.

Pray for persecuted Christians, especially in North Korea, Laos, China, Indonesia and Pakistan, that God will strengthen and encourage them as they stand firm in their faith. Pray also for ourselves that we will not be ashamed to confess Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior when persecution comes.

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

OCT 28, THURSDAY

2 Ti 2:1-3:9

Be Approved by God

2 Ti 2:2

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Ti 2:15

Asians have become extremely brand conscious. For the rich and famous, nothing less than a Versace, Jimmy Choo, Luis Vuitton and the like will do, though for some of us Malaysians, the 'Superbrands' seal will do just as well! But what does it mean to have God's seal of approval?

Paul wanted God's seal of approval upon Timothy. He had to stand out as the approved workman amidst the false, by the truth he taught (vs 8-13) and the way he lived (vs 3-6, 20-24). Truth and Character - they have to go together because good people who teach bad doctrine endanger the church, and without character, even great exponents of the truth lack credibility.

In Ephesus, false teachers, probably inspired by the Gnostics (who considered the body as evil), claimed there was no future bodily resurrection of the dead. Their ungodly argumentative spirit further divided the church. Paul's plea to Timothy is twofold: handle God's truth with care and correct your opponents in love.

God's approved workman has a heart that is open and eager to find out what the Scriptures actually say (Acts 17:11). We should never twist God's word to support our views or our lifestyle. Nor should we squabble with those in error but gently instruct them, for the goal is to bring them to repentance and truth (v 25). Clearly, God's approval rests on the godly workman who handles God's word correctly and imparts the truth with grace.

How successful have we been in speaking the truth in love to someone holding on to a false teaching?

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 29, FRIDAY

2 Ti 3:10-4:8

Be a Role Model

2 Ti 4:7-8

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. 2 Ti 4:7

When Brother Yun, the Heavenly Man, came to Malaysia, thousands flocked to see the man whose faith in Christ had triumphed in the midst of cruel persecution. I believe the people who overflowed Brother Yun's meetings were actually longing to see a role model, a Christian who had walked the talk, who had done heroic things in an age where heroes are found mainly in comic books.

Paul was a hero, a role model who could boldly say, 'Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ' (1 Cor 11:1). In his final charge to Timothy, we see why we should emulate him:

- He accepted persecution and suffering as part of the godly Christian life (vs 10-11).
- He recognized all Scripture as the God breathed, life-changing word of God (vs 16-17).
- He believed in proclaiming the Gospel with great urgency, in view of Jesus returning as Judge, and the growing fascination in myths, like The Da Vinci Code (vs 1-4).

If we were to write our own epitaphs, what would we say? For Paul, the most fitting epitaph would certainly be his own words: I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. The persecutor turned preacher had fulfilled the mission that began on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). Now, as Paul looks forward to his heavenly reward, he throws us a challenge to follow his example (v 8b).

Encourage the young people in your church to follow the example of great heroes of the faith, rather than movie stars and singing idols!

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 30, SATURDAY

2 Ti 4:9-22

Be a Real Winner

2 Ti 4:18

The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 2 Tim 4:18

Reality TV shows are here to stay, judging from the number of people who passionately follow every episode. Obviously, people enjoy watching ordinary people in extraordinary situations. It was reported that Malaysia’s own reality show *Explorace* had more than 3.4 million viewers watching the teams' every move as they raced to complete their tasks.

The real reality race, however, is the one that we are in - the race that we are exhorted to run with perseverance, our eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb 12:1-3).

Paul had finished the race. But his finishing line was in prison. If we go by the standards of this world, Paul was a loser. Here he was, in a dark dungeon, lonely, cold, deserted and betrayed - a prisoner facing certain death. But didn't Paul once claim, 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor 12:10)? And now he proves it by putting his whole confidence in God and drawing upon His strength to see him through his hour of trial. In God's eyes Paul was a winner (v 8)!

The reality is that we are running an endurance race, strewn with obstacles. The temptation to quit and take it easy, like Demas, is great (v 10). Thankfully, wrong turns along the way do not disqualify us if we turn around as Mark did (v 11; Acts 15:38). And it is not the many tasks we accomplish nor the circumstances in which our life ends that get us into the heavenly kingdom. It is our steadfast faith in the Lord.

How are you faring in the real race of life?

P.R.A.Y

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

OCT 31, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 Peter 1-5

The recipients of this letter of Peter were mainly Gentile believers scattered throughout Asia Minor. They were suffering persecution. Since many of them were new believers, Peter was especially concerned that they conducted themselves in a manner glorifying to God in the face of anti-Christian hostility. He called them to personal holiness, to have mutual love for one another, to grow in their salvation, to practice humility in the church and to resist persecution.

Peter's exhortation to all believers to be good testimonies for Christ in a non-Christian society touches on matters of good deeds, good citizenship, submission and relationships. These are especially relevant for Asian Christians who are mostly a minority in largely non-Christian societies. He appealed to the elders to be good and willing shepherds of God's flock (5:1-4).

Peter was aware of the fact that although they were innocent they were going through suffering. This had caused believers to question their faith. He urged them to follow the example of Christ and 'continue to do good' (4:19). In closing, he encouraged them by assuring them that their suffering would end and the God of grace would restore, strengthen and call each believer into eternal glory in Christ. May this assurance be ours too as we hear God speak through Peter.

NOV 1, MONDAY 1 Pe 1:1-2:3

Living Hope

1 Pe 1:23

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3b

The Bidayuhs of Sarawak tell the story of a child named Matiarui who waits in vain for his grandmother to come home from a fishing trip. Sadly, she never does and is found dead in the river. Until he died, he continued to hope that his grandmother would come back to life and return to him.

For the Christian, hope is the glorious anticipation of spending eternity with God in heaven. It is based on the fact that Jesus our Saviour is risen from the dead (v 3). Life after death is a certainty for us. This is made possible through Jesus Christ. This is unlike Matiarui’s hope that was based merely on his deep longing for his grandmother's return.

Hope that is based on the certainty of fulfilment is faith. Faith purified by trials is refined faith. It results in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed (v 7). Believing and loving the Lord without seeing Him physically is the witness of this faith by the indwelling Holy Spirit (v 8). It is this faith that leads to the salvation of the soul.

This redemptive plan and the manner in which it was to be fulfilled were eagerly awaited by the ancient prophets. Generations came and went and prophet after prophet prophesied, but that hope lived on because of the certainty of its fulfilment. The prophets ensured with greatest care that the search for this fulfilment lived on (v 10). It was not only the prophets but also the angels in heaven who longed to have a glimpse at what was planned for us through Jesus. There is no greater hope than the hope we have in Jesus.

When trials and difficulties are over and my days have come to an end, let my hope in You, that Living Hope, draw me ever closer to You, my Saviour and my Friend.

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

NOV 2, TUESDAY

1 Pe 2:4-3:7

From Rag to Riches

1 Pe 2:9

Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God: once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10

In April 1983, I attended an Irau (Orang Ulu word for Easter Convention) in a longhouse (Long Keseh) along the Baram river, in Sarawak. It was a most memorable occasion. I met with Christians from the various ethnic groups of the Orang Ulu tribe. The Penans (a nomadic tribe), walked for two days to Long Keseh. The evening worship service was an experience of the awesomeness of God's power and love. The same Bible passage we read today was expounded to them.

In the mid 1920's, missionaries from Australia came to witness to the tribal peoples of Sarawak. The missionaries found them living in the upper reaches of the Lawas-Trusan River, Baram River and the Rejang River in utter poverty, and stricken with diseases. They were in bondage to superstition and were drunk from their own locally brewed rice wine.

The mighty work of God changed all that. The verses in today's Bible passage gave them hope, filling them with the joy of being forgiven. God's word set them free from many fearful bondages. They discovered the power and victory available to them in Jesus' Name. Today, their church, the Evangelical Church of Borneo, is one of the fastest growing and also one of the largest churches in Malaysia.

More than anything else, it is the message of the Gospel that has the power to transform the lives of people. This transforming power has changed the lives of not just many individuals but also people groups. The many tribes in Sarawak who turned to Christ bear testimony to the power of God's word. Their spiritual transformation has in turn transformed them academically, socially, politically and materially. We now see people from these native tribes of Sarawak in prominent positions in politics, academia, business and the corporate sector, including Malaysian Airlines.

Those who trust in Him 'will never be put to shame' (v 6). More than this, they have the privilege of being 'a chosen people', called out of darkness into His wonderful light to worship Him (v 9).

The transforming work of the word of God is an ongoing work. May we experience this transformation daily so that we may decrease and He may increase in our lives.

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

NOV 3, WEDNESDAY

1 Pe 3:8-4:11

Remember Gethsemane

1 Pe 3:15

It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:17

As I read this passage, I recall the many prayer letters that seek urgent prayer for many Christians facing persecution in different countries. In many Asian homes where family ties and religious commitment are very important, becoming a Christian is tantamount to rebellion. Besides this, there are many countries that legislate anti-conversion laws. Those who become Christians pay a heavy price for seeking the truth. But these believers know that no amount of unjust treatment they receive will ever match what Jesus had to endure at Gethsemane (vs 17- 18).

As a young Christian in a secondary school more than thirty years ago. I was mocked for bringing my Bible to school. I was alienated and friends whom I knew as friends distanced themselves from me. I suffered rejection and loneliness. This was early training on Christian discipline. I learned to stand up for what was right and tried to be a good example for Christ by helping a number of very poor students. The ISCF (Inter-School Christian Fellowship) became a good training for Christian living and a sanctuary for me and other students like me. As a group we learned to pray for the big bullies of the school.

Today, as an adult involved in politics, I have found it to be a magnified version of the power play I experienced in my secondary school years. We are subject to manipulation, public slandering, unjust comments, 'surat layan' (anonymous letters) by the opposition.

My four principles have remained the same: *stand for what is right, help the poor, be an example of good character and pray for my enemies.*

Lord, lest I forget Gethsemane when I am subject to unjust treatment, draw my eyes away from myself. Help me focus on what You, the sinless One, had to endure at the hands of evil men.

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

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13

Nothing affects us as seriously as suffering. The effect of it can be physical pain, mental agony, emotional hurt or stress. Becoming a Christian does not mean we are safe from suffering. In fact, this passage suggests that we should expect it merely because we are Christians (v 19). Peter’s readers were suffering because they were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. Since Jesus Himself was persecuted, Peter urged them to count it a privilege to be chosen to walk the same path of suffering (v 16). He also added that there was nothing to be gained by suffering for wrong (v 15).

In Asian culture, suffering is seen as a punishment from an external superior force. Amongst the Bidayuh tribes of Sarawak, for example, in the days when medical and health services were not easily available, any form of illness would be traced to some evil spirit. The witch doctor would be called in to appease the evil spirit and thus remove the ‘curse’ believed to be causing the suffering. A similar procedure would be used to invoke evil spirits to cause suffering upon an enemy or rival.

Eph 6:12 tells us that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. We cannot discount the role evil spirits play where suffering is concerned. They darken the minds and blind those who persecute Christians. While those who have reviled us will be judged (vs 17-18), we can look forward to a joyful reunion with the Lord when we behold His glory (v 13).

***Pray for those who persecute Christians in different parts of the world.
Ask the Lord to intervene in their lives so that they turn away from living
in bondage to Satan and accept Him as their Lord and Saviour.***

Pray also for those who are persecuted that the Lord will grant them strength to endure.

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

Overview of Jude

The writer of this letter, Jude, is believed to have been the brother of Jesus and James. It is a very short letter. Bible scholars believe that Jude was planning to write a longer one 'about the salvation we share' (v 3) when he received news of false teaching corrupting the faith of believers (v 4).

He thus quickly penned this short letter to them to warn them about these teachers. Using Old Testament references (vs 5-7, 11), he tells his readers that these teachers are marked out for destruction. He also quotes from two Jewish writings, 'Assumption of Moses' (v 9) and the 'Book of Enoch' (vs 14-15), to strengthen his case against these false teachers.

The false teaching had to do with the grace of God (v 4). The false teachers were trying to convince believers that being saved by grace gave them the license to sin since their sins would not be held against them. Jude argues strongly against this teaching, reminding his readers about the judgement handed down to those who dared to take God's grace lightly.

Jude urges them to 'build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit' (v 20). This is good advice for us today, for at every turn, books/ movies are being released that challenge the authenticity of Scripture.

NOV 5, FRIDAY

Jud 1:1-25

Don't Test God

Jud 1:20-21

I want to remind you that the Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. Jude 1:5

God is not Santa Claus. Santa Claus is a figment of someone’s imagination so whether you are 'naughty or nice' it does not matter. God, on the other hand, is real. He is holy and righteous. If you think you can sin as much as you like and still get away with it, you are mistaken. Jude conveys this message to his readers.

False teachers had 'secretly slipped in' (v 4a) to the church while pretending to be believers. They joined in all their activities, including their 'love feasts' (v 12) that were held regularly with the Lord's Supper in the early church. At the same time, they were poisoning the church by telling them that being saved by grace gave them the license to sin since their sins would not be held against them (v 4b). Jude shows this teaching to be false by quoting incidents from Old Testament times where people who attempted to test God - the false teachers were advocating this - were severely punished.

Starting with the Israelites who, after God had delivered them from Egypt, were punished by death for their unbelief (v 5), he goes on to Sodom and Gomorrah, cities that were destroyed because of the people’s sexual sin (v 7). Next, he speaks of Cain’s sin of murder, Balaam’s sins of betraying his position as a prophet and Korah's sin of rebellion against God-given authority (v 11). Jude chose these examples to show that the false teachers were guilty of these very same sins and would receive the same severe punishment. He also cited the case of the disobedient angels who were punished (v 6) to show that if angels could be punished, what more, mere human beings like us?

From Jude’s description of these false teachers (vs 4, 8, 10-13, 16) they seemed to have been arrogant, immoral and self-indulgent. They claimed superior knowledge and did not respect God-given authority. We are to avoid such people and their teaching. If we cannot avoid them, we must 'contend for the faith' (v 3) that we know to be true and expose them for what they are.

False teaching has to do with power and control. In many countries in Asia where there are fast growing churches, false teachers are becoming increasingly prevalent. Pray that Christians will endeavor to be equipped with the doctrines of the faith, and be firm about following Christ so that no false teacher will be able to get a foothold in any church.

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of 2 Peter

The key theme of this epistle is theological orthodoxy. Peter writes as a concerned pastor with a compassionate plea for the believers to grow in Christian maturity and to guard against false teachers. The purpose of this letter is to call Christians to spiritual growth so that they can combat apostasy as they look forward to the Lord's return.

This letter has three main thoughts:

The True Knowledge of Christian Belief

Christians must match their Christian calling and resources with growth in practical holiness. The historical reliability of this faith is supported by eyewitness testimony and fulfilled prophecy.

False Teachers

The writer warns of their appearance in the church. Every attempt must be made to resist and refute them and not to be dragged into their immoral ways. The believers are told of the certainty of judgement on these false teachers.

The Parousia (Return of the Lord Jesus Christ) and the Final Dissolution

This is certain in spite of delay and the denials by false teachers. He exhorts them to live their lives in holiness in the light of the coming day of the Lord.

NOV 6, SATURDAY

2 Pe 1:1-21

God's Riches, Our Resources for Righteous Living

2 Pe 1:5-8

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness. 2 Peter 1:3

Trials and testing are inevitable challenges to Christian living. Peter wrote this text at a time when first century Christians faced life-threatening persecution. Peter himself expected death (1:14). His parting words are neither a tearful farewell nor a stoic resignation to God's will.

There is no self-pitying, neither are there any defeatist thoughts in his mind. Rather, his letter is saturated with overflowing optimism and unwavering confidence that God's divine power had given him EVERYTHING he needed for life and godliness. He had everything he needed to stay vibrant and upright. What are these divine gifts that are so complete and exhaustive? God's gifts had so impacted Peter that even amidst severe testing and impending martyrdom, his epistle persistently echoes the triumphant note of this timeless hymn by Charles Wesley:

*'Happy, if with my latest breath I may but gasp His Name:
Preach Him to all, and cry in death. 'Behold, behold the Lamb!'
God's divine gifts are Jesus and the Holy Spirit*

The apostle's life is a testimony to the transforming power of his personal knowledge of Jesus' glory and goodness and the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had made him a partaker in the divine nature and enabled him to escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desire (v 4).

Hence, with God's richest provisions in the person and work of Christ and His precious promises of help through the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are confident none can have dominion over us. Isaiah 43:1-3 leaves us in no doubt that with God in our lives we have everything we need. 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you ... When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flame will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.'

Praise be to God whose tender mercy and steadfast love never ceases

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 7, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

NOV 8, MONDAY

2 Pe 2:1-22

False Prophets and Teachers

2 Pe 2:9

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. 2 Peter 2:1a

We need to heed the warnings in this passage about false prophets and teachers because they continue to operate today. In 2006, the best selling book and film 'The Da Vinci Code' created much confusion among many young believers. In my church, some even questioned the authenticity of the Christian faith.

Peter opens this section by declaring that false teachers are bound to appear. They appear among the people as members of the church; they work secretly, under cover, pretending to be what they are not, and they bring in their false teaching alongside true doctrine. Finally, they replace the truth with their lies. The apostle proceeds to describe fully their true nature. They are insolent, licentious, immoral and greedy. They are bold and willful. These are the rebels who dare to criticize even angels. They are deceitful in every way.

The desire for curious new things is very much a part of human nature. The same truth being said over and over by the same group of people is not very exciting. Thus, it is no wonder that false prophets attract significant numbers of followers. The danger posed by false prophets challenges church leaders to have real discernment and a firm approach to deal with such people. Church leaders have the great responsibility to teach and train new believers in the Christian faith. No room should be given to any form of doctrinal deviation and no person who propagates such deviation should be taken lightly. However, if there is genuine misunderstanding without any intention to distort and confuse other believers, such a person should be corrected with discipline and love.

But judgement is sure to come upon those whose evil intention is to mislead and destroy believers with their deviant ways. God did not spare angels when they sinned. Neither were people spared during the time of Noah. Cities, too, have faced the wrath of God - Sodom and Gomorrah are two prime examples.

***Pray for the faithful teaching of doctrine to our younger generation in churches.
Pray that our children will not be easily influenced by these false teachers or their teachings.***

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

The Certainty of Christ's Promised Return

2 Pe 3:9

The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9

I come from a family that used to practice ancestral worship. I became a Christian through the witness of the Christian fellowship in my school. What prompted me to accept Christ was the fear I had when I first heard of the judgement accompanying His return. When I witnessed to my mother about Jesus' second coming she said. 'Are you kidding? Trying to trick your poor illiterate mum with myths, and tales! You have wasted my money and effort to send you to school.' God is merciful! My mum was not to remain ignorant for long. She became a Christian and is now with the Lord.

God's love labors long towards us, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (v 9). He may seem to be tarrying in returning but the promise of His return is as solid and as evident as this existing world which was brought into existence by His word (v 5). And it was God's prophetic word that forewarned the destruction of the ancient world (v 6). It is therefore no light matter that by the same word the present heavens and earth will be destroyed.

When is this Terrible Day in God's timetable? The eternal God is outside of time. He is not confined by it. 'But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day' (v 8). What matters most is that in His love for mankind, He will keep the door of grace and opportunities for repentance open for as long as His patience endures. God is abounding in patience and slow to anger but the day of His wrath will surely come. And the manner in which it comes is as frightening as it is unexpected and unannounced. Since it will come like a thief in the night (v 10), let us be watchful.

Dear Lord, disturb us if we have fallen in love with the things and comforts this world offers and have forgotten Your imminent return and our calling as Your servants.

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of Hebrews 1 - 8

All of us come to Christ carrying with us some of our former religious and cultural traditions. No one anywhere in the world is really free from this. As Asians, for many of whom Christ is only a first or second generation experience, non-Christian attitudes and ways of thinking may be unconsciously ingrained inside us or be part of our reflex.

From the contents of this letter we can see that this epistle was written to Jewish Christians to resolve the conflict they had between following Jesus and following the Old Covenant. In Christ there is no need for believers to offer the sacrifices prescribed by the Law of Moses but understandably this was the core of Jewish beliefs. Hebrew Christians had to deal with that. The epistle of the Hebrews helped them go to the root of how Jesus, 'God incarnate for our salvation', deals with their former religion.

In the same way, this letter shows us the essence of the Gospel and helps us see what we can keep from our culture and what we must leave behind.

It also seems clear that for Hebrew Christians, staying on as Christians involved suffering persecution (10:32-34) whereas falling back to Judaism would have removed that threat. Judaism was a recognised religion in the Roman Empire while Christianity was not. If ever today we must face loss for Christ's sake, this letter shows us how Christ is worthy and supreme above all.

Only in heaven will we know who wrote this epistle. But we know the author knew Timothy (13:23). That makes the circle quite small. It could be Silas, it could be Apollos, it could be Barnabas, it could be somebody else. It has been thought that it was Paul who wrote the letter, but most people now agree that the way it is written does not bear his mark.

We also do not know for sure when this letter was written. However, the mention of Hebrew sacrifices suggests that the temple at Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 AD was still standing. The fact that persecution had broken out suggests that it was written after the persecution of Nero in 64 AD. There is no address to tell us to whom it was written, but they were obviously people who knew Timothy and the phrase 'those from Italy send you their greetings' (13:24) suggests that the letter might have been sent to the Jewish church in Rome.

NOV 10, WEDNESDAY Heb 1:1-2:18

Something Better

Heb 1:1-2

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Heb 1:3

Jews, even Christian Jews, felt a very strong bond to the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament as they knew it. Over generations they had become deeply convinced about God's message to them. God had called Abraham who, because he was faithful, was blessed abundantly. In the same way, the Jews or Hebrews as a people were called to be faithful to the Law through Moses. They proved unfaithful and as a nation was exiled 600-800 years after Moses. In exile, they learned repentance and developed a will never to forsake the Law again.

Now God had revealed something new. He had spoken through His Son. God’s promises through His prophets of a Messiah had been fulfilled. But it was not what the Hebrews expected. The message did not contradict God's nature but it did change very deeply things the Jews held closely in the practice of their religion. How could they put aside these familiar and precious things?

The letter of Hebrews sets the stage for this by telling them they could change when they have something better. 'You have the Son of God' and that is surely something better than whatever they had before. Scripture shows us that Jesus is the Son (v 5), above all else (vs 6, 13), equal to God (v 8) and everlasting (vs 10-12).

***As Asians coming to Jesus, we too must leave behind all ties with Asian deities,
all idolatrous religious practices and ingrained superstitious beliefs.
We must put aside necromancy (consulting dead spirits) and geomancy (feng shui).***

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

NOV 11, THURSDAY

Heb 3:1-4:13

The Son is Greater Than Moses

Heb 4:12

Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. Heb 3:3

We are reminded that this letter was written to the Hebrews. Living just about 40 years after Jesus appeared, the early Jewish believers had a more familiar knowledge and awareness of the man, Jesus. His Gospel was told to them in stories of His encounters and conversations. But He was just a preaching carpenter in Galilee. Moses, on the other hand, was from back in time and was placed on a pedestal. He was the Lawgiver who heard the voice of God, the great champion who brought their forefathers out of Egypt against all human probabilities.

It may have already been said earlier that the Son is greater than the Law, but the writer of Hebrews needed to say again that Jesus is greater than Moses. To accept Jesus, clothed in flesh and frail as we are, as God, is hard to accept, and not just for the Jews. The church is littered with philosophies like those of the Marcionites, Docetists and Arians who tried various devices to separate the man Jesus from the Son of God.

Today, we may face philosophies that try to equate Jesus with other so-called deities. We must believe that Jesus is the only Son of the Father; begotten not made; of one substance with the Father.

***Colossians 1:15-16: Jesus is the image of the invisible God... by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.
Pray that family members who do not know Jesus will open their hearts to Him.***

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

NOV 12, FRIDAY

Heb 4:14-5:10

Holding Firmly

Heb 4:16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Heb 4:14

When Jesus, the Son, was presented as greater than Moses (chapter 3), He was among other things described as high priest. Here the theme is taken up again and mentioned five times.

A priest stands for us before God. His job is to act on our behalf so that we may find favor or approval before the Almighty. For this, Jesus is supremely qualified. First, He is one of us, fully human. He knows our weaknesses and is able to deal gently with us. Yet He is perfect before God because He is without sin. Second, no priest appoints himself as priest. God appointed Christ for the job. If God has given Him the role, have we any right to seek another?

The danger the Hebrew Christians, to whom this letter was addressed, faced was that they might drift away (v 14). It was not easy to be different. I am sure the Jews found comfort in observing the practice of having a priest offer sacrifices for their sins. There was a pull for the Jewish Christians to follow, what was after all, a God ordained practice. The message here for us is that there is no better priest than Jesus. Hold firm to the best. Do not let the 'good' keep you from the best.

***Let us approach the Throne of Grace with confidence - regularly, and often.
Although Christ was the Son, He had to learn obedience through suffering. (Heb 5:8)
If we are God's children will He not also perfect us through suffering?
If this has been our lot, let us count it all joy (James 1:3).***

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 13, SATURDAY

Heb 5:11-6:20

Pressing On

Heb 6:10

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Heb 5:13-14

It is not good enough to just enter God’s rest and remain at the entrance ‘holding firm’. There is a journey to begin. We must grow from drinking milk to eating solid food.

We need to understand what God’s heart is like and all that He has done for us to reach maturity. When the mind and heart change, our behavior and habits become Christlike. The road to Christlikeness is through reading, meditating on and applying God’s word to our life. But here is a word of caution: We need to leave behind arguments about repentance, baptism, the laying on of hands and the resurrection as though we could come up with new ideas. Scripture is already clear on these things. Adding, subtracting or changing this foundation leads to a shipwreck of our faith.

There is real danger in getting involved in any deviant new teaching. It is the rejection of the goodness of God, shown in the Son Who is superior to all.

***Those who feed on solid food are able to distinguish good from evil.
The family shares physical food together. Likewise, the family should feed on spiritual food together. Together we can help each family member grow from drinking milk to eating solid food.***

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 14, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

NOV 15, MONDAY

Heb 7:1-8:13

Melchizedek - Priest & King

Heb 7:25b

Without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, like the Son of God he remains a priest forever. Heb 7:3

Not being Hebrews and not being steeped in the Torah or Law we may find ourselves totally lost with this reference to Melchizedek. We are keen to go on and know more about being sure about our faith but instead run into this detour.

We are taken back 2,000 years before Jesus and told of how Abraham meets this 'king of righteousness- who was also priest of God Most High. He stood apart from Abraham and all the other kings who were on one side or the other in war. He blessed Abraham and received from him a ritually significant offering. Neither he nor his people are ever mentioned again.

In Abraham's day there were no other priests of God. Israel's descendants who were to be priests were not yet born. Yet God planned this encounter to show that even the great Abraham needed a priestly mediator.

In this passage, the meaning behind Melchizedek's appearance is not yet discussed but here is a priest unlike the sons of Levi, one mysteriously sent by God. There is a reference to Melchizedek in Psalm 110, which is a prophetic psalm significantly referring to the Messiah as a priest in the order of Melchizedek.

God always provides the way for us to go to Him.

Our minds cannot grasp the majesty of the immortal and invisible God, nor can we approach Him acceptably. We need a mediator and no one fits the role better than Jesus to be our priest.

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview Of Hebrews 9 - 13

In these five chapters, we are taken from the tabernacle to the coming 'lasting city'. We hear testimonies of God's people from Abel to Samuel and many others. Yet it is Christ who is the center of our attention in these passages.

We learn about the imperfect 'old' and rejoice and are exceedingly glad that we belong to the 'new'. The 'old' could never remove sin while the 'new' cleanses the conscience from guilt and thus abolishes the barrier between God and His people. The 'new' when compared to the 'old' is like substance to the shadow.

Since Jesus has purchased the new life for us, we are encouraged to live out our faith by looking to Jesus as our supreme example. He is called the mediator of the new covenant. Our duty and our part in this salvation plan are to constantly surrender to God in discipline and in trials. We are privileged to have a Father and child relationship. We look to Him, our supreme example. We worship Him who is already enthroned at God's right hand.

The only thing worth hoping for is the lasting city. As the saints in the earlier days lived in such hope, we are also exhorted to live in this sure hope because Christ has come. While we know that without faith it is impossible to please God, it is also true that without hope it is impossible to live a Christian life.

NOV 16, TUESDAY Heb 9:1-28

How Things Were

Heb 9:27

The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. Heb 9:8

Now that the way to the Most Holy Place has already been made possible to us by the death of Jesus, it is good to assess the 'old' from our position of the 'new'.

The tabernacle (later, Solomon's temple) was the place where meeting with the God of Israel was made possible. We have here a short account on the tabernacle (vs 1-5). Its description is not the main point here (v 5b). However, the items mentioned here are significant.

Next we have the rituals in the tabernacle (vs 6-7). They are temporary. They were in practice while waiting for the better to be initiated (v 8) and the right time to come (v 10b). We are able to testify to the fact that the 'fullness of time' has come (Galatians 4:4). While the rituals were performed daily in the outer room and once a year in the inner room, we have Jesus, minus these rituals, interceding for us continuously (7:25).

These rituals are considered imperfect in that they were unable to cleanse the conscience of the worshippers (v 9). This is because the true barrier to our access to God is an inward problem and not a physical one. It exists in the conscience. Jeremiah's prediction which came to be fulfilled in Christ (8:8-12) assures us of such inward purity of conscience.

***Let our access to Jesus (prayer and worship) be spontaneous
for there is no longer any barrier that keeps us away.***

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

NOV 17 WEDNESDAY Heb 10:1-39

The New Order

Heb 10:22-25

Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. Heb 10:9

The 'second' can be established only when the 'first' has been set aside (v 9b).The 'second' is made possible by the wholehearted obedience of Christ (vs 7b, 9a).The believer's sanctification is now made possible (vs 10, 14. 16b).

Christ and His new order are the good things, which had already come. Definitely these people under the Law knew nothing of these good things where pardon, certainty and peace dwell. The Law was but a shadow (v 1) and not the true form or the image. While they had the annual reminder of sins (v 3), we have a daily reminder of the imputed holiness, righteousness and the very presence of God (v 17, Rom 8:15).

John the Baptist declares that Jesus is 'the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world'. David also prophesies: 'A body you have prepared for me' and 'I have come to do your will, O God' (vs 5b, 7b).These are fulfilled in Christ's incarnation and earthly ministry respectively. All our sacrifices will come to nothing unless they are living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) made out of obedience and total devotion to God. This has to originate from our inward cleansing by Christ's sacrifice (v 10) and our secured and consecrated position, which Christ has already provided (v 14).

'It is done.' We must keep proclaiming this truth. There is no more remembrance of sin (v 17) as compared with the old covenant where there was an annual reminder of sins (v 3). Further, we now have the will and power to obey God because His laws are now in our hearts and minds (v 11) and not on stone tablets.

***The new order, accompanied by the Holy Spirit,
has made obedience (and sanctification) possible (Rom 8:15).***

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

Living Faith

Heb 11:1

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. Heb 11:13

Faith can be described as living the future in the present. It is God’s word that makes the future as real as the present. Promises and rewards belong to the future. Obedience, sacrifice, endurance, conviction, certainty, assurance, hope and joy belong to the present.

Let us consider those who have been faithful and be encouraged. Abel's better sacrifice revealed his devotion. Enoch pleased God. Noah heeded God's word with holy fear and obedience. Abraham was the father of the faithful. Even Sarah was considered faithful though she seemed to have wavered.

Let us live as sojourners and aliens in this world and seek always to please God (v 6). We too are certain of what we do not yet see (v 1 b). We are mere strangers on this earth in the same way as Abraham, who considered himself a stranger (v 9).

Let us fix our eyes constantly on our heavenly destination (v 16). By faith we know that it is a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God (v 10).

Let us keep the faith till the end (v 13a) and imitate the apostle Paul who ‘kept the faith till the end’ (2 Tim 4:7).

Let us learn from Abraham's greatest test. While we know that heaven is real and God's promises are real, we know also that trials and testing will come our way. Abraham faced the greatest test of his life in the sacrifice of Isaac. How could God's command clash with His promise? Nevertheless, Abraham, as the father of faith, obeyed and was rewarded.

When faced with the severest trial of your life, hold on tightly to God’s promises.

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

NOV 19, FRIDAY

Heb 12:1-29

The Father's Discipline

Heb 12:2

Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Heb 12:9

Without discipline it is impossible to live a Christian life. We need discipline to run the race (v 1), to fix our eyes on Jesus in our struggle with temptations and weaknesses (vs 2, 4), to endure (v 7) and to submit (v 9). Rejoice and be exceedingly glad when you are being disciplined for it is from our Father in heaven and it is for good purposes (v 10).

Our response to discipline must be one of contemplation and understanding, seriousness and submissiveness in enduring. Discipline is bound to cause pain but in order for us to endure, we must know that it is for our own good and part of our personal pursuit of holiness, righteousness and peace. We must obey and not resent or rebel.

Jesus is our supreme example and therefore inspirer in that He learned obedience from what He suffered (5:8). We must be able to see in Jesus a devoted servant and a patient sufferer. While the Old Testament saints could inspire us (v 1b), it is Jesus alone who is able to help us. He always lives to intercede for us (7:25b). Let us then rid ourselves of all ensnaring sins (v 1b), be serious and wise (vs 5-6, Prov 3:11-12) in our Christian walk and daily make every effort to obey the Lord. Let us not be childish, immature, and irreligious like Esau.

***Christian discipline comes naturally
out of a Father and son relationship,
and if we submit, we shall live!***

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 20, SATURDAY

Heb 13:1-25

Christ Does Not Change

Heb 13:8

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Heb 13:8

The changeless character of our Lord Jesus Christ affirms and encourages us to live a life of brotherly love, hospitality and contentment.

We have to persevere in love (v 1). Love needs perseverance as much as faith needs perseverance.

Hospitality (v 2), when fully displayed, results in love, kindness and compassion and we do well if we heed Christ's words: 'He who receives you receives me' (Matt 10:40-42). Further, make it a point to identify with the suffering members of the body of Christ (v 3).

Sexual immorality and love of money belong to the same category as the sin of covetousness (vs 4-5, Exo 20:17). A greedy person can never be happy, but the opposite of covetousness is contentment. 'However, this carefree contentment is not an irresponsible improvidence; it springs from an intelligent trust in God and acceptance of his promises' (vs 5b-6; Bruce, NICNT, page 374).

Every church has a beginning and a past and it is good to remember its pioneers of faith. If you have been long in the church, you would know someone who has faithfully completed the race. We should always emulate what they have done and thank God for them.

As we consider the past and the present and look towards the future (and frequently with fear), the changelessness of our Lord Jesus Christ stabilizes us. He is the past sacrifice, a present intercessor and the coming and final consummation.

***The earth may quake and the mountains tumble,
but fear not for our God is our ever-present help (Psa 46:1).***

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 21, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 John 1 - 5

The writer of this book is John the beloved disciple of Jesus. This book is one of his three letters written to the Christians of the early Church. He is also the author of the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

Bible historians tell us that John was an old man when he wrote these books. He was concerned that heresies seriously distorting the truths regarding the person and teaching of Jesus were springing up and spreading. He took up his pen to refute such lies. He was writing as an eye-witness. He testified that he knew this Jesus personally. He ate and lived with Him for three and a half years. He heard His teaching, saw His miracles, and stood beneath the Cross and he touched the Resurrected Christ. Now, as an eye-witness, he maintains that this man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Messiah and He is the Son of God.

In this letter, John wrote to refute certain wrong teachings. He did not spell out the exact heresies, but generally we can conclude that these wrong teachings denied that:

- Jesus is the Christ
- He is the pre-existent Son of God
- He came in the flesh to provide salvation for all

2,000 years later, these heresies still prevail. From time to time we hear reports of some 'church leaders' (2:19) proclaiming that Jesus was a mere human religious teacher. They may even deny that humans have sinned against God.

Christians, take heart: Christianity is grounded firmly on accounts written by eye-witnesses (Lk 1:2, Jn 20:3 1, 2 Pet 1: 16).

In this Book, John instructs us to love God, love His commands, love our brethren and to love not with mere words but with action. Becoming a believer is not only to believe in the correct doctrines but to live out these beliefs in an appropriate lifestyle.

Loving God must lead to obeying God's commands and loving one another.

I Know Jesus

1 Jn 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

John's declaration (vs 1-4)

'I personally know this Jesus! I saw Him in action with my own eyes. I touched Him with my own hands. What I saw and what I heard convinced me beyond a shadow of doubt that this Jesus lived as a man. He lived more than a godly life: in fact, He is God.'

When events are erroneously presented, eye-witnesses step forth to refute the lies. Serious distortions of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ were spreading. This caused John to take a stand in the witness box. He gave his personal experiences with Jesus. He declared Jesus is the Christ, the pre-existent Son of God. This gives us confidence that when we read John's three Epistles, the book of Revelation and the Gospel, we know these are written by an eye-witness.

When we sin (1:5-10)

Do Christians sin? All humans have inherited the tendency to sin. All have sinned. And when we receive Jesus, we walk in the light. When we come near the light our sins are exposed: we are sinners and we have sinned. We cannot deny this.

Sin is serious but there is a solution (v 9)

God provides help. Read this assurance in verse 9: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.' God did not only forgive our sins. He also wiped out the records. We become righteous in Christ and need no longer live in guilt. This is because Jesus Christ has paid the price on the cross to obtain pardon for our sins.

In the next nine days as you read 1 John, be reminded that you are reading a letter from a man who had lived with the Lord Jesus when He was on earth.

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

Do Not Love The World

1 Jn 2:15-16

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15

Newcomers into the workforce may find their colleagues difficult to handle. Some misunderstand the above Scripture as instructing Christians to avoid contact with the society outside the church walls. They then avoid the 'evil' world, and stay in the 'safe environment' inside the church.

When John wrote to warn the Christians not to love the world, he was not contradicting his own words in the Gospel 'God so loved the world ...' (Jn 3:16). In this passage, the world implies the world system, a system that operates without godly principles. The world lusts after physical pleasure, desires everything seen and takes pride in possessions (vs 2:16). The world that God loves (and we are to love) is the world that He created which includes people.

When we walk in the light, we will not be envious or desirous of the world's view of materialism. Our world view changes:

*'Things I loved before have passed away
Things I love far more have come to stay
When I give my heart to Jesus.'*

However, we must not avoid the world outside of the church walls. We are commissioned to go into the world to be the salt and light. God's people should be equipped and encouraged to minister to people in their offices, classrooms, homes and neighborhood. We should note that Jesus has set the example (Lk 19:7). See also His instructions for eating and drinking with pre-believers (Lk 10:7).

Love people but not the system of the world.

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

NOV 24, WEDNESDAY

1 Jn 3:11-4:6

Do Not Hate

1 Jn 3:18

And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. 1 John 3:23

Love. The apostle of love returns to this subject repeatedly.

'Love my brothers/ sisters? Easier said than done! But there are some that I just cannot love. Don't tell me to love Tim. He has hurt me badly. Not once, but repeatedly.' Lum was putting up a strong resistance to his cell leader's teaching on John's letter. Some of us may feel that John's call for us to love is not realistic. There are some people whom we just cannot love.

We need to understand that love is a command. We love not because people are lovable or we 'feel' like loving them. There are people who have really hurt us and treated us unfairly. These traumatic incidents have left bitter roots inside our hearts. So, before we can love, we must remove the bitterness. The remedy is forgiveness. Release forgiveness. Tell God in obedience to His command, you forgive the person and you do not want to be bitter anymore. When bitterness is removed through forgiveness, love comes supernaturally. It may take time but let the Lord work in you.

Don't hate! Cain murdered Abel because he was jealous of the latter's righteousness. He is a bad example; do not imitate him. Walk in the light and emulate Jesus' love. Jesus so loved us all that He laid down His life for us. Follow Him, walk in the light and love your brethren. Love must not be done with mere words. Love is action (Ja 2:15-17). When we love, our prayers are answered. We love because we are commanded to love. We love as an act of our will. When we start to love, the feelings will follow.

Lord, I cannot forgive because he / she has hurt me so deeply. But because You want me to love, so in obedience I release forgiveness to him/her. Now Lord I obey Your command to love him / her. Please create opportunities for me to show love to him/her.

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

NOV 25, THURSDAY

1 Jn 4:7-5:21

Love Again and Again

1 Jn 5:11-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7

Mary and Joyce are senior staff in a university administrative office. A strong sense of rivalry exists between these ambitious ladies. Joyce has become a believer. She struggled with this command of Jesus to love. Memories of past incidents of their combative behavior still hurt. One day, she decided to obey God to love. God provided an opening. On her way out of the office, she saw Mary. Joyce smiled and said softly, 'Good night, Mary.' The dark spirit of hurt fled. Subsequently, a restored friendship led Mary to Jesus Christ. They are now both loving sisters in Christ.

Love again and again. The apostle of love is never tired of exhorting us to do so. Legend has it that when John, old by now, was carried to different places, he was always heard murmuring, 'Dear children love, love. Dear children love one another.' As we read his letter written to rebuke heresies, we hear this word 'love' being repeated constantly.

We love because God first loved us by sending His Son to us. When we receive His salvation, love lives in us. With His love in us we cannot but love. When we love one another, we complete the circle of His love (v 12).

As we show love to our fellow colleagues or neighbors it demonstrates His love. This makes the people understand His love. On the other hand, heed this warning! If we do not love we do not know God (v 8). Anyone who does not love his brethren, whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen (v 20). This is a command: whosoever loves God must also love his brother.

Lord, make me a blessing by sowing love everywhere I go.

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview of 2 & 3 John

Both epistles were written by John, the beloved disciple. He was one of the sons of Zebedee and together with his brother James were referred to by Jesus as the sons of thunder (Mk 3:17). From the Gospels, we can learn something about this man. He was full of energy, hence, the word 'thunder' was applied to him. He tended to be intolerant (Mk 9:38), vindictive (Lk 9:54), and ambitious (Mk 10:35-37). We can also deduce from his first epistle that John would have learnt the lessons on love from being in the Bible School of Jesus Christ during the three years he was with Him (1 Jn 3:14-18).

We need to read these epistles as letters written to people - 2 John to a lady and her children and 3 John to Gaius. Both epistles were written for believers - 2 John to warn against heresy and association with false teachers and 3 John to teach Christian hospitality. In 2 John, the main theme is a discussion on truth and error where the word 'truth' appears five times in the thirteen verses. Interestingly enough, the word 'love' also appears five times. In 3 John the focus is on three people namely Gaius, Diotrephes and Demetrius.

Today, we seem to have lost the art of letter writing in the midst of the advance of technology. The computer and the mobile phone are able to send messages to people. Yet, these modes of communication can sometimes be impersonal, as compared to a handwritten letter. As we study these two epistles, may we be helped regarding how to stand in defense of our faith when encountering false teachers (2 John) and how we can be a friend to other Christians in the true sense of the word (3 John).

NOV 26, FRIDAY

2 Jn 1:1-13

Truth Is A Person

2 Jn 1:6

... because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever. 2 John 2

In our world today, truth can be so relative or diluted through compromise. It is good to be reminded by John that truth lives in us and will be with us forever (v 2). This happens when a person realizes that Jesus is the only truth showing us the only true God, and we accept Him into our life as Savior and Lord. We know without a shadow of doubt that there can be no real truth except what is found in the Christian faith. Someone might argue that all religions lead to God. What then is our response? We hold fast to the truth that Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life concerning God (Jn 14:6).

When we know this truth in the Person of Jesus Christ, then it follows that we will desire to love others in the Body of Christ. This is God's command (vs 5-6). Yet the reality is that we do not see this happening in our churches today. The reason could be that most of us only give lip service to the truth.

The opposite of truth is falsehood and lies. As it was during John's time, so it is today that people deny the truth that Jesus came 'in the flesh' (v 7). The Jesus that John knew is the same Jesus who ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of God (Heb 1:3). His human and divine natures are inseparable. If we do not hold fast to this teaching, we stand to lose the rewards for our hitherto faithful service. The stern warning follows that we are not to welcome people who spread lies about the Person of Jesus into our homes. Their one aim is to try and cause us to stumble in our Christian lives (vs 10-11).

Read verse 12. Is there someone you know who has been led astray from the truth of the Gospel? Perhaps a face-to-face meeting carried out lovingly will help draw the person back to Jesus.

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 27, SATURDAY

3 Jn 1:1-14

Truth and Conduct

3 Jn 1:11

We also speak well of him, and you know that our testimony is true. 3 John 12b

When John wrote this letter, the Gospel had already spread throughout the Roman Empire and he was probably the only one of the original apostles left. It was of utmost importance to him that the truth of the Gospel be maintained and passed on to the generations to come. But he also knew that this would mean nothing if not translated into Christian conduct.

In this passage we read about Gaius whom John greeted as 'my dear friend, whom I love in the truth' (v 1). Gaius was not only true to the Gospel in belief but also in behavior. He had opened his home to visiting evangelists from John and provided for their needs although they were strangers to him (vs 5-7). Thankfully, there are still many people like Gaius today. The question is, are we one of them?

Demetrius was another example of a good Christian testimony (v 12). Not only was he faithful to the truth of the Gospel, he lived it out in his life - 'well spoken of by everyone' (v 12a).

Diotrephes, the third person mentioned was, however, a disappointment as a Christian. He was obviously very influential but he was using his influence for evil rather than good (v 11). He was hostile towards the apostle John and the 'brothers' sent by John to strengthen the church. Diotrephes slandered them and even put out of fellowship members of the church who wanted to welcome them (vs 9-10). He was self-centered rather than Christ-centered, wanting to exercise control at all costs. It must have been difficult for Gaius to endure the opposition he faced from Diotrephes. But the situation would not continue unchecked. John promised Gaius that and urged him to continue his good work (vs 9, 11, 13).

Again, we see that John ends this letter (vs 13-14) in the same way as in his second epistle (2 Jn 12) with the desire to see Gaius and talk face to face.

Pray that we may seek to follow the examples of Gaius and Demetrius.

If there are traces of Diotrephes in us, let us come before God and seek His forgiveness.

May our conduct reflect our belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 28, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Revelations 1 to 3

The word 'revelation' comes from the Greek word apokalupsis, meaning an unveiling. Revelation is the only book in the New Testament representative of a kind of literature which was very common between the Old and New Testament period called apocalyptic literature. It was the product of the indestructible Jewish hope that God will come again in judgment and restore His people to their rightful place in His kingdom. Thus it dealt with the events that would happen before this comes to pass and is entirely composed of symbolic language so that it would be unintelligible to the outsider.

Traditionally, Revelation is accepted as written by John the apostle of Jesus. He was exiled to the island of Patmos during the time of Emperor Domitian and it was there that he received Jesus' revelation for His church. The church was going through a terrible period of suffering and persecution under Domitian and more was yet to come in the future. It was during such a time that Jesus' revelation came to encourage, rebuke and to exhort His people to hold firm till the end. God still reigns in power and glory, and He promises that they would reign with Him if they remained faithful till the end.

John begins with a brief prologue (1:18) where he states that the origin of his work is Jesus Himself. The revelation is not about Jesus but from Jesus for the seven churches in Asia to show them what was to come. Commentators believe that although John was writing to the seven churches, the message is also to the whole church because the number 'seven', regarded by the Jews as the perfect number, runs all through the message of Revelation.

Every letter finishes with the words: 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.' The Spirit is still speaking to every church in every generation, including ours, if only we will pay heed and listen to Him.

NOV 29, MONDAY

Rev 1:1-20

Love Divine All Love Excelling

Rev 1:8

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Rev 1:5b-6

Karl Barth, the great German theologian, was once asked this question, 'Of all the theological insights you have ever had, which do you consider to be the greatest of them all?' This man, who had written tens of thousands of pages of some of the most sophisticated theology ever put on paper, replied, 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'

At the end of his greetings to the readers of his letter (vs 4-5a), John broke into a doxology of praise to Jesus Christ. Why was John so swept up in his praise to Christ? To John, everything goes back to Jesus' love for us. It was because He loved us that He went to His death and became the faithful witness (v 5a), the supreme 'martyr' (the Greek term for 'witness') who died to free us from our sins. It was because He loved His people that He was giving His revelation to encourage them to remain faithful to the end.

Jesus loves us - that is the message of the Gospel and of the book of Revelation. That was the message that resonated in the lives of Barth and John. What comes to your mind when you hear these words: 'Jesus loves you and has freed you from your sins by his blood?' We need to regularly remind ourselves of what our life was like before we knew Christ - what He has freed us from and where we are now - and thus remind ourselves of how much He loves us. It is only in living lives overflowing with gratitude to Him, constantly remembering that He loves us, that we can keep faithful through our life's journey, regardless of the circumstances we find ourselves in.

'Amazing love, how can it be, that thou my God shouldst die for me?'

Why don't you spend some time to reflect on your life before you became a Christian?

What has Christ set you free from? Then take some time to thank and praise Him for loving you so much and for giving you this new life in Him.

P.R.A.Y

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

NOV 30, TUESDAY

Rev 2:1-17

At What Cost

Rev 2:7,11,17

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance ... Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Revelation 2:2a, 4

Sometimes in our desire to do what we think is right in God's sight, we can become censorious and unable to tolerate the weaknesses or faults of others. In our self-righteousness, we become oblivious to the fact that our critical attitudes and actions are hurting the body of Christ. That was what happened to the church at Ephesus.

It was not easy to be a Christian in Ephesus. By far the greatest and wealthiest city in Asia, Ephesus was also the center for the worship of the goddess Artemis, and a notorious centre of pagan superstition, crime and immorality. The Ephesian church had to work hard to remain faithful to Christ, and to maintain the purity of the teachings of Christ. Paul had already forewarned the elders that 'savage wolves' would come in and distort the truth (Acts 20:29). However, somewhere along the way in their quest to maintain orthodoxy, they had either lost their love for their fellow Christians or their original devotion to God and enthusiasm for their faith (v 4). Their dedication and hard work were still there, doctrine was preserved but the love was gone. Heresy-hunting had killed their love for one another - orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of their fellowship.

Sometimes in our overzealousness to protect the faith, or our preoccupation with rules and forms, we tend to lose sight of the feelings of our brothers and sisters for whom Christ also died. They become 'enemies' to be straightened out, 'unspiritual' members to be corrected, rather than people to be nurtured and to walk alongside with. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that we are on the same side, precious to the same Lord who died for us.

We need to hear again Christ's call to us to remember, to repent and to love again as we used to do in the first place (v 4b).

Why don't you spend some time to pray about this for yourself, for your church, as well as other churches that you know of where there is a need for greater love and unity amongst their members?

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 1, WEDNESDAY Rev 2:18-3:6

Wake Up

Rev 2:19; 3:1b

I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. Rev 3:1b-3a

Socrates said at his trial for heresy that the unexamined life is not worth living. He was on trial for encouraging his students to challenge the accepted beliefs of the time and to think for themselves. If we do not take time to examine our life and the life of our church, we can wrongly assume that things are going on well when in actual fact they might not be.

Like its city, Sardis, which had grown wealthy but had sunk into moral decadence, the church also had all the outward trappings of life and activity but had sunk into spiritual death. Unlike the other churches, it was not facing any danger from Caesar worship or persecution and slander from the Jews, or even heresy from within. With nothing to spur them to be vigilant, the people grew content with their normal church life with all the right forms and activities of religiosity. Jesus, however, warned the church to wake up and to be watchful.

That was what their city had failed to do, twice in its history. Thinking they were impregnable, the people failed to be vigilant and had fallen into enemy hands. Jesus thus called the church to remember and to examine themselves to see how they had fallen short and to make amends. They could not afford to delude themselves into thinking that everything was fine.

The New Testament emphasizes the need to be watchful as Christians. Unless we take time to examine our lives and the life of our church, we can easily be lulled into a false sense of complacency.

**Which areas of your life need to be revived or strengthened?
What will you do about it?**

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

Holding On

Rev 3:20

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no-one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Rev 3:11-12a

The city of Philadelphia had an interesting custom to honor its citizens. When a person had served the state well or when he had left behind a noble record as a magistrate, priest or public benefactor, the city would erect a pillar in one of the temples with his name inscribed upon it. All who came to worship in the temples would see and remember him. When Christ promised to make the person who stands firm to the end a pillar in the temple of His God, the church understood what He was saying - God would accord them the highest honor when they meet Him face to face.

Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia was all praise. In the later days when Islam swept across Asia Minor, Philadelphia stood for many years as a bastion of Christianity. When it fell, it was not because of weakness or lack of courage. It fell because it was betrayed by the Christians of Byzantium who were jealous of its honor. The Philadelphian church did not have much strength (v 8) but with what little it had, it kept faithful. That was all that Christ required of them and He praised them for it. He did not ask or expect of them what they could not give.

If Jesus were to write a letter to you now, what would He say? If He were to write to your church, what would He say? The Philadelphians had little strength but they persevered in faithful obedience (v 10). How are you responding in the face of the difficulties or issues that you or your church members are going through? Or even if there are no issues, are you still 'hot' and not 'lukewarm' like the Laodiceans?

***Read through the passage again slowly and hear the Lord's words to you.
Write a letter to yourself in the words that Jesus might say to you.
And respond to Him accordingly.***

P.R.A.Y

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

Overview Of Revelation 4 - 22

Many Christians are reluctant to get into the book of Revelation while there are some who cannot get out from the book! Yet the Bible would be incomplete without it. God's story has a definite ending. The world is much more than the present situation that we are living in. There will be a new Heaven and a new Earth at the end of history.

This knowledge is reassuring to all of us who live in a fallen world. The world's economic and political systems have no answer but merely provide 'band-aids' to mend the brokenness in society and the environment. Only the promises in the book of Revelation offer the final solution when there will be no more tears, pain and death. There will be a happy ending after all in the long-drawn drama of world history. Our 'super hero' Jesus Christ will win in the end!

The book of Revelation does not gloss over the disasters and tragedies which will take place. In fact, many of the prophecies have come to pass and more will occur. Christians need not be ignorant of or surprised at the forthcoming events. We should prepare ourselves, keeping our faith strong, and be ready to face any eventuality. Tribulations will come, great and small, whether one believes the 'rapture' will occur before or after the Great Tribulation. Praise the Lord if we are taken out of the Great Tribulation, but it would be foolish if we are not prepared for it. We have the assurance that the Lord Almighty will see us through.

The book of Revelation has led to considerable controversy among many churches and Christians especially when attempts are made to interpret literally the various prophecies. Many of the descriptions are symbolic and the meanings of the numbers and visions have been subjected to various interpretations. We need not be bogged down by trying to decipher many of the symbols and numbers. We can remain faithful by relying on the plain understanding of the underlying messages that God is wanting to inform and warn His children.

John wrote that much blessing will come to those who read the book of Revelation. May God bless us all as we read His word.

Glory to the Lord God Almighty

Rev 4:11

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." Rev 4:11

Have you ever seen some wonderful scenery and then tried to describe what you saw? Even poets and artists can hardly do justice to describe or paint, for example, the panoramic beauty of a sunset over the mountains. How much more difficult it was for John when he tried to describe the splendors of Heaven with its multifaceted dimensions of visions and sounds.

Before John was told 'what must take place after this', he was given a glimpse of the awesomeness of the dwelling place of the Almighty God. Human words could barely give an adequate description to the overwhelming grandeur of Heaven. So, John had to use imperfect descriptions: he wrote of the glitter of precious stones, the myriad colours of the rainbow and the shekinah glory accompanied by flashes of lightning as well as blazing lamps together with thunderous sounds.

The majesty of the Lord God deserves the continuous worship of all His creation. This is symbolized by the twenty-four elders representing the people of the Old and the New Covenants and the four living creatures representing all that God has created.

It is proper for us to first acknowledge the Creator of all beings and the Controller of our world's history. The famous songwriter Fanny Crosby had a dream in which she saw heaven. In spite of her blindness, she was able to glorify God in the more than 8000 hymns she wrote. We should be continually praising and worshipping the Lord Almighty.

***History is HIS STORY - all glory and honor and power unto HIM.
Let us reflect on the amazing wonders of the heavenly realm.***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 4, SATURDAY

Rev 5:1-14

Worthy Is the Lamb

Rev 5:9-10

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. Rev 5:9

Important legal documents are always stamped and sealed to certify their authenticity, to be revealed only by authorized officials. The scroll with seven seals that John saw is thought to be the title deed to the ownership of the created world. This world is being reclaimed by the Lamb who is now glorified in Heaven with All-Power and All-Wisdom and All-Presence as symbolised by the seven horns, seven eyes, and seven spirits.

It is obvious that the one who is worthy to redeem the title deed of the creation is the Lord Jesus. He is the sacrificial Lamb whose body was broken and whose blood was poured out. We are now redeemed from our sins and appointed as royal priests to serve our God and to reign with Him on earth. All the suffering on the cross had not only been rewarded at the resurrection but also proven that Christ more than deserves His role as the new ruler of our world.

It is heartening to know no people group will be left out. In his vision, John saw peoples from all nations praising the Lord in all the languages of the world. No special racial group or nation has been singled out. The redeemed humanity has been set aside as saints; offering constant prayers filling golden bowls of incense, they, together with hosts of angels praise the Lamb forever and forever.

***Come let us sing, 'Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is Your Name
for it's Your Blood that cleanses me and gives me Life.'***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 5, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 6, MONDAY

Rev 6:1-8:5

No More Tears

Rev 7:9

"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev 7:14

Christians in the West have many different interpretations of the prophecies in the book of Revelation. However, many believers who live in Asian countries where they are constantly under persecution will find one great purpose in what had been revealed to John. Many have experienced many of the consequences of the disastrous events described as the Great Tribulation such as wars, famines, diseases and death (as graphically depicted by the four horsemen). Not surprisingly, many of the victims are crying out to the Lord for judgment and vengeance (6:10) for the suffering they had gone through because of the word of God and the testimony they had faithfully maintained (6:9). Christians are being martyred even today in many Asian countries.

Many believers continue to hold on to the faith because of the numerous promises in the Bible, especially those written in the book of Revelation. They know that one day a great multitude will come out of the Great Tribulation (7:14-17) and be washed white in the blood of the Lamb. They will stand before the Heavenly Throne, never to hunger or thirst again, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. What comfort! What joy! They may not escape the tribulation but they will not die in vain for their faith.

We can pray and hope that we be spared from the disasters of the Great Tribulation but we should be prepared. Then when troubles and suffering come upon us, we shall remain as faithful as the martyrs, both in the past and the present. As the seventh seal is being opened we wait in meditative silence.

**Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength
be to our God forever and ever. Amen**

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 7, TUESDAY Rev 8:6-9:21

Woes and More Woes

Rev 9:6

The rest of mankind that were not killed by the plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands, they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. Rev 9:20-21

Many people often wonder how a loving God could impose such severe judgment on the world and its population as described so tragically in Revelation. There will be such great destruction to the land and vegetation, to the seas and its creatures, and to the poisoning of many people until even the skies will be shaken.

Those people who are not under God's protection (9:4) will be inflicted with such pain that they will prefer to die. The instruments of suffering described as scorpions from the Deep seem to resemble the weapons of mass destruction, led by their leader called the Destroyer. The metal horses described could also be visions of the modern machines of warfare which John, living 2000 years ago, vainly tried to describe with his limited knowledge. Much of the destruction will be caused by the devil and evil men bent on war and destruction.

Even with such ominous warnings, the people will still refuse to repent from their evil, immoral and idolatrous ways. Our God, who is All-Loving, is also HOLY and JUST. Unrepentant evildoers who continue to commit their nefarious deeds will not go unpunished.

**Let us remember that our God is good.
He tempers His perfect Holiness with ultimate Love.**

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

DEC 8, WEDNESDAY Rev 10:1-11

Sweet and Sour Words

Rev 10:10

"There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Rev 10:6-7

The final plan of God will be fulfilled very soon. Throughout history numerous warnings have been given through the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures. In the last days, stronger warnings will be sounded. Yet many people will not repent. God’s patience will be stretched to the limit even as His mercies ‘endureth forever.’

God still has one more revelation of the little scroll which He has sent through another mighty angel for John to receive, read and meditate on. John has to digest its meaning and then to continue to prophesy and warn the people, especially the rulers from many nations.

Like John, many of us may find the word of God sweet at first when we first read it. However, when we really understand the implications and when we realise that we have to obey and respond to God’s word, we may find it difficult to digest. Yet it is not enough to just taste the sweetness of His word. We need to act on it. Like John, we have to share God’s word by sharing the Gospel with our friends. We have to advise and warn others of God’s holiness and judgment of sin.

**Let us continue to read the word of God and understand its meaning and implications,
until we are moved to act on them.
Be doers of the God’s word and not just hearers of it.**

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

DEC 9, THURSDAY

Rev 11:1-19

The Battle Between Good & Evil

Rev 11:15b

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Rev 11:15

The battle between good and evil will continue till the last days. The two heroes described remind us of Elijah and Moses with their great powers. They will come with the oil of anointing (two olive trees) and the light of the word (two lamp stands). They will prophesy for three and a half years. However, as throughout history, they will be opposed by the evil one from the Deep.

They will be martyred like many of their predecessors. To the unrighteous people, prophets will always be seen as a threat to their lifestyle. Thus, they will silence these prophets of doom. The fact that the dead bodies of the two prophets will be seen all over the world suggests that by that time, the international media with satellite TV will be sophisticated enough for this to be possible.

God, however, will deliver His prophets from death and will bring them back to reign with Him. The seventh, and the last, trumpet will herald the defeat of the wicked world systems and the coming of the eternal Divine Kingdom under the rule of our Lord.

The nations that have rebelled against God will face His wrath accordingly. Those who have destroyed the earth will receive the punishment they deserve. However, those who have served God faithfully and kept His holy standards will be given their due reward.

**Be not lovers of this world but look forward to the
coming kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.
'This world is not my home, I am just a passing through.'**

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

Star Wars in the Heavens

Rev 12:11

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Rev 12:11

We now understand the source of the spiritual attacks in our world. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, our struggle is against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. They are led by Satan who had been hurled from heaven with his fallen angels. They continue to create havoc and destruction in our world till today. In particular, he attacks the people of God and the church by falsely accusing them before our God.

The image of the devil as the dragon may be confusing to the Asians who often associate this mythological creature as 'good'. To some Chinese 'loong', may be different in origin and meaning, being associated with imperial status. Yet we should be cautious about practicing our cultural traditions and test them in the light of God's truth.

We should not try to fight the devil ourselves when we are faced with accusations from him. Neither should we surrender when our lives are being threatened. Instead, we should depend on our Lord Jesus Christ by living our lives in testimony of our faith in Him and obeying God's commandments.

In addition, we have the assurance that the faithful will be protected from the devil's reach as we shall be taken by God's angels to places of safety. We shall attain the salvation and the power of the kingdom of our God.

***Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
Put on the full armor of God to protect ourselves (Eph 6:13).***

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

DEC 11, SATURDAY

Rev 13:1b-18

The Faithful & The Beast

Rev 13:10b

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Rev 13:10b

Without trying to identify the two beasts described, we are given enough information to be aware of two personalities or systems in the world. One of them (a world dictator) will be given great authority over many nations but will slander God and His angels. He will also try to attack and defeat the people of God. Yet he will receive fanatical support from those people who are not followers of Christ.

The other person or system will be able to perform many miracles to deceive mankind and lead them to pay homage to the world dictator. Both will persecute those people who refuse to bear the mark of allegiance to them. As a consequence, many will suffer from being left out of the world's economic system, even to the point of death. Even now, in many countries, these two groups of people exist, the faithful and the fanatic.

Many Christians are still being persecuted for their faith and are being deprived of their freedom of worship and the right to live normal lives.

God's faithful are encouraged to be patient and remain faithful, enduring even imprisonment and death. We must not submit ourselves to the false prophet and the beast. We need not speculate on the identity of the triple six but we know that this number indicates a human figure. We are not to bow down to him.

Let us pray for Christians who are being oppressed by their governments and who have been deprived of their freedom to worship and to live their lives according to their faith.

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 12, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 13, MONDAY

Rev 14:1-20

The Redeemed 144,000

Rev 14:12-13

"Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads." Revelation 14:1

On Christmas Eve the focus is on the newborn baby Jesus in the manger in a stable in Bethlehem. He is surrounded by Joseph and Mary, a few shepherds and farm animals. In the last days, we shall all see the Lord Jesus as the Lamb on Mount Zion surrounded by 144,000 saints.

Much controversy has been raised over the number 144,000. Most of the numbers in the book of Revelation are symbolic, and thus this number more likely means a great multitude, the number being a multiple of 12 by 12 by 1000. In both instances where the number is mentioned, it is followed by the description of a great multitude from every nation, tribe, language and people.

The love of God extends to all peoples who bear the Name of Jesus, the Lamb on Mount Zion, and the Name of Father God. They will be redeemed from the earth, which in the last days will go through severe judgment. They will be called to endure with patience and to remain faithful to Jesus in spite of the temptations of the worldly Babylon and the pressure from the beast. Followers of Christ will be severely tested as to whether they will hold on to His Name or submit themselves to the mark of the evil one.

Asking the redeemed for their patient endurance implies that they may have to go through much persecution from the beast. However, there is assurance that those who die in the Lord, and who have shown their allegiance, will be redeemed and will sing a new song to the Lamb.

***"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, Let the redeemed of the Lord say so,
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, 'I'm redeemed, I'm redeemed!'"***
Our Redeemer lives!

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 14, TUESDAY

Rev 15:1-16:21

The Supreme Justice

Rev 15:3-4

“You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of the saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserved.” Rev 6:5-6

On this blessed Christmas day. we all praise God for the wonderful gift of His Son who has come to bring peace on earth and goodwill to all men. While we thank God for His mercy and grace, we need to remember that the main purpose of the incarnation of Jesus is to reconcile wicked sinners with the Holy God. Yet till the very end, many have not accepted this gift and continue to rebel against God.

Many Christians feel very troubled when they read of the calamities which will fall on the earth and its inhabitants at the end time. How can a loving God impose such severe punishment, they will ask. Instead, we should ask, how can a holy God allow such great wickedness to go unpunished. A good God must see that there is justice especially for those who have been persecuted for their faith. We cry out for justice, from the police when we are robbed or cheated of our belongings. We complain if criminals are not caught and punished for the crimes they commit.

The evil perpetrators have refused to repent and continue to curse God. They deserve punishment for their crimes against humanity including God's people. They will be judged by the All-Mighty Supreme Justice and God's judgments will be true and just.

For too long, many people, including some Christians, have lost the fear of God. We would rather picture God as a kind old man. We must understand that a good God must be both holy and loving, just and merciful, righteous and forgiving. This knowledge will bring us to both worship and glorify His Holy name. All nations will come and bow before the Lord God Almighty for His great and mighty deeds.

***Let us worship God with awe and wonder, for He is good and just.
‘The fear of the Lord is beginning of wisdom.’ (Proverbs 9:10)***

P.R.A.Y

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

The Final Conflict

Rev 17:14

"They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Rev 17:14

The day after Christmas is known as Boxing Day. It is not named after the violent combat sport but for the box which is often kept in the church to receive Christmas offerings which are later disbursed to the poor. Yet today's reading reflects more on the end-time conflict between good and evil.

We need not try to identify the woman on the beast, sometimes called the mystery Babylon. This chapter suggests that this will be a great city or country and will dominate the world's rulers. She is associated with much immorality, addiction and idolatry and will blaspheme against God. It is a rich city which gets its wealth from unrighteous activities. Worst of all, she has persecuted and killed many Christians who bore testimony to Jesus.

She will make an alliance with the evil one, the beast, and those countries which follow him, and will make war against Jesus and suppress His faithful church. Even now, there are many such countries which continue to persecute Christian believers.

The chapter continues to say that this alliance between the 'mystery Babylon' and the beast and its followers will fall apart and there will be war between them. Evil forces will fight among themselves to destroy one another. This is already happening and it helps us to understand some of the current world events making headlines today. There are dictatorial countries which have allied themselves with religious extremists to cause much havoc and terrorism in the world, often against the followers of Christ.

Verse 14 promises that Christ with all His supreme powers will defeat His enemies in the defense of His loyal followers. What a great comfort for us all! We are not alone when our enemies attack us. We shall be defended by the Lord Himself.

***'Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone,'
says a popular song. His presence shall always be with us.
His rod and His staff shall protect us.***

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

DEC 16, THURSDAY

Rev 19:1–20:15

Wedding Banquet in Heaven

Rev 20:11–12

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." Rev 19:7

Weddings are joyous occasions in most Asian societies. Months are spent in preparation for the auspicious day. All family members and relatives are involved in the various aspects of the celebrations. In rural areas, the whole village would be a hive of activity. Much thought is given to inviting friends and relatives to make sure that no one important is left out. No expense is spared.

The Bible says that there will be a final grand banquet to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb who is the Lord Jesus Christ and His bride who is the church. The angel says, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'

Let us make sure we are ready for this grand occasion. The bride shops for the best bridal gown and all the finery and accessories to match. The color of the gown is usually white which indicates purity. The heavenly bride is, however, instructed to wear fine linen, bright and clean, which is the heavenly symbol for the righteous acts of the saints.

We may not mind if we are not invited to the wedding dinners of our friends. However, we cannot afford not to receive an invitation for the heavenly wedding banquet. Let us make sure we are found worthy as guests by remaining faithful to the Lord and continuing to be righteous in all our deeds.

Let us rejoice in anticipation of the Wedding Banquet to come.

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 17, FRIDAY

Rev 21:1-27

God Dwells With Us

Rev 21:3-4

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Rev 21:3-4

It is the wish of every Christian to visit Jerusalem and walk through the Biblical sites. We have the desire to feel the presence of God in the holy city. However, in the last days, John reveals that the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, will descend from heaven. It will be a huge city, more than 2000 kilometers in length, width and height. It will accommodate all the millions of the citizens of the new heaven and the new earth.

There will be no more tears and suffering, no more pain or death. There will be no more thirst as there is the spring of the water of life. The city walls will sparkle with precious stones, each gate will be a marvelous glowing single pearl and the streets will glitter with pure gold.

More than all this grandeur, there will be the shekinah glory of God Himself. There is no need for a temple or any other holy building, for the Lord God Almighty and Jesus Christ will be the sanctuary. There is no need for light from the sun or the moon (or electric bulbs!) for the glory of God gives it light. God Himself will walk with us as He did with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We need not fear like the Israelites who dared not see God face to face for fear of death. Many of us can feel the presence of God when we pray and worship. Greater joys are in store for us who love the Lord.

***'And He walks with me, and He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own,
And the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known'.
- Charles Austin Miles -***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 18, SATURDAY

Rev 22:1-21

Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus

Rev 22:12

"Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Rev 22:12

Many people like to read detective stories. As the story unfolds, there will be dramatic events, interesting characters, and devious plots leading to quarrels and death. There will be many clues. Some may be misleading while others might point to the truth. There will be a lot of suspense. Finally, the story will climax, the answer is revealed and the mystery solved.

The book of Revelation is a similar story with many truths which we do not fully comprehend. There are also dramatic events and remarkable characters. However, we are not ignorant of the conclusion. We know who will win at the end!

The assurance that our Lord Jesus Christ will be coming again, and soon, has been the inspiration for many believers throughout history, especially those who are suffering under persecution. We shall be taken to the new garden where a crystal-clear river flows with the water of life that will quench any thirst. There we will see the tree of life with bountiful fruits to nourish us. Its leaves will heal the nations. God Himself will be with us.

The words of Jesus Christ are trustworthy and true. We have been given a preview of what will happen. We are told to be patient and continue to be faithful and holy. There will be rewards for everyone who bears His Name. He is coming soon to fulfil His promise. What great jubilation and celebration lie ahead!

***He is the Beginning and He is the End.
Hallelujah! Maranatha!***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 19, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 20, MONDAY

Isa 9:1-7

Four Clues To Who Jesus Is To You

Isa 9:6

Though their circumstances were grim, Isaiah tells Israel a Messiah is coming who will redeem everything.

Jesus is that Messiah, and in this passage, Isaiah uses four titles to describe Jesus' role and character: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus makes decisions with divine wisdom we will never understand. His insight isn't hidden from us. As a Wonderful Counselor, Jesus leads us to make wise decisions as well.

Mighty God is a nod to Jesus' divinity. Jesus is one with God. He was with God at the creation of the earth, and nothing is beyond His ability to affect.

Jesus is called Everlasting Father because, through Him, we can know God the Father. "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18, NIV).

Lastly, as Prince of Peace, Jesus is the ruler whose reign will bring about peace and tranquility that never cease.

For Israel, these names would have brought joy and comfort during dangerous and unsettling circumstances. The same is true for us today.

No matter what we're going through, when we are in Christ, we can look to Jesus as our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.

Reflect:

- ***Of the four names Isaiah uses to describe Jesus, which one means the most to you? Why?***
- ***How have you seen Jesus fulfill each of these roles in your life?***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 21, TUESDAY

Luk 1:5–25, Luk 1:57–66

The Surprising Benefit Of Being Honest About Your Doubts

Luk 1:13–14

“... the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord.’” - Luke 1:13-15

Have you ever wanted to believe God would make something happen, but the circumstances overwhelmingly pointed to “no”?

If that’s you, you’re not alone. When it came to parenthood, all signs pointed to “no” for Zechariah and Elizabeth. Their prayers for a child had resulted in old age and empty arms. So, when an angel showed up to tell Zechariah that Elizabeth was going to give birth, he understandably had some questions (Luke 1:18).

Zechariah was bold enough to let the Lord know he had doubts, but he wanted to believe. So, Zechariah confessed his doubt, and God used it to grow his faith.

Imagine this — Zechariah sat in silence as he watched his wife’s belly grow for nine miraculous months of pregnancy, and the only person he could talk to about it was God. How much closer must Zechariah and God have been at the end of Elizabeth’s pregnancy?

God doesn’t call us to be certain but to act faithfully in the face of uncertainty. That’s what Zechariah and Elizabeth did when it came time to name their baby. God told them his name was John, so that’s what they went with (Luke 1:59-63).

Zechariah and Elizabeth were faithful to listen to God, confess their doubts, and when it came time to act in obedience, they did.

Reflect:

- ***What does Zechariah’s life show you about God’s patience and love for us, even in our doubt?***
- ***Have you ever doubted God then saw Him at work in your situation?***
- ***Is there an area in your life where you doubt God now? Have you told Him?***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 22, WEDNESDAY

Mat 1:18-25

When The Right Thing Is Not The Easy Thing

Mat 1:21

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." - Matt 1:21

Joseph had a choice when he discovered Mary was pregnant. He could publicly divorce Mary, which would have led to Mary being stoned. Or, he could try to divorce Mary quietly.

Then, God gives Joseph a third option: Go through with the wedding.

Matthew 1:20 says, "But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.'"

Marrying Mary wasn't on Joseph's mind until the angel showed up. It just wasn't done. In their culture, marrying Mary required more faith than getting a divorce.

Like Joseph, we will face decisions that challenge our faith. We'll find ourselves in situations where obeying God will make us look crazy.

When that happens, remember God's words from Isaiah 55:8-9, "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

What's easy is not always right. And what's right is not always easy.

When we ask God to show us the way, He does. Sometimes, He affirms what we're already thinking. But other times, as He did with Joseph, God leads us to a faith-filled option we never knew was possible.

Reflect:

- ***When was the last time you had to make a difficult choice? How did you arrive at your decision?***
- ***What decisions are you facing this week that will require greater faith? Take some time to pray and ask God what He would have you do.***

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

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.” - Mic 5:2

Micah prophesies a ruler will come from Bethlehem, one who will shepherd his people and bring peace. Christmas celebrates God fulfilling this promise, but rarely do our lives reflect it. Somehow, the happiest season of all has become the most stressful season of all. We sing about peace yet rush through each day without it. But what if this Christmas could be different?

Phi 4:6-7 reminds us, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The social pressure to buy everyone a gift, go to every party, and fulfill every holiday tradition isn't going away. We bring peace to the chaos by learning to pray before we plan. God wants to be involved in every situation, including how we celebrate Him at Christmas. Jesus is our source of peace. So, talk to Him and read His Word. Isaiah 26:3 promises He “will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.”

The prophecy in Micah is a promise to us. We, too, can enjoy the peace Jesus brings in any season of life.

Reflect:

- ***When we feel like we don't have enough, taking time to give thanks reminds us how much we already have. What can you thank Jesus for right now?***
- ***Is the lead up to Christmas stressing you out? Take some time today to ask God how He wants you to celebrate this year.***

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

DEC 24, FRIDAY

Isa 7:1-14, Mat 1:23

Do You Believe God Is With You?

Isa 7:14

"... the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." - Isaiah 7:14

Jesus is "Immanuel" or "God with us." Through Jesus, God came and walked among creation. Jesus made a way to restore our relationship with God and gave us His Spirit, so we're never without Him.

Reminders of Jesus' birth are everywhere this time of year — in Christmas carols, church nativities, TV specials, and family traditions. But how many of us woke up today with the confidence that God is with us?

Our actions and attitudes change when we understand this truth.

Because God is with us, we can never be separated from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Because God is with us, we can accomplish His will for us (Philippians 2:13). And because God is with us, we don't have to live with fear, worry, or dissatisfaction.

When you're facing the heartache of Christmas without family, remember, God is with you. When you're fretting over what the in-laws might think, remember, God is with you. And when you're cuddled up with your kids around a fire, God is with you there, too.

It's one thing to know God is with us; it's another to carry this truth into each day. This Christmas, let the knowledge that God is with you lead you to love more fully, give more generously, and live more confidently.

Reflect:

- ***Where do you find it easy to believe that God is with you? Where do you struggle to believe that's true?***
- ***How will you approach this Christmas differently, knowing God is with you?***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 25, SATURDAY

Isa 52:7–10, Rom 10:8–15

The Most Beautiful Gift You Can Give This Christmas

Isa 52:7

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news...” (Isaiah 52:7).

If you’ve ever seen a runner’s feet or bathed a child who’s been playing barefoot outside, you know the beauty Isaiah describes isn’t in the feet themselves but in what they represent. In Isaiah’s day, messengers carried news from town to town.

Watchmen would see a messenger approaching in the distance and try to determine from their posture or speed if they were carrying good news.

You can imagine the anticipation and excitement building as the messenger gets closer. What will he say? What will the news be? The messenger is received like a celebrity, and when he speaks, everyone celebrates (Isaiah 52:8). It’s a beautiful moment.

When we share the good news of the Gospel, we are like that messenger. We aren’t asking people to give more or do more. We get to be the ones delivering the news, “Salvation is here!” (Romans 10:13). Jesus did all the work to save us and set us free.

Then, He gives us the privilege of delivering that message to the world. What better time than now, during the celebration of His birth, to share the hope Jesus brings.

Reflect:

- ***What makes the Gospel good news for you?***
- ***Are there people you know who need to hear the good news of Jesus? Ask the Lord for the opportunity to share it with them.***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 26, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

DEC 27, MONDAY

Joh 1:1-14

What Happened When Jesus Came To Earth

Joh 1:1-3

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." - Joh 1:1-3

It's a common plot for Christmas movies. Girl bumps her head and wakes up in a different reality. She remembers everything, but no one recognizes who she really is.

Do you ever wonder if that's how Jesus felt sometimes? He was walking around in the world He created, but few saw Him for who He was. John 1:10 says, "He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him."

Jesus was not part God, part man. He was completely divine and completely human at the same time. This is what makes Jesus' arrival as the most amazing event in all of history. The eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinitely holy God took on a human nature and lived among us!

As God and man, Jesus reveals how God thinks and how we should think. He models how to live and gives us the power to live that way. And because Jesus was God, He was without sin — making Him the only person who could make us right with God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In Jesus, we get a visible image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15). For hundreds of years, people heard from God through a complex religious system. They traveled to the temple to be in God's presence. But through Jesus, we can know God fully and talk to Him anytime, anywhere.

Reflect:

- ***Why is Jesus coming to earth a big deal for you personally?***
- ***What's one thing you've learned about God as you've been reading about Jesus' birth?***

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 28, TUESDAY

Isa 53:1–6, Joh 3:16–17, Joh 20:31

Miracles Don't Always Look Like We Thought They Would

Isa 53:3

“He was despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.” - Isa 53:3, NLT

When rescue doesn't come the way we thought it would, we grow restless. We would love for the answer to our prayers to hit us like a bolt of lightning while rainbow confetti sprinkles from the sky, and a harp plays in the background. But often, God works in ways we don't expect and would never see coming. Jesus fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah. Yet, His life runs contrary to the savior people had in mind.

Israel was looking for a mighty king to deliver them. But their rescuer wasn't going to be the typical hero. He would be an ordinary person; someone they would look down on or pass over (Isaiah 53:2-3). This humble servant would be pierced, crushed, and wounded for them (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus came in humility, suffered, and showed mercy. He didn't take over by might or force or will. Instead, Jesus gave His life so we could have eternal life. What God has prepared for us is greater than anything we can imagine (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Maybe you need healing from a chronic or undiagnosed illness. Maybe you're looking for work and wondering how you will provide for your family. The miracle you're looking for might not come in the package you expect, but it will come. God is faithful in fulfilling His promises.

When you're in a period of waiting and not knowing what comes next, sit and ponder the miracle of Jesus' birth and rest knowing that in Christ, all suffering will ultimately lead to God's glory. With God intervening on our behalf, what is there to fear?

Reflect:

- **What was the last miracle you witnessed? Did it happen the way you thought it would?**
- **How have you seen suffering and uncertainty give glory and honor to God?**
- **What miracles are you waiting for this Christmas? Share your desires and dreams with God. He loves you and wants to hear from you.**

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 29, WEDNESDAY

Psa 105:1-4, Psa 68:3-5

Celebrate Christmas All Year Long

Psa 105:3-4

Long after the tree is packed up and the lights are put away, the spirit of Christmas can live on in us. Christmas reminds of God's faithfulness, and His faithfulness never ends.

Psalm 105 tells us to sing to God and tell of all his wondrous works. Singing is powerful. When we sing, we're telling our hearts what's true and reminding ourselves of God's faithfulness.

Reading the Bible and talking with God in prayer are two more ways to keep God's faithfulness before us all year long. As we read the Bible, we see how God has been taking care of His people from the beginning of time.

Psalm 105:4 says, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always" (NIV). Always really does mean always. Cry out to God with your frustration. Ask Him to show you He's near and give you peace. God is always with you, ready to hear from you.

Record how God is speaking to you through Scripture, circumstances, and other Christians. It doesn't have to be complicated or detailed. It doesn't matter if it's digital or written. Keeping a record of when God shows up and shows off helps us recall His character and "glory in his holy name" (Psalm 105:3).

Christmas celebrates God coming to earth to be with us. When we take the time to be with Him, we can experience the same joy and hope we have at Christmas every day of the year.

Reflect:

- **Can you remember a time when God answered your prayers in a clear and specific way? Take some time to reflect on that today.**
- **Have you ever specifically asked God to help you feel His presence in your life? Go ahead and give it a try.**

P.R.A.Y

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

DEC 30, THURSDAY

Psa 31:1-24

Reflections for the End of the Year

Psa 31:14-16

Well, we have come to the last day of 2021. You might want to add, “Finally!” In so many ways this has been a long, hard year. If all we had to deal with was a global pandemic, that would be tough enough. But layered onto this affliction has been economic hardship, fear and anxiety affecting everyone. To this list you can surely add difficulties from your personal life and that of your friends, family, church, and city.

The events of 2021 reminded us that, as much as we might want to be in control of our life and might even believe we are, in fact we really aren’t. So much of what happens to us and to those we love is way beyond our control. I’ll admit that I don’t like this very much, but it’s true.

My feeling out of control led me, several months ago, to add a simple element to my morning devotions. One of the things I do each morning is recite portions of several psalms, ones I have memorized so I can have them with me throughout the day. My collection includes beloved passages, such as Psalm 100 (“Make a joyful noise to the Lord”). In May I added a few lines from Psalm 31: “But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love” (Psalm 31:14-16).

This psalm, attributed to David, is a cry for help from someone who is in a dangerous, distressing, and dreadful situation. Right before the verses I just quoted, David laments the fact that people are plotting to kill him (Psa 31:13). So how does he respond? David reaffirms his trust in the Lord. God is not just the God of heaven and earth, but “my God,” the God whom David knows intimately.

On the basis of this relationship, David prays, “My times are in your hand” (Psa 31:15). What happens during the times of his life and how long he will live are ultimately God’s to control. Yet, this isn’t a prayer of resignation, as if David believes that his life is established by fate. Rather, he knows that he can call out to God for help. So, he asks to be delivered from the hand of his enemies. David implores the Lord to look upon him with mercy and to save him as an expression of divine love.

When I echo David’s prayer each morning, saying, “My times are in your hand,” I feel a sense of release and relief. It’s as if I’m leaning back into God’s strong, trustworthy arms. I’m reminded that I belong to God, that I exist for the praise of his glory. I find myself wanting with greater urgency to use the time God has given me for his purposes. I can let go, at least for a moment, of the worry I carry around about myself, not to mention the world around me.

So, as we bid farewell to 2021 and say hello to 2022, it’s important to remember that our times, our years if you will, are in God’s hand. Though the calendar may change, though we may face unexpected challenges, disappointments, and losses in the new year, we are safe in God’s strong, merciful, loving hand.

Reflect

- **As you look back on 2021, what comes to mind? What thoughts? What feelings?**
- **When you feel out of control, what do you do?**
- **If you were to believe, really to believe, that your times were in God’s hand, what difference might this make in your life?**

Act:

As you think about the past year and prepare for a new year, let the fact that your times are in God’s hand sink into your heart.

You may even find it helpful to memorize this verse so you can take it with you all the time.

DEC 30, THURSDAY

Psa 31:1-24

Reflections for the End of the Year

Psa 31:14-16

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

The words of the old hymn ...

**“COUNT YOUR MY BLESSINGS NAME THEM ONE BY ONE
AND IT WILL SURPRISE YOU WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE.”**

still ring through today.

As the year draws to a close let's Count Our Blessings, Name Them One by One ...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Take Time to Thank God for Each and Everyone of These Blessings.

PS: Do not forget to Thank God for BWJ – completing 5 long years of reading His Word daily and systematically .

DEC 31, FRIDAY

Deu 8:1–20

What To Do on the Last Day of the Year

Lam 3:22–23

Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. Lam 3:22-23

This is it, the last day of the year, and within hours a new and strange-sounding year will begin full of what we have no idea what! Hopes, dreams, beginnings and endings. It's a bit scary! But should it be, really?

Tomorrow morning (or afternoon) when you rise and face the eastern sky, you won't find emblazoned across the heavens the words, "This is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday!" Neither will you find the warning, "Today is all you have so make it a good one!" You will find the winter sun piercing the clouds, squinting at you, driving back the darkness and giving you the light of another day.

Life really isn't broken up into days and months and years but into 24-hour cycles as the dawn of a new day comes; and these God-given periods are what life is about: sunrise and sunset, one day at a time.

Coming to the end of a year often is a cause for reflection, and that can be positive. Sometimes it's good to look back, to reflect, and to see the hand of God who brought you through some rough times. Before God took His children into the Promised Land, he asked them to look back. Here are the words from Deu 8:2, "*Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*"

"Remember how the LORD your God led you," was Moses' instruction. As you stand on the threshold of a New Year, there are four things which I hope you will remember which can serve as guideposts for the future.

First, **REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO YOU THIS PAST YEAR.** It was Jeremiah who cried out, "Great is your faithfulness!" He is still faithful today. Remember how God did meet you this past year, how He faithfully responded to your heart cry and saved you from disaster.

Next, **REMEMBER THE FACT THAT GOD IS SOVEREIGN AND THAT HE IS STILL IN CONTROL OF THE UNIVERSE.** 2 Chr 29:11 reminds us of just who God is: "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all." Let's refresh our memories about who God is. Yes, He is big enough to be in control of our lives.

Then **REMEMBER HIS PROVISION FOR YOU THIS PAST YEAR.** Are you familiar with the poet and song-writer, Annie Johnson Flint? Born in the late 1800s, hers was a life of difficulty and disability and yet she remembered the goodness of God. "Hitherto the Lord hath helped us,/ Hitherto His hand hath led," she penned. "Hitherto His arm protected,/ Hitherto His bounty fed./ Will His love desert us wholly,/ Will His heart our need forget?/ Will His presence clean forsake us who has never failed us yet?" How would you answer those questions?

Finally, **REMEMBER HIS PROMISES.** There are literally thousands of promises in God's word with your name attached to them. While some promises are given specifically to certain groups or people, most of the promises of the New Testament are made to God's children. They belong to you, not because you are good, or beautiful, or kind to others, but because you are God's child. They are part of your inheritance in Jesus Christ.

Face the New Year one day at a time, walking hand in hand with Him who knows no surprises and will meet you at the beginning of each new day.

DEC 31, FRIDAY

Deu 8:1-20

What To Do on the Last Day of the Year

Lam 3:22-23

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

**Personal Prayer Needs for
the Coming Year(s)**

**Prayer Needs for
My Family Members**

Not New Year Resolutions But God-Given Burdens & Desires ...

**Salvation - People I want to bring before
the Lord for their Salvation**

**Discipleship – To Disciple OR to be Discipled
Prayerfully decide who you would want to
disciple you & who you want to disciple.**

To Pray Our God-Given Burdens & Desires Into Fruition

"HE APPOINTED TWELVE THAT

they might be with him

AND THAT HE MIGHT SEND THEM OUT TO PREACH AND TO
HAVE AUTHORITY TO DRIVE OUT DEMONS."

MARK 3:14-15

Lunch-time Devotion

FOLLOWING BWJ DAILY READINGS

Monday to Saturday, 12 PM-1 PM

zoom @ tinyurl.com/SSMCLTD

ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN

also featured at facebook.com/SSMethodistChurch



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