

SUNGAI WAY-SUBANG METHODIST CHURCH

Being with Jesus

VOL 2, MAY–AUGUST 2021

BWJ PLUS

NAME:

Being with
PASSION

Going with
PURPOSE

Doing with
POWER

SSMC's VISION

Transforming Lives, Expanding His Kingdom

Dear SSMC Church Family,

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

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

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

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

Just a quick recap on BWJ 2021:

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

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

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

Blessed Continuing BWJing 2021

Ps Swee Ming

16th March 2021

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GUIDELINES TO READING THE BIBLE CHRONOLOGICALLY

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

For your devotion, please try to use 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?

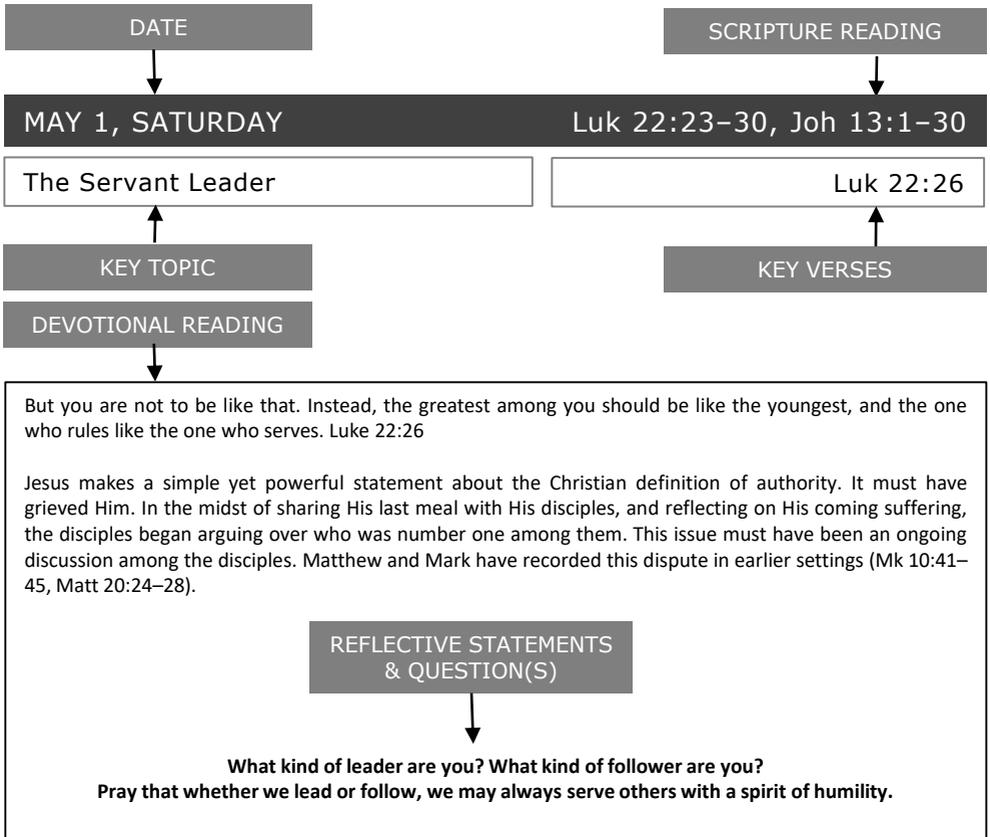
"To the degree & to the extent that I yield and submit to the Holy Spirit in my life, God's Kingdom will come more and more into my life, my family, my Discipleship Group, my work, my Church & my community."

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:



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

JOURNAL YOUR REFLECTIONS, IMPRESSIONS, THOUGHTS, LESSONS HERE.

ALSO PRAYER NEEDS FOR YOURSELF & OTHERS

**SOURCE
REFERENCE**

MAY 1, SATURDAY Luk 22:23–30, Joh 13:1–30

The Servant Leader

Luk 22:26

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 1, SATURDAY

Luk 22:23–30, Joh 13:1–30

The Servant Leader

Luk 22:26

As Jesus' hour of humiliation draws near he reveals to his disciples the supreme humility which shaped the love he had for them. He stoops to perform a menial task reserved for servants – the washing of smelly, dirty feet. In stooping to serve his disciples Jesus knew he would be betrayed by one of them and that the rest would abandon him through disloyalty. Such knowledge could have easily led to bitterness or hatred. Jesus met the injury of betrayal and disloyalty with the greatest humility and supreme love. Jesus loved his disciples to the very end, even when they failed him and forsook him. The Lord loves each of us unconditionally. His love has power to set us free to serve others with Christ-like compassion and humility. Does the love of Christ rule in your heart and thoughts and in your actions?

"Lord Jesus, your love conquers all and never fails. Help me to love others freely, with heart-felt compassion, kindness and goodness. Where there is injury, may I sow peace rather than strife."

How do you treat people who have caused you grief or disappointment, especially those who might be related to you in bonds of friendship or kinship? In his last supper discourse, Jesus addressed the issue of fidelity and disloyalty in relationships. Jesus knew beforehand that one of his own disciples would betray him. Such knowledge could have easily led Jesus to distance himself from such a man and to protect himself from harm's way. Instead, Jesus shows affection and loyalty to those who were his own, even to the one he knew would do violence to him through betrayal. Jesus used a quotation from Psalm 4:9 which describes an act of treachery by one's closest friend. In the culture of Jesus' day, to *eat bread* with someone was a gesture of friendship and trust.

Jesus extends such friendship to Judas right at the moment when Judas is conspiring to betray his master. The expression *lift his heel against me* reinforces the brute nature of this act of violence. Jesus loved his disciples to the end and proved his faithfulness to them even to death on the cross. Through his death and resurrection Jesus opened a new way of relationship and friendship with God. Jesus tells his disciples that if they accept him they also accept the Father who sent him. This principle extends to all who belong to Christ and who speak in his name. To accept the Lord's messenger is to accept Jesus himself. The great honor and the great responsibility a Christian has is to stand in the world for Jesus Christ. As his disciples we are called to speak for him and to act for him. Are you ready to stand for Jesus at the cross of opposition and hostility?

"Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you, that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus our Lord." (Prayer of Saint Augustine)

Jesus' disciples were put to the test as Jesus prepared to make the final and ultimate sacrifice of his own life for their sake and for all the world. What was different between Peter and Judas? Judas deliberately betrayed his Master while Peter, in a moment of weakness, denied him with an oath and a curse. Judas' act was cold and calculated. Peter, however, never meant to do what he did. He acted impulsively, out of weakness and cowardice. Jesus knew both the strength of Peter's loyalty and the weakness of his resolution. He had a habit of speaking with his heart without thinking through the implications of what he was saying. The treachery of Judas, however, is seen at its worst when Jesus makes his appeal by showing special affection to him at his last supper. John says that Satan entered into Judas when he rejected Jesus and left to pursue his evil course. Satan can twist love and turn it into hate. He can turn holiness into pride, discipline into cruelty, affection into complacency.

We must be on our guard lest Satan turns us from the love of God and the path which God has chosen for us. The Holy Spirit will give us grace and strength in our time of testing. If we submit to Jesus we will walk in the light of his truth and love. If we turn our backs on him we will stumble and fall in the ways of sin and darkness. Are you ready to follow Jesus in his way of the cross?

"Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart which no unworthy thought can drag downwards; an unconquered heart which no tribulation can wear out; an upright heart which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. Bestow upon me also, O Lord my God, understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and a faithfulness that may finally embrace you; through Jesus Christ, our Lord." (Prayer of Thomas Aquinas)

MAY 2, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 3, MONDAY

Joh 14:1-31

I Will Return for You

Joh 14:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 3, MONDAY

Joh 14:1-31

The Other 'ME'

Joh 14:16-17a

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth." John 14:16-17a

In John 13:34 Jesus says, 'A new command I give you: Love one another'. Hitherto He has spoken of His love for them and their obligation to love one another. Now for the first time in the Gospel, He speaks of their love for and obedience to Him.

It is within the context of this loving obedience that He promises them a Paraclete (helper, companion, counsellor) who is the Spirit of Truth whom He will request the Father to send to be with them forever (v 16). While He will leave them to return to the Father after accomplishing His 'work', the Spirit, 'another comforter and helper' will be their constant companion. Not only will He be with them but He will also live in them. Though unknown to the unbelieving world, He, the Spirit, will teach them 'all things' and will also remind them of what the Lord has taught them (v 26). He assures them that they will not be bereft, having to fend for themselves. He will come to them. Though the world will not see Him, they will. With the coming of the Spirit they will realize the great truth that He is in the Father, and they are in Him and He is in them (v 20). The one who knows His commands and obeys them loves Him (Jesus) and will be loved both by the Father and Himself.

There are two ways by which He will come. He will come back (literally) to take them to be with Him (a future event - v 3); He will also come to abide with them through the Spirit (v 18) as soon as He returns to the Father. 'I am going away and I will come back for you.' Jesus says that they should be glad that He is going away, in the light of what has been revealed to them.

The church today rejoices in the presence of the Spirit in its midst and also looks forward in eager anticipation to the day of Christ's return to establish His kingdom of peace.

Do you know the love that surpasses all, that is stronger than death itself (Song of Songs 8:6)? In Jesus' Last Supper discourse, he speaks of the love he has for his disciples and of his Father's love. He prepares his disciples for his imminent departure to return to his Father by exhorting them to prove their love for him through their loyalty and obedience to his word. He promises them the abiding instruction and consolation of the Holy Spirit.

Saint Augustine says *the Lord loves each of us as if there were only one of us to love*. God's love for each of us is as real and tangible as the love of a mother for her child and the love of a lover who gives all for his beloved. God made us for love — to know him personally and to grow in the knowledge of his great love for us. How can we know and be assured of the love of God? The Holy Spirit helps us to grow in the knowledge of God and his great love. The Spirit enables us to experience the love of God and to be assured of the Lord's abiding presence with us (see Rom 8:35-39). The Holy Spirit also opens our ears to hear and understand the word of God. Do you listen attentively to God's word and believe it?

Ask the Holy Spirit to inflame your heart with the love of God and his word.

"Lord, in love you created me and you drew me to yourself. May I never lose sight of you nor forget your steadfast love and faithfulness. And may I daily dwell upon your word and give you praise in the sanctuary of my heart, You who are my All."

MAY 4, TUESDAY Joh 15:1-27

Fruit, More Fruit, Much Fruit

Joh 15:5

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

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

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

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

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

**True discipleship is evidenced by holding to Christ's teaching (obeying His commands - 8:31, 15:10), loving one another as Christ loved (13:34, 15:12) and bearing much fruit (15:8).
It is as true today as it was when Jesus announced it.
The Christian life may be summed up in two words - progress and perseverance.**

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

MAY 4, TUESDAY

Joh 15:1-27

A Hostile World

Joh 15:19

"You do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." John 15:19

In the previous section (15:1-17), John focuses on the vine (Jesus), the branches (His disciples) and the gardener (God). In this section, a fourth form is added to the equation, the world. This 'world' is not the world of nature, nor the human race generally but rather the realm in which the 'prince of the world reigns - where society - its values, world view, lifestyle - is governed by humanistic principles (1 John 2:16). Cynical Sadducees, hypocritical Pharisees, discontented soldiers, avaricious tax-collectors belong to this category. It is natural therefore that they will be bitterly opposed to Jesus and His teachings of love, sincerity and humble service. They also accused Him of breaking the Sabbath and of blasphemy (His claim to be God).

Jesus warns His disciples of what they will have to face in the future, namely the hatred of the world. 'If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first' (v 18). What Jesus said to His disciples 2000 years ago is just as true and relevant for the church today. The underlying reason is that it rejects Jesus and His claims of being God incarnate and the only Savior of mankind.

The world rejected all that He said and did. Christians should not be surprised if it also rejects them and the message they proclaim. Rejecting Him, Jesus says, is to reject the Father who sent Him. Those who hear the truth about Him and reject it are worse off than those who never heard of Him. The Holy Spirit, the Companion and Counsellor, will confirm Jesus to the world. Christians are also required to do the same.

Jesus says that His purpose in telling the disciples of the troubles they will have to face is that they may be forewarned and not be stumbled when excommunication, persecution or even death descend on them. The world, not knowing God or His Son, will think it is serving God by stretching out their hands against them.

Christians the world over need to be mindful of the persecuted and suffering church in many lands. We need to be in earnest constant prayer that it may be able to endure the suffering and remain faithful to the Lord. Christians also need to offer whatever help they can through various Christian agencies engaged in relief work.

What does Jesus mean when he says "you are not of this world"? The "world" in scripture refers to that society of people who are hostile towards God and opposed to his will. The "world" rejected Jesus and his disciples can expect the same treatment. Jesus leaves no middle ground for his followers. We are either for him or against him, for his kingdom of light or for the kingdom of darkness. The prophet Isaiah warned that humans separated from God by sin and spiritual darkness would end up *calling evil good and good evil* (Isaiah 5:20).

How can we rightly distinguish good from evil? The love of God draws us to all that is lovely, true and good. If we truly love God then we will submit to his truth and will for our lives. A friend of God cannot expect to be a friend of the world. Jesus' demand is unequivocal and without compromise. *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him* (1 John 2:15). We must make a choice either for or against God. Do you seek to please God in all your thoughts, actions, and relationships? Let the Holy Spirit inflame your heart with the love of God.

"Lord, may the fire of your love inflame my heart with zeal for your kingdom. And may there be no rivals to keep me from loving you first and foremost above all else."

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

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

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

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

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

Christians can rejoice in the fact that the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor and Companion, is as available to the church today as it was at His advent at Pentecost. Armed with the word of God and the presence and power of the Spirit, the church is equipped to face an indifferent and even hostile world.

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

MAY 5, WEDNESDAY

Joh 16:1-33

Coming and Going

Joh 16:33

"I came from the Father and entered the world, now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." John 16:28

Jesus' reference to His disciples not seeing Him and then, after a little while, seeing Him (16:16) has them completely puzzled. What does He mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? Anticipating that they will question Him about His enigmatic statement, He begins by saying that He is telling them the truth when He says they will experience a season of anguish (while the world rejoices at His absence) but this will turn to joy at His 'reappearance'.

He compares these experiences of theirs to that of a woman in labor shortly before and immediately after childbirth. No one will be able then to rob them of their joy. At that time, He assures them ('I tell you the truth') their requests to God the Father in His Name, will be granted, making their joy complete. He urges them to make the requests known in the name of their absent Lord – something they have not done hitherto because He is with them. The Father loves them because they believe that He (Jesus) has come from God.

Jesus sums up His mission on earth with the words of verse 28. His incarnation, ministration, immolation (crucifixion), resurrection, ascension and glorification are all encapsulated in that pithy statement and summing up of His life's work on behalf of His Father. Because of Him 'speaking clearly without figures of speech' (v 29), He confirms the disciples' belief that He has come from God (v 30). Though they believe at last, it will not be long before they will desert Him, leaving Him alone, but He will have the Father with Him.

His final remarks are, 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (v 33).

Like the disciples, Christians are forewarned of what to expect in the world. However, they are to be encouraged because of Christ's victory over the world.

What would you give to know all truth! Truth, however, is not something we create nor is it our discovery. It is the gift of God who is the possessor and the giver of all truth. Jesus tells His disciples that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to reveal what is true. How can this be? Skeptics of truth don't want to believe in an absolute Truth. If truth is objective then it must be submitted to as authoritative. Some fear the truth because they think it will inhibit their freedom.

Jesus told His disciples that the truth will set them free (John 8:32). The truth liberates us from doubts, illusions, and fears. Since God is the source of all truth, then the closer we draw to Him and listen to His word, the more we grow in the knowledge of Him and of His great love and wisdom for us. Jesus told His disciples that He would send them the Spirit of truth who will announce to them the things to come. Through the Holy Spirit, we proclaim our ancient faith in the saving death and resurrection of Christ until He comes again. The Lord gives us His Holy Spirit as our divine Teacher and Helper that we may grow in the knowledge and wisdom of God. Do you seek the wisdom that comes from above and do you willingly obey God's word?

"Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and guide me into your way of truth. Free me from erroneous and false ways and lead me in the knowledge of your ways and your will for my life. May there be nothing in my life that is not under your Lordship."

MAY 6, THURSDAY

Joh 17:1-26

Don't take them Out of the World

Joh 17:9

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 6, THURSDAY

Joh 17:1-26

The Missionary Purpose of Christian Unity

Joh 17:21

"May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." John 17:21

A recent issue of Berita NECF, a bi-monthly publication of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia, focused on the challenges of and the need for Christian unity. This emphasis is a timely call for Christian churches to reflect on the prayer of Jesus in our reading today. Jesus prayed that those who believe in His name would be one, just as He and the Father are one (vs 21-23).

There are two significant aspects of Jesus' prayer for unity. First, this petition is repeated three times, signifying the importance of the request. Second, the petition for Christian unity is missional in nature so that the unbelieving world may believe that God's love is manifested in the sending of Jesus into the world.

As a physical manifestation of the present reality of the kingdom of God, the church is called to be a witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God does not call the church to be a saved community but a saving community. As such, Christian unity goes beyond the surface of lip service and external union. It is sought not for itself but for the sake of mission - that the world may know Jesus. As such, the unity of believers challenges the unbelieving world to believe and recognize the redemptive work of Christ. If we fail to be united, how can we be effective witnesses for Christ? If there is no Christian unity, how can the unbelieving world be convinced of the message of Christ and be convicted of its sinfulness? O, how we need to listen to the prayer of Jesus - again, and again, and again!

Remember, the world is watching the church of Jesus Christ for the demonstration of the love of God as manifested through the cross of Christ. Therefore, pray for Christian unity in your country.

Pray for Christian leaders of various churches and denominations that they may be united for the sake of the Gospel.

Do you know what your aim or mission in life is? Jesus' aim and mission was to glorify his heavenly Father. All he said and did gave glory to his Father. On the eve of his sacrifice and in the presence of his disciples, Jesus made his high priestly prayer: "Holy Father, keep them in your name that they may be one as we are one." Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples. Jesus' prayer for his people is that we be united with God the Father in his Son and through his Holy Spirit and be joined together, in unity with all who are members of Christ's body. Jesus saw glory in the cross rather than shame. Obedience to his Father's will was his glory. Jesus kept his Father's word even when tempted to forgo the cross. His strength was not in himself but in his Father who kept him. We, too, must take up our cross and follow the Lord Jesus wherever he may call us. He will give us the strength and power of the Holy Spirit to live as his disciples. John Henry Newman wrote: "God has created me, to do him some definite service; he has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission - I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. Therefore, I will trust him. Whatever, wherever I am. I cannot be thrown away." Do you trust in God and in his call for your life?

Jesus prayed that his disciples would be sanctified and consecrated in God's truth and holiness. The scriptural word for consecration comes from the same Hebrew word which means holy or set apart for God. This word also means to be equipped with the qualities of mind and heart and character for such a task or service. Just as Jesus was called by the Father to serve in holiness and truth, so we, too, are called and equipped for the task of serving God in the world as his ambassadors. God's truth frees us from ignorance and the deception of sin. It reveals to us God's goodness, love, and wisdom. And it gives us a thirst for God's holiness. The Holy Spirit is the source and giver of all holiness. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, he transforms us by his purifying fire and changes us in the likeness of Christ. Is your life consecrated to God?

"Lord, take my life and make it wholly pleasing to you. Sanctify me in your truth and guide me by your Holy Spirit that I may follow you faithfully wherever you lead."

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

Second Chance

Joh 13:34–35

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

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

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

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

**God gives us second chances.
Is there someone you should be giving a second chance to?**

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

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

Second Chance

Joh 13:34-35

How does God reveal his glory to us? In his Last Supper discourse Jesus speaks of his glory and the glory of his Father. What is this glory? It is the cross which Jesus speaks of here. The cross of Jesus shows us that the greatest glory in life is the glory of willingly sacrificing one's life for the sake of another. In the cross God reveals the breadth of his great love for sinners and the power of redemption which cancels the debt of sin and reverses the curse of our condemnation. Jesus gave his Father supreme honor and glory through his obedience and willingness to sacrifice his life on the cross.

The greatest trust one can give to their leader is the willingness to obey in the line of duty, even to the point of putting oneself in harm's way. In warfare the greatest honor belongs not to those who survive but to those who give the supreme sacrifice of their lives. Jesus also speaks of the Father bringing glory to the Son through the great mystery of the Incarnation and Cross of Christ. God the Father gave us his only begotten Son for our sake, to redeem us from slavery to sin and death. He freely offered his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins and the sins of the world.

There is no greater proof of God's love for us than the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the cross we see a new way of love – a love that is selfless, sacrificial, forgiving and compassionate beyond comprehension. Jesus commands us, his disciples, to love one another just as he has loved us. How can we love one another selflessly, sacrificially, and with compassion? Through the victory of the cross and resurrection, we have access to God's grace and mercy. God gives us new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit and he fills our hearts with faith, hope, and love. Paul the Apostle reminds us that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Romans 5:5). As we turn to God with trust and obedience, he transforms our hearts and frees us to love others with compassion and kindness. Do you want to bring glory to God in the way you love others?

"Lord Jesus, your love knows no bounds and your obedience to the Father reverses the curse of our disobedience. May I bring you glory in the sacrifice of my will to the will of the Father and in my love and compassion for others, both for those who treat me well and for those who cause me grief or harm."

Are you prepared for trial and testing? Jesus was put to the test at the beginning of his public ministry when Satan offered him power, position, and all the kingdoms under his dominion (Luke 4:1-13). Jesus had to wrestle with temptation and now he warns Peter that he, too, will have to struggle for his very life. Peter was a courageous man. He gave up his business and everything he had to follow Jesus. Now he promises Jesus that he will go with him through any trouble, be it imprisonment or violent death. Satan knows both our weakness and our strength. And he often tests us in our strength to make us fall. Why is that the case?

Where we are strongest we are often over-confident and unprepared with our guard down. Peter was passionately loyal to his Master, but he was unprepared for the test that was to come. Jesus not only warns Peter, but prays for him, and then calls him in turn to be a source of help and strength to his brothers when they face temptation. We often cannot help someone in their weakness and failure until we have suffered similar trial and shame.

Because Jesus "himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted" (Heb 2:18).

MAY 8, SATURDAY

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

When the Going Gets Tough

Mar 14:38

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

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

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

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

What do you do when the going gets tough?

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 8, SATURDAY

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

When the Going Gets Tough

Mar 14:38

Jesus did his best to prepare his disciples for what was to come – his betrayal, rejection by his own people, and violent death on the cross. This was to fulfil what the scriptures and the prophets had foretold, that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer before he entered into his glory. Jesus was tempted like us in everything but sin. Now he undergoes the worst temptation yet to face him, to accept or to reject the agony of death on a cross.

Jesus had the power and the means to escape defeat and death at the hands of his enemies. But he chose the way of the cross for our sake and for our salvation. How do you face opposition, failure, trial, and rejection? Do you look to God for strength to overcome adversity with faith, trial with hope, and rejection with love? Jesus went to his favorite place of prayer, the Garden of Gethsemane, to face such trial and testing. In prayer to his Father in heaven he found the strength he needed, both to embrace the Father's will and to accept the suffering that must come his way in order to carry out that will. What is the cross that you and I must face each and every day? When my will "crosses" with God's will, then his will must be done. Are you ready to take up your cross to follow the Lord Jesus?

In the Lord's prayer Jesus instructs his disciples to pray that we might not be "led into temptation". Sin results from our consenting to temptation. God wants to set us free from evil. We are engaged in a battle between "flesh and spirit", and so we must ask God for the Spirit of discernment and strength that we might not take the way that leads to sin. The Holy Spirit helps us to discern between trials that are necessary and good for our spiritual growth (Romans 5:3-5, 2 Tim. 3:12), and temptation which leads to sin and spiritual death (James 1:14-15). Discernment unmasks the lie of temptation which makes sin look good and desirable, when in reality its fruit is death.

That is why Satan is called the "father of lies". We must resist his lies and cling to the truth so that we may choose what is good rather than evil. If we decide in our heart that we want to choose what is good and to obey God, then God will surely give us the strength and help we need to overcome sin. Paul the Apostle tells us: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13). We will only see victory in our struggle against temptation to sin if we take it to the Lord in prayer. It was by prayer that Jesus overcame his tempter in the struggle of his agony. We, too, must be vigilant in prayer and ask God for the strength and perseverance to be faithful to him to the end.

Satan will try his best to induce us to choose our will over God's will. If he cannot induce us to apostatize or to sin morally, he will then try to get us to make choices that will lead us away from what God wants for us. Jesus was tempted like us and he overcame not by his own human strength but by the grace and strength which his Father gave to him. He had to renounce his will for the will of his Father. He succeeded because he wanted to please his Father and he trusted that his Father would give him the strength to overcome the obstacles that stood in the way. The Lord gives us his Holy Spirit to be our strength and guide and our consoler in temptation and testing. God the Father is ready to give us all that we need to live in his way of love and righteousness. Do you rely on the Lord for your strength and help?

"Lord, your word is life and joy for me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit that I may have the strength and courage to embrace your will in all things and to renounce whatever is contrary to it."

MAY 9, SUNDAY – Mother’s Day

What does the Bible say about Christian Mothers?

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

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

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

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

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

**PLEASE PRAY FOR ALL MOTHERS INCLUDING SPIRITUAL MOTHERS & GRANDMOTHERS
- Thank God for them and Pray God’s Blessing Upon Them.**

MAY 9, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 10, MONDAY Mat 26:47–56, Mar 14:43–52, Luk 22:47–53, Joh 18:2–11

Jesus Is In Control

Luk 22:51

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

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

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

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

Notice the grace and gentle strength of Jesus.

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

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

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

MAY 10, MONDAY

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

The Kiss of an Enemy

Mar 14:45

A kiss has been defined as ‘the contraction of the mouth due to the enlargement of the heart’. In Jesus’ day and culture, it was customary for disciples to kiss their teacher as a sign of submission, affection and respect. Yet, in this instance, Judas’ kiss is a sign of treachery, betrayal and hypocrisy. Judas cheapens this gesture of love and goodwill. Proverbs 27:6 rightly warns us that ‘wounds from an enemy can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses’.

The destinies of Judas and Peter seem poignantly intertwined. Both assume positions of leadership within Jesus’ circle. Both see and hear wondrous things. Both at one time or another proclaim their allegiance to Jesus. Yet as the stakes increase, both deny their Master.

The difference between them, however, is that although Judas is remorseful, he is not repentant. Throughout the Gospels, Judas typically addresses Jesus as ‘Rabbi’ or ‘Teacher’ (14:45). Not once does Judas acknowledge Jesus as ‘Lord’. This is a warning to us that even those who seem closest to Jesus can completely steel their hearts against Him.

Peter responds to Judas’ betrayal with the sword. Yet in hindsight, he was fighting the wrong enemy with the wrong weapon (2 Cor 10:3-6; Eph 6:10-18). In contrast to Peter, Jesus acts with grace while all others act with malice. He heals Malchus’ wounded ear (Jn 18:10). This is the last miracle performed by Jesus before the cross. Will Malchus be able to hear the true shepherd’s voice with his restored ears?

Is Jesus merely our Teacher or is He our Lord?

Do you know the pain of rejection? The greatest pain and injury comes not from our enemies but from those closest to us. Psalm 55 foretells the suffering of rejection which God’s anointed King and Messiah would endure for our sake: “It is not an enemy who taunts me – then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me – then I could hide from him. But it is you, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to hold sweet converse together; within God’s house we walked in fellowship” (Psalm 55:12-14). In the ancient world a kiss was a sign of intimate friendship and trust. Judas’ betrayal with a kiss shows the hypocrisy of his love and trust. This is literally a “kiss of death” not only because it leads to Jesus’ death but is also a sign of the death of one who lost all hope and abandoned God. In betraying Jesus, Judas rejected the one and only hope for freedom from sin and condemnation and the hope of reconciliation and restoration to friendship with God. Jesus met rejection not with bitterness or resentment, but with love and pity. God will never stop loving us no matter how far we stray from him or abandon hope. When you encounter injury and rejection from others, how do you respond? With merciful love and a forgiving heart or with bitterness and revenge?

Jesus met his betrayal and arrest with serenity and with confident trust in his Father. He knew that this was Satan’s hour of darkness but God’s light and truth would prevail in the end. How did the other apostles meet this trial? They were unprepared even though Jesus has warned them about his betrayal. And they had forgotten God for the moment. Their will was to resist force with force rather than peaceably submit to God’s will. Jesus never failed to show mercy and compassion even to his enemies. Luke tells us that Jesus “touched” the severed ear and healed the high priest’s slave who had been struck by one of Jesus’ own disciples (Luke 22:51). When adversity strikes how do you respond? With fear and panic or with confident hope and trust in God?

"Lord, only you can save us from the blindness of sin and despair. May your light dispel the darkness of our lives and give us hope and joy. Fill our hearts with mercy and compassion that we may bring hope to those who have no hope and show them the light of Christ."

MAY 11, TUESDAY

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

Justice Denied

Mat 26:59

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 11, TUESDAY

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

Right Means, Wrong Ends

Mar 14:62

What charges could have been laid on Jesus to warrant his death? It is unlikely that healing the sick on the Sabbath, claiming to rebuild the Temple in three days and expelling demons would qualify for death. Nor could they pronounce a death sentence on Jesus unilaterally. As a province of Rome, Jerusalem requires the consent of the Roman authorities to do so.

This is therefore a 'show trial'. The verdict has already been determined. They are merely looking for a charge to justify it. They cannot assassinate Jesus lest it provokes a riot and a subsequent crackdown from their Roman rulers. If Jesus had simply acknowledged that He was a human prophet, He would have escaped death. But when Jesus boldly proclaims that He is indeed the Son of God, their goal to trap Jesus is met.

The tearing of robes by the Chief Priest, usually symbolic of grief, is now almost a sign of joy. All restraint is cast aside when His sentence is pronounced. A legal trial has been used for illegal ends. Ironically, in the process, they follow strictly the letter of the law by invalidating the testimonies of their unreliable witnesses. It is harder to agree on a lie than to simply tell the truth. This gathering is to maintain the external appearance of legality. It is a case of 'rule by law', not 'rule of law'.

**Beware of using the 'right' means in the eyes of men to pursue wrong ends in the eyes of God.
One day, Jesus, the 'Son of Man' (Psa 110:1; Dan 7:13) will return
in judgement and right every wrong.**

Jesus was cross-examined by the high priest and the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. The high priest by law was required to wait until morning before he could call the Sanhedrin to try Jesus. In their eagerness to eliminate Jesus they did not hesitate to break their own rules for a fair trial and they used false witnesses.

Jesus' captors also used mockery and physical intimidation to trip up his testimony. They hoped he would say something they could use as evidence of criminal action. When they pressed Jesus for his claim to be the Christ (or Messiah in Hebrew) and the Son of God, he did not deny it but stated simply, "I am". They understood the claim to be the Son of God an insult to God's majesty and therefore blasphemy, which was punishable by death. Jesus bore ill-treatment, mockery, and the charge of blasphemy with peace and confidence.

In faith he knew beyond a doubt that what men would try to do to him could not thwart the purposes of God. The cross would lead to ultimate triumph over sin and death and God's kingdom would prevail over the forces of evil and Satan.

Is your faith and hope securely anchored in Christ's victory on the cross?

"Lord Jesus, you willingly suffered and died for our sake and for our salvation. You took upon yourself the burden of our guilt and the punishment due to our sins. Strengthen my faith and help me in my trials that I may never deny you or forsake your ways."

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

A Searching Glance

Luk 22:61

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lord, Search My Heart

Luk 22:61

When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." Again he denied it. After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean." Mark 14:69-70

When asked by Jesus, 'Who do you say I am?' Peter had answered, 'You are the Messiah.' It was upon this rock of revelation that God was going to build His church. Peter was sure he would not deny Jesus. He vehemently defended himself when Jesus prophesied his denials and told him that Satan had asked to sift him. We know that the devil roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. We are to resist him and stand firm through faith in the victory of Christ's blood shed for us (1 Pet 5:8-9).

Peter did not pray even after Jesus admonished him to pray so that he would not fall into temptation (v 38). Therefore, when challenged, he denied all accusations and disowned Jesus. When the cock crowed, Jesus turned and looked straight at him (Luk 22:61). Their eyes locked and Peter was brought to focus on the Lord. He humbly remembered what Jesus had said about his denials. He then wept bitter tears of repentance.

Jesus had prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. He is still interceding for us in heaven while the Holy Spirit intercedes within the believer on earth. Peter was later asked three times by the Lord, 'Do you truly love Me?' He could answer from the bottom of his heart, 'Yes, Lord, You know that I love You' (Joh 21:15-17). It was Peter, the stout-hearted, who preached on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-41). Such is the grace, mercy, lovingkindness, patience and faithfulness of our God!

Invite God to search your heart, convict and lead you in His ways. Pray that the eyes of our heart may be enlightened that we may know in our heart what we know in our head.

"I have betrayed innocent blood." Matthew 27:4

Stories abound of people who use devious plans to achieve their aims. They team up with people or friends of the same devious minds to work out their plans. In the end, their plans backfire. Some are arrested and jailed, others become depressed and never quite get over their deeds of wickedness and shame.

Judas Iscariot was from Judea while the other disciples were from Galilee. In the beginning Judas would have shown promise and he was chosen to take care of the finances. In the course of Jesus' ministry, Judas was seized with an overpowering concern for an earthly Jewish kingdom with Jesus as King. When he saw the Jewish leaders oppose Jesus, he took matters into his own hands. He helped the Jews to arrest Jesus. Perhaps Judas thought Jesus would then fight back and establish His kingdom. But when he saw his plan backfire and Jesus condemned and delivered to Pilate, 'he was seized with remorse' and returned the money to the chief priests and elders (v 3). He confessed, 'I have sinned' (v 4). The chief priests replied, 'What is that to us?'

The act of betrayal had been committed. Sadly, Judas confessed his sin to the wrong people who did not care about his spiritual state of well-being. How tragic, too, that the chief priests and elders, the religious leaders of the day, cared nothing about the shedding of innocent blood (v 4). They were partakers of the sin and exhibited a callous and careless attitude to the confession of Judas. The field of blood (Akeldama) would always be a witness to Judas' confession that he had shed innocent blood.

Judas had three years with the Lord and stood to gain everything in Christ. Salvation and eternal blessings of belonging to Christ could have been his portion. But he lost it all. Let us hold dearly to our treasures in Christ.

MAY 13, THURSDAY Mat 27:11-26, Mar 15:1-15, Luk 23:1-25

Vengeance Belongs to God

Mar 15:5

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

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

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

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

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

Let God be the Judge.

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

<p>P.R.A.Y</p>	<p>PRAY & PRAISE READ & REFLECT ASK & APPLY YIELD & YAKHAL</p>
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MAY 13, THURSDAY

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

Courage Lacking

Luk 23:22

How do you treat Jesus and his claim to be the one true King and Ruler of the universe? The religious leaders charged Jesus with blasphemy because he called himself the Son of God. But since they did not have the power to put him to death, they brought him to the Roman authorities to have him tried and executed. The charge they brought before Pilate, however, was political rather than religious.

They leveled three accusations which were completely false: First, that Jesus agitated sedition. Second, they said that he encouraged people to not pay taxes to Caesar. And third, he assumed the title king. Pilate, being a shrewd politician, passed Jesus off to King Herod who had jurisdiction over Jews from Galilee. How did Herod treat Jesus? As a contemptible spectacle. To Herod Jesus was a joke! He refused to take Jesus seriously. He mocked Jesus' claim to be king by robing him in "gorgeous apparel". How easy it is to brush Jesus off as being of no importance. How difficult and challenging to accept his claim to be King and Ruler of heaven and earth. How important is Jesus to you? Does he have your undivided loyalty and submission?

Pilate's verdict was swift and clear when Jesus was brought back to him. He told the religious leaders to their face that he found in Jesus "no crime deserving death". We know from the gospel accounts that Pilate made no less than four attempts to avoid condemning Jesus. He told the Jewish leaders to take Jesus and settle the matter themselves (John 19:6-7). He tried to refer the case to Herod. He tried to get the Jewish leaders to receive Jesus as a prisoner who was granted release at Passover time (Mark 15:6). And then he tried to compromise by offering to scourge Jesus and then release him. The Romans were noted for their impartial justice.

What coerced Pilate to sentence a just man to death? Blackmail! John's gospel records that the Jewish leaders told Pilate: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar." The last thing Pilate wanted was a report back to Rome that he supported a dangerous man who was inciting the people to accept him as their king and to revolt against Roman authority. The last thing Rome would accept was civil disorder. So Pilate relented to avoid having a charge brought against him to Rome. Pilate was a ruthless leader, but he lacked one important quality, the courage to do the right thing. He sacrificed justice to save his face and his job. Are you willing to sacrifice reputation and position for truth and justice?

"Lord Jesus, you suffered injustice and abuse for our sake.

By your cross you have redeemed the world and won for us pardon and reconciliation.

Give me courage to always choose what is right and to avoid what is evil."

Whom Do We Prefer?

Joh 18:38a

"Give us Barabbas!" John 18:40

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 14, FRIDAY

Joh 18:28-19:16a

"Behold Your King"

Joh 19:14b

Pilate hoped that by having Jesus scourged the Jews who brought him to trial might be satisfied with this punishment and stop asking for his death. Scourging was the usual kind of punishment given for disturbing the peace and a warning to cease from upsetting authority and civil order. It was also used to weaken a criminal who was about to be executed. The latter was considered a form of mercy since a crucified man could last for days on a cross before expiring. Roman scourging, nonetheless, was brutal, painful, and dehumanizing. When a prisoner was scourged he was stripped, bound and bent so his back was exposed. Long leather whips tied with pieces of sharp iron and bones were used for ripping apart the back. As skin was torn from the body in shreds, blood gushed from the numerous wounds. Some died from the whipping alone, some were made unconscious, and some went mad.

Pilate had Jesus scourged in the typical Roman fashion. Jesus was led into the Praetorium, a large hall where the whole company of soldiers could gather and watch. The Roman soldiers had a strong resentment towards the Jews and they vented their cruelty and hatred towards Jesus by mocking him as King of the Jews. They robbed him in purple, the color for kingly garb, and crowned him with thorns. They struck his face, beat the crown of thorns into his skull with a reed, and jeered him for his claim to kingship. Their ridicule, mocking, and slapping was meant to dehumanize Jesus and to cause him mental anguish as well. Isaiah long ago had prophesied what the Suffering Servant would undergo for our sake: "As many were astonished at him – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men" (Is. 52:14). "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:4-5) Jesus willingly underwent these torments without complaint, anger, or bitterness. "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me" (John 18:11)? Jesus freely accepted his passion and death for our sake and our salvation.

When Pilate presented Jesus to the crowds robed in purple and crowned with thorns, he emphatically stated that he found "no crime in him" (John 19:3). What finally coerced Pilate to sentence a just man to death? Blackmail! The Jewish leaders told Pilate: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar" (John 19:12). The last thing Pilate wanted was a report back to Rome that he supported a dangerous man who was inciting the people to accept him as their king and to revolt against Roman authority. The last thing Rome would accept was civil disorder. So Pilate relented to avoid having a charge brought against him to Rome. Pilate was a ruthless leader, but he lacked one important quality, the courage to do the right thing. He sacrificed justice to save his face and his job. Are you willing to sacrifice reputation and position for truth and justice?

Who was responsible for the trial, condemnation, and death of Jesus? It is erroneous to attribute collective responsibility to the Jewish people as a whole, or even to all the Jewish authorities. We know that among the Pharisees there were secret disciples of Jesus, namely, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. John also states that "many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). When Peter preached the gospel to the Jews he stated, "I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers." We also know that on the day after Pentecost "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7). Scripture shows us that all who sin, both in the past, present, and the future are responsible for crucifying our Savior (Hebrews 12:3; 6:6; Acts 9:4-5). Paul the Apostle tells us plainly that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Francis of Assisi, the great 12th century reformer and lover of Christ crucified, told his beloved friends: "Nor did demons crucify him; it is you who have crucified him and crucify him still, when you delight in your vices and sins."

"Lord Jesus, you suffered injustice and abuse for our sake.

By your cross you have redeemed the world and won for us pardon and reconciliation.

Give me courage to always choose what is right and to avoid what is evil."

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

The Cross of Forgiveness

Mar 1:35

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 15, SATURDAY

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

The Cross of Forgiveness

Mar 1:35

Are you prepared to die well? None of us can avoid the inevitable – our own death. We try to avoid it, to block it from our minds, but the truth is we will all die sooner or later. Dying is not easy for anyone. It involves mental and physical suffering, loss, and separation. We can choose to live well, and we can choose to die well. Dying well is a life-long spiritual task. Fortunately there is something stronger than death and that is love (Song of Songs 6:8). "For God so loved the world that he gave us his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus embraced the cross knowing it was the Father's will and the Father's way for him to die.

A criminal condemned to death by Roman law was forced to carry his own cross. Soldiers made him carry it to the place of execution usually by the longest route possible. This prolonged the public humiliation and agony of carrying a weight that bowed the head and broke the back into a posture of submission. Jesus fell under the weight of his cross and could go no further. The Roman soldiers compelled another man to carry it for him. Simon had come a long distance from Cyrene (in North Africa, present-day Libya) to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. The last thing he wanted to do was to participate in the public execution of a criminal. But he had no choice since Roman authority could not be challenged without serious consequences. Mark records that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). Since Mark wrote his gospel for the Christian community at Rome, it is likely that the two sons of Rufus were well-known to the Church there as fellow Christians. Who knows, if Simon had not been compelled to carry Jesus's cross, he may never have been challenged with the message of the cross and the meaning of the Christian faith which his two sons later embraced. Perhaps Simon became a believer and passed on his faith to his family as well. Do you take up your cross willingly to follow Jesus in his way of love and sacrifice?

The Romans reserved crucifixion for their worst offenders. It was designed to be the most humiliating and excruciatingly painful way they knew for execution. The criminal was stripped and nailed to a cross erected in a public place, usually by a roadside or highway near the town where the criminal could be viewed by everybody who passed that way. A healthy man could live for several days on such a cross before he expired from hunger, thirst, exhaustion, and madness. It was a slow agonizing death, usually as a result of asphyxiation. The victim was hung on the cross in such a fashion that his lungs quickly filled with fluids and he could not breathe unless he pulled his chest upward and gasped for breath. Every movement brought nerve-racking pain. Eventual exhaustion led to asphyxiation. If the soldiers wanted to speed the process up, they broke the victim's legs to prevent ease of breathing.

The place where Jesus was crucified was on a hill just outside of Jerusalem known as Golgatha (Aramaic word for skull). The authorities deliberately executed Jesus besides two known criminals. This was designed to publicly humiliate Jesus before the crowds and to rank him with robbers. When Jesus was nailed to the cross he was already more than half-dead. The scourging alone and the crown of thorns beaten into his skull had nearly killed him. In such a state it is all the more remarkable to see Jesus with a clear sound mind and a tranquil heart. When Jesus was offered some wine mixed with myrrh to ease his pain, he refused it. He willingly embraced suffering and death for our sake because he knew and loved us all when he offered his life as an atoning sacrifice on the cross (Gal. 2:20, Ephes. 5:2,25). Jesus shows us the depths of God's redeeming love and forgiveness. He loved his own to the end (John 13:1). "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died" (2 Cor. 5:14).

Pilate publicly heralded Jesus "The King of the Jews" as he died upon the cross, no doubt to irritate and annoy the chief priests and Pharisees. Jesus was crucified for his claim to be King. The Jews understood that the Messiah would come as king to establish God's reign for them. They wanted a king who would free them from tyranny and foreign domination. Many had high hopes that Jesus would be the Messianic king. Little did they understand what kind of kingship Jesus claimed to have. Jesus came to conquer hearts and souls for an imperishable kingdom, rather than to conquer perishable lands and entitlements. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he was mocked for his claim to kingship. Nonetheless, he died not only as King of the Jews, but King of the nations as well. His victory over the power of sin, Satan, and the world was accomplished through his death on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus exchanged a throne of glory for a cross of shame to restore us to glory with God as his adopted sons and daughters. "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:8-11). In the Book of Revelations Jesus is called King of kings and Lord and lords (Rev. 19:16). Do you recognize Jesus Christ as your King and Lord and do you exalt his name as holy?

"Lord Jesus, you laid down your life for me that I might walk in the freedom of your love and mercy. Free me from love of the world and from attachment to sin and hurtful desires, that I might love whole-heartedly and sincerely what you love and reject whatever is false and contrary to the gospel."

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

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

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

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Psalm 42:1-11

Hope In Place of Despair

Psalm 42:11

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

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

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

Spend time reflecting:

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

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

Shared by Philip Phua

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

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Deu 15, Joh 3:1-20

THE GREAT RESET

Deu 15:6

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

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

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

Reflection

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

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

Shared by Melanie Yong, Malaysian Care

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

MAY 16, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 17, MONDAY

Eph 4

Hope through Grace

Eph 4:7, 29

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

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

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

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

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

Reflective question

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

Shared by Phua Su-Kim

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

MAY 17, MONDAY

Psa 139, Mat 13:34–36, Eph2:1–10

God's Perfect Masterpiece

Psa 139:13–16

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shared by Timothy Chui, Raphah Ministries

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

MAY 18, TUESDAY

Jos 2, Rom 8:24–25, Rom 15:13

Hope in Waiting

Rom 12:12

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

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

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

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

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

Reflection

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

“To Believe There is Hope”



I can cling to God and cry out with the psalmist,
“For thou art my hope “tikvah”, O Lord God; thou art my trust from my youth” (Psa 71:5).

Shared by Jacqueline Yap

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

MAY 18, TUESDAY Act 1:8

Transformed by the Word and the Spirit

Act 1:8

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 19, WEDNESDAY

Psa 34:6-7

Prayer of a Desperate Man in a Hopeless Situation

Psa 34:6-7

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

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

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

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

God's story

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

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

Shared by Xavier.S

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

MAY 19, WEDNESDAY

Mat 22:37-40

Leading A Missional Life

Mat 22:37-38

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

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

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

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

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

Reflection

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

Shared by Peter Shankar, STAMP

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

MAY 20, THURSDAY Joh 4:1-42

Personal Mission

Joh 4:39-42

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

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

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

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

Questions for reflection:

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

Shared by Koh Earn Soo

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

MAY 20, THURSDAY

1 Co 15:35–58

Living Faithfully Day to Day

1 Co 15:58

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reflective question

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

Shared by Well & Michelle Manurung

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

MAY 21, FRIDAY

1 Jo 1:1-3

Sharing Common Life

Joh 17:3

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

What is the essence of the Christian life? Is it prayer, Bible study or attending church? Or is it something altogether beyond this natural world? In the Gospels we see the close partnership Jesus had with His Father. They share the same nature, the same life, same heart devoted to one eternal purpose. This fellowship between the Father and the Son is the source of eternal life. In John 17:3 Jesus invited His disciples into an experience of knowing God, thereby to experience eternal life.

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

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

Reflection question

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

Shared by Yeow Mooi

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 21, FRIDAY

Mat 9:37-38

Seedtime, Harvest & Laborers

Mat 9:37-38

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

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

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

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

Shared by Randy Singkee, Wawasan Penabur

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

MAY 22, SATURDAY

Mar 10:42-45, Gal 6:9-10

True Greatness

Mar 10:42-45

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

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

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

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

Shared by Lucrece Loo

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

MAY 22, SATURDAY

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

I Will Go Where God Wants Me to Go

Mat 28:19

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

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

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

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

Reflection question

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

Shared by Esther Thean, GMT

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

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

Christ's Ambassadors of Reconciliation

Mat 24:14

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

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

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

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

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

Shared by Pastor Phua Seng Tiong

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

Mat 28:18-20

Make Disciples

Mat 28:19

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

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

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

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

Shared by Bruce Hill, International Director of World Outreach

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

MAY 23, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

MAY 24, MONDAY Mat 27:45–56, Mar 15:33–41, Luk 23:44–49, Joh 19:25–37

Christ Dies

Mat 27:54

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

No death has made such a difference to the world as the death of Christ. The manner of His death - crucifixion - was both cruel and humiliating. Stripped of His clothes, He was made to hang on the cross in public view until His death. He could have numbed the physical pain and the pain of being mocked (vs 39-44) by drinking the heavily drugged wine that was offered to Him (v 34) but He chose to suffer the pain. Jesus thus fulfilled the prophecies of Psalm 22 and 69:21.

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 24, MONDAY

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

Christ Dies

Mat 27:54

John tells us that when Jesus cried from thirst on the cross, he was fulfilling the words of scripture from Psalm 69:21: "They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Jesus' death was no mere accident of fate but a direct fulfillment of the will of his Father. He came to lay down his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. John's mention of the hyssop (19:29) would remind the Jews of the first Passover feast when God instructed the people to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb with hyssop over the lintels of their doors that they might be spared from death (Exodus 12:22). Jesus is the true Passover Lamb whose blood sprinkles us clean from sin and saves us from eternal death.

As Jesus expired, he cried out a "loud shout". Both Matthew and Luke mention this shout (Matt. 27:50 and Luke 23:46). John tells us that Jesus died with these words on his lips, "It is finished" (John 19:30). These parting words express triumph rather than defeat. Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit knowing that the strife was now over and the battle was won. Even on the cross Jesus knew the joy of victory. What the Father sent him into the world to do has now been accomplished. Christ offered himself without blemish to God and he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (see Hebrews 9:24-26). We can find no greater proof of God's love for us than the willing sacrifice of his Son on the cross. "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

In the cross of Christ we see the triumph of Jesus over his enemies – sin, Satan, and death. Christian writers down through the centuries have sung the praises of the Cross of Christ. Paul the Apostle exclaimed, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6:14). "A few drops of blood renew the whole world!" Hear what Gregory Nazianzen, a 6th century church father, has to say: "Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a cross, the sun made dark and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its creator. The temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from his side: the one as from a man, the other as from what was above man; the earth shaken, the rocks shattered because of the rock; the dead risen to bear witness to the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the sepulcher and after the sepulcher, who can fittingly recount them? Yet no one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of blood renew the whole world, and do for all men what the rennet does for the milk: joining us and binding us together" [On the Holy Pasch, Oration 45.1].

Abbot Rupert of Deutz, wrote in the early 12th century: "The cross of Christ is the door to heaven, the key to paradise, the downfall of the devil, the uplifting of mankind, the consolation of our imprisonment, the prize for our freedom." The Cross of Christ is the safeguard of our faith, the assurance of our hope, and the throne of love. It is also the sign of God's mercy and the proof of forgiveness. By his cross Jesus has redeemed our sin and atoned for our punishment. The way to peace, joy, and righteousness in the kingdom of God and the way to victory over sin, despair, and death is through the cross of Jesus Christ. Do you willingly follow Jesus in his way of the cross with joy, hope, and confidence?

**"Lord Jesus Christ, by your death on the cross you have won pardon for us and freedom from the tyranny of sin and death.
May I live in the joy and freedom of your victory over sin and death."**

MAY 25, TUESDAY

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

Courageous Action

Mar 15:43

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 25, TUESDAY

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

Two Secret Disciples

Mar 15:43

Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews ...He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. John 19:38-39

Two very unlikely disciples came to bury Jesus after His death. Joseph was described as a secret disciple because he feared the Jews. His fear of disapproval from his peers kept him from making an open stand for Jesus during his lifetime. Nicodemus, afraid that he might be ostracized by his peers, was also fearful of being seen in the company of Jesus. That was the reason why he had previously visited Jesus quietly at night (3:1-21). But when the situation called for them to make a stand, they emerged from their closet of being secret disciples. Both men approached Pilate for permission to bury Jesus' body. This naturally exposed their allegiance to Jesus to their contemporaries which might likely have caused them to incur those consequences they were fearful of.

Many believers in Asia pay a high price for their faith in Christ. Many have faced persecution and rejection from family, relatives, and even from the community. Some even face discrimination in schools, colleges and workplaces. As such, there could be some who are afraid to declare openly their faith in Christ. But our passage today reminds us that we cannot be secret disciples of Jesus forever. We need to make a stand for Jesus ultimately, even though the fearful consequences of such an action may be very real.

Joseph took a stand for Jesus by coming out of the closet. Nicodemus emerged into the light. What about us? What could be our fear that hinders us from acknowledging our allegiance to Jesus to our family, relatives, friends, colleagues and neighbors? Do we still remain secret disciples of Jesus?

**Lord, give me courage to stop being Your secret disciple.
Grant me boldness to make a stand for You.**

Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb. Matthew 27:59-60

There was a period of three days between Jesus' death and resurrection. Matthew records for us the activity of some people during that time.

Hundreds of years before Jesus' death, Isaiah had prophesied that Jesus would be buried in a rich man's grave (Isa 53:9). That rich man was Joseph of Arimathea (v 57). He was a respected member of the Sanhedrin and had objected to the way Jesus had been treated. He was also a follower of Jesus (v 57, Mk 15:43, Lk 23:50- 51). He went boldly to Pilate and requested for Jesus' body which he lovingly wrapped and placed in his own grave (vs 58-60). Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, witnessed the burial (vs 56, 61).

Out of respect for the Sabbath day, Joseph and the women made sure they completed what they had to do before it began (v 57). On the other hand, the Pharisees and the chief priests who made a great show of keeping the Sabbath, and constantly harangued Jesus for disobeying their perceived understanding of the Sabbath laws, broke their own Sabbath laws by going to see Pilate, a Gentile (v 62). Not only were they hypocrites, from the request they made of Pilate (vs 63-64), we also see how greatly they continued to fear the influence Jesus had on people. Perhaps it was out of fear - fear of further trouble that Pilate assented to their request (v 65).

**At different points in our lives, we may find ourselves having to wait, as in waiting for a job.
We have a choice to use the time in meaningful activity or waste it doing unwholesome things.
Let's choose the way of Joseph and the women and not of the Pharisees,
chief priests and Pilate.**

MAY 26, WEDNESDAY

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

CHRIST is RISEN

Mat 28:6a

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 26, WEDNESDAY

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

CHRIST is RISEN

Mat 28:6a

He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Matthew 28:6a

It is impossible to remain unemotional when reading this passage. Oh, to have been there with the two Marys! It is interesting to note that God chose women to be the first witnesses of the resurrection although Jewish society did not recognize the testimony of women as reliable in a court of law. Obviously, God has no respect for such discriminatory laws!

While the guards shook and became 'like dead men' (v 4), the women took heart when the angel told them not to be afraid (v 5). Having confirmed that Jesus was not in the tomb, they hurried away, 'filled with joy', to obey the angel's instructions (vs 7-8).

Worship! That was the immediate response of the women when Jesus chose to show Himself to them. They clasped His feet (v 9). He was real! He confirmed the angel's instructions. He was eager to see His brothers (v 10) – the disciples who had abandoned Him, and Peter, who had denied Him.

In stark contrast to the joyful women, we see the ludicrous plight of the chief priests and elders (vs 11 -15). Unsuccessful at preventing the resurrection, they were now attempting to change the truth with money. Their actions come as no surprise as they were never really interested in the truth.

The deception of the religious leaders has contributed to the resistance of the Jewish people to the Gospel (v 15). But things are changing now. Jews who have received Jesus as their Messiah are now reaching out to both Jews and non-Jews with the Gospel. Finally, the Gospel is again being preached as it was meant to be (Acts 1:8).

Take time to reflect on what it means to you that Jesus is alive.

How does it affect your day-to-day life? How does it affect the way you view death?

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" John 20:18

The emphasis in this account of the resurrection of our Lord is on the story of Mary Magdalene. John carefully arranged the narrative to emphasize the important role Mary played in the story of Jesus' resurrection. First, she was the first person to discover the empty tomb and to inform the disciples (vs 1 -2). Secondly, after the disciples came, saw the empty tomb, and left, Mary was the only person who remained in the vicinity of the tomb (vs 10-11). Thirdly, Mary and not a male disciple, was the first person to witness the risen Lord (vs 14-16). Finally, Mary was the first messenger sent by Jesus to inform the disciples of the good news of the resurrection (vs 17-18).

It is interesting to note that in the arrangement of the narrative, John placed special emphasis on the witness of a woman. In the ancient world, the testimony of a woman did not carry much weight. It would not have escaped the attention of John's audience that it was a woman, not a man who first proclaimed the resurrection of the Lord.

In a male dominated society currently prevalent in many parts of Asia, the testimony and voice of a woman can easily be drowned or ignored. Our reading today reminds us of the significant role women played in the ministry of Jesus and the importance of their testimony concerning the risen Lord. Mary's obedience to Jesus' command to tell the resurrection story to the male disciples makes her the first witness to offer the reliable testimony of this event.

Our reading today continues to affirm our sisters in Christ as reliable witnesses to a broken, unbelieving world in need of the good news of Jesus Christ. If Jesus could send Mary to proclaim to the apostles the resurrection, who are we to refuse to go and do likewise?

MAY 27, THURSDAY

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

With Burning Hearts

Luk 24:32

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

MAY 27, THURSDAY

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

With Burning Hearts

Luk 24:32

Are you prepared to meet the Risen Lord? The disciples of Jesus were as unprepared for his resurrection as they were for his death. The empty tomb made them fearful and joyful at the same time. "Where did they put the body or did he really rise just as he predicted?" Even though Jesus had spoken to them before of his death and rising, they could not believe until they saw the empty tomb and met the risen Lord. Aren't we the same? We want to see with our own eyes before we believe! The guards brought their testimony to the chief priests and elders who met the news with denial. They were resolved to not believe that Jesus had risen and they bribed the guards in the hope of keeping others from believing.

What is the basis of our faith in the resurrection? The scriptures tell us that "*faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*" (Heb 11:1). Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to us. Our faith is a free assent to the whole truth which God reveals to us through his word. Faith is *certain* because it is based on the very word of God who cannot lie. Faith also seeks *understanding*. That is why God enlightens the "eyes of our hearts" that we may know what is the hope to which he has called us (Ephesians 1:18). Peter the Apostles says *we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead* (1 Peter 1:3). Through the gift of faith, the Lord reveals himself to those who believe in his word and he fills them with "new life in his Holy Spirit".

Do you live in the joy and hope of the resurrection? And do you recognize the presence of the Risen Lord in his word, in the "breaking of the bread", and in his church, the body of Christ?

"Lord, may we always live in the joy and hope of the resurrection and never lose sight of its truth for our lives."

Why was it difficult for the disciples to recognize the risen Lord? Jesus' death scattered his disciples and shattered their hopes and dreams. They had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. They saw the cross as defeat and could not comprehend the empty tomb until the Lord appeared to them and gave them understanding. Jesus chided the disciples on the road to Emmaus for their slowness of heart to believe what the scriptures had said concerning the Messiah. They did not recognize the risen Jesus until he had broken bread with them. Do you recognize the Lord in his word and in the breaking of the bread?

"Their eyes were obstructed, that they should not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. And thus, in accordance with the state of their minds, which was still ignorant of the truth "that the Christ would die and rise again", their eyes were similarly hindered. It was not that the truth himself was misleading them, but rather that they were themselves unable to perceive the truth" (From The Harmony of the Gospels, 3.25.72). How often do we fail to recognize the Lord when he speaks to our hearts and opens his mind to us? The Risen Lord is ever ready to speak his word to us and to give us understanding of his ways.

Do you listen attentively to the Word of God and allow his word to change and transform you?

"Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart to recognize your presence with me and to understand the truth of your saving word.

Nourish me with your life-giving word and with the bread of life."

MAY 28, FRIDAY Mar 16:14, Luk 24:36-49, Joh 20:19-29

Empowered To Witness

Luk 24:48

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be prayerful as you witness.

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

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

MAY 28, FRIDAY

Mar 16:14, Luk 24:36-49, Joh 20:19-29

Empowered to Witness

Luk 24:48

Do you know the joy of the resurrection? The Risen Jesus revealed the glory of his resurrection to his disciples gradually and over a period of time. Even after the apostles saw the empty tomb and heard the reports of Jesus' appearance to the women, they were still weak in faith and fearful of being arrested by the Jewish authorities. When Jesus appeared to them, he offered proofs of his resurrection by showing them the wounds of his passion, his pierced hands and side. He calmed their fears and brought them peace, the peace which reconciles sinners and makes one a friend of God. Jesus did something which only love and trust and can do. He commissioned his weak and timid apostles to carry the gospel to the ends of the earth. This sending out of the disciples is parallel to the sending out of Jesus by his Father. Jesus fulfilled his mission through his perfect love and perfect obedience to the will of his Father. He called his disciples, and he calls us to do the same. Just as he gave his first disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, so he breathes on us the same Holy Spirit who equips us with power, grace, and strength.

The last apostle to meet the resurrected Lord was the first to go with him to Jerusalem at Passover time. The apostle Thomas was a natural pessimist. When Jesus proposed that they visit Lazarus after receiving news of his illness, Thomas said to the disciples: "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11:16). While Thomas deeply loved the Lord, he lacked the courage to stand with Jesus in his passion and crucifixion. After Jesus' death, Thomas made the mistake of withdrawing from the other apostles. He sought loneliness rather than fellowship in his time of adversity. He doubted the women who saw the resurrected Jesus and he doubted his own fellow apostles. When Thomas finally had the courage to rejoin the other apostles, the Lord Jesus made his presence known to him and reassured him that he had indeed overcome death and risen again. When Thomas recognized his Master, he believed and exclaimed that Jesus was truly Lord and truly God! Through the gift of faith we, too, proclaim that Jesus is our personal Lord and our God. He died and rose that we, too, might have new life in him. The Lord offers each of us new life in his Holy Spirit that we may know him personally and walk in this new way of life through the power of his resurrection. Do you believe in God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit?

"Lord Jesus Christ, through your victory over sin and death you have overcome all the powers of darkness. Help me to draw near to you and to trust in your life-giving word. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and strengthen my faith in your promises and my hope in the power of your resurrection."

Aren't we like the apostles? We won't believe unless we can see with our own eyes. The gospels attest to the reality of the resurrection. Jesus goes to great lengths to assure his disciples that he is no mere ghost or illusion. He shows them the marks of his crucifixion and he explains how the scriptures foretold his death and rising.

The centrality of the gospel is the cross; but fortunately, it does not stop there. Through the cross Jesus defeated our enemies – death and Satan and won pardon for our sins. His cross is the door to heaven and the key to paradise. The way to glory is through the cross. When the disciples saw the risen Lord, they disbelieved for joy! How can death lead to life, the cross to victory? Jesus shows us the way and gives us the power to overcome sin, despair, and death. Just as the first disciples were commissioned to bring the good news of salvation to all the nations, so, we, too, are called to be witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ to all who live on the face of the earth. Do you witness to the joy of the gospel to those around you?

"Lord Jesus, open our minds to understand the scriptures that we may fully comprehend the truth of your word. Anoint us with power and boldness to be your witnesses to all the nations."

MAY 29, SATURDAY Joh 21:1-25

Breakfast with Jesus

Joh 21:12

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

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

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

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

*PS: Jesus is still inviting us to have Breakfast with Him each and every day.
Would you accept His invitation to eat with Him?*

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

MAY 29, SATURDAY

Joh 21:1-25

Breakfast with Jesus

Joh 21:12

Why didn't the apostles immediately recognize the Lord when he greeted them at the Sea of Tiberias? John gives us a clue. He states that Peter decided to return to his home district of Galilee, very likely so he could resume his fishing career. Peter was discouraged and didn't know what to do after the tragedy of Jesus' death! He went back to his previous career out of despair and uncertainty. The other apostles followed him back to Galilee.

When was the last time Peter was commanded to let down his net after a futile night of fishing? It was at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee when the Lord dramatically approached Peter in his fishing boat after a futile night of fishing and commanded him to lower his nets (see Luke 5:4-11). After the miraculous catch, Jesus told Peter that he would be 'catching people' for the kingdom of God.

Now Jesus repeats the same miracle. John, the beloved disciple, is the first to recognize the Lord. Peter impulsively leaps from the boat and runs to the Lord. Do you run to the Lord when you meet setbacks, disappointments, or trials? The Lord is ever ready to renew us in faith and to give us fresh hope in his promises.

Skeptics who disbelieve the resurrection say the disciples only saw a vision of Jesus. The gospels, however, give us a vivid picture of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus went out of his way to offer his disciples various proofs of his resurrection – that he is real and true flesh, not just a spirit or ghost. In his third appearance to the apostles, after Jesus performed the miraculous catch of fish, he prepared a breakfast and ate with them. Peter's prompt recognition of the Master and exclamation, It is the Lord! stands in sharp contrast to his previous denial of his Master during the night of arrest. The Lord Jesus reveals himself to each of us as we open our hearts to receive his word.

Do you recognize the Lord's presence in your life and do you receive his word with faith?

"Lord Jesus, you are the Resurrection and the Life. Increase my faith in the power of your resurrection that I may never doubt your word nor stray from your presence."

It's my duty to grill the burgers, brats, steaks, or whatever else my wife has on the menu. And while I'm not the greatest chef when it comes to outdoor cooking, I love the unforgettable aroma of grilling over a charcoal fire. So the mention of a "fire of coals" in John 21:9 catches my attention. And I find myself wondering why John would include this detail in the story about Jesus calling a failing Peter back to serve and follow Him.

In verses 1-3, it's apparent that Peter had reopened his fishing business. Just a few days before, Peter was warming his hands over a charcoal fire when he denied Jesus to save his own skin (John 18:17-18 ESV). So why not go back to fishing?

While Peter and his cohorts were casting nets, Jesus built a fire on the beach. Coincidence? I doubt it! And as Peter approached Jesus, I wonder if the pungent aroma of the burning charcoal brought back memories of that other fire where he had failed Christ. Yet Jesus in His mercy took the initiative to call Peter back into His service.

Think of it: Jesus is willing to forgive our failures and call us into His service. After all, if only perfect people qualified to serve Him, He wouldn't have anyone to choose from!

By: Joe Stowell

Although we are imperfect, the Lord can use us still, if we confess our sins to Him and seek to do His will. Being imperfect doesn't disqualify us from serving God; it just emphasizes our dependence on His mercy.

MAY 30, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

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

Marching Orders

Mat 28:19-20

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

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

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

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

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

**The Gospel is too good to keep to yourself. Share it with others.
Tell them what Jesus means to you and give them a Gospel of Matthew or John to read;
Be a good friend to them and pray for them.**

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

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

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

Answer:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Answer:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MAY 31, MONDAY

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

Marching Orders

Mat 28:19–20

Why did Jesus leave his beloved apostles forty days after his resurrection? Forty is a significant number in the scriptures. Moses went to the mountain to seek the face of God for forty days in prayer and fasting. The people of Israel were in the wilderness for forty years in preparation for their entry into the promised land. Elijah fasted for forty days as he journeyed in the wilderness to the mountain of God. For forty days after his resurrection Jesus appeared numerous times to his disciples to assure them that he had risen indeed and to prepare them for the task of carrying on the work which he began during his earthy ministry.

Jesus' departure and ascension into heaven was both an end and a beginning for his disciples. While it was the end of Jesus' physical presence with his beloved disciples, it marked the beginning of Jesus' presence with them in a new way. Jesus promised that he would be with them always to the end of time. He assured them of his power – a power which overcame sin and death. Now as the glorified and risen Lord and Savior, ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven, Jesus promised to give them the power of his Holy Spirit, which we see fulfilled ten days later on the Feast of Pentecost (Luke 24:49 and Acts 2:1-4). When the Lord Jesus departed physically from the apostles, they were not left alone or powerless. Jesus assured them of his presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus' last words to his apostles point to his saving mission and to their mission to be witnesses of his saving death and his glorious resurrection and to proclaim the good news of salvation to all the world. Their task is to proclaim the good news of salvation, not only to the people of Israel, but to all the nations. God's love and gift of salvation is not just for a few, or for a nation, but it is for the whole world – for all who will accept it. The gospel is the power of God, the power to forgive sins, to heal, to deliver from evil and oppression, and to restore life. Do you believe in the power of the gospel?

This is the great commission which the risen Christ gives to the whole church. All believers have been given a share in this task – to be heralds of the good news and ambassadors for Jesus Christ, the only savior of the world. We have not been left alone in this task, for the risen Lord works in and through us by the power of his Holy Spirit. Today we witness a new Pentecost as the Lord pours out his Holy Spirit upon his people to renew and strengthen the body of Christ and to equip it for effective ministry and mission world-wide. Do you witness to others the joy of the gospel and the hope of the resurrection?

“Lord Jesus, through the gift of your Holy Spirit, you fill us with an indomitable spirit of praise and joy which no earthly trial can subdue. Fill me with your resurrection joy and help me to live a life of praise and thanksgiving for your glory. May I witness to those around me the joy of the gospel and the reality of your resurrection.”

Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples. Mat 28:19 GNT

Driving through a low-income area near his church, Colorado pastor Chad Graham started praying for his “neighbors.” When he noticed a small laundromat, he stopped to take a look inside and found it filled with customers. One asked Graham for a spare coin to operate the clothes dryer. That small request inspired a weekly “Laundry Day” sponsored by Graham’s church. Members donate coins and soap to the laundromat, pray with customers, and support the owner of the laundry facility.

Their neighborhood outreach, which dares to include a laundromat, reflects Jesus’ Great Commission to His disciples. As He said, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Mat 28:18–19 GNT).

His Holy Spirit’s powerful presence enables “everywhere” outreach, including even a laundromat. Indeed, we don’t go alone. As Jesus promised, “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (v. 20 GNT).

Pastor Chad experienced that truth after praying at the laundromat for a customer named Jeff who is battling cancer. As Chad reported, “When we opened our eyes, every customer in the room was praying with us, hands stretched out toward Jeff. It was one of the most sacred moments I have experienced as a pastor.” The lesson? Let’s go everywhere to proclaim Christ.

— Patricia Raybon

Where can you go in your neighborhood today to proclaim Christ? How could His powerful presence enable you? Jesus, enable me to proclaim Your good news today—everywhere.

Overview of Acts 1:1–9:31

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

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

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

Jesus Himself provides the outline for this program in 1:8. The Holy Spirit would firstly come upon the disciples to equip them for the task. They would then witness for Jesus in three stages:

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

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

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

JUN 1, TUESDAY

Act 1:12-2:13

Receiving the Promised Holy Spirit

Act 2:2-4

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

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

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

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

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

**We who trust in Jesus have been given God's Spirit. We have also been given new life as God's people and made part of the harvest which God is gathering.
Give thanks to Him for His kindness to us!**

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

JUN 1, TUESDAY

Act 1:12-2:13

Receiving the Promised Holy Spirit

Act 2:2-4

With the reward he got for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. Acts 1:18

After the ascension of Jesus, the believers devoted themselves to prayer (v 14), and Peter proposed that an apostle be chosen to replace Judas who had betrayed Jesus and suffered God's judgment for his actions (vs 15-19). Peter's reasoning about replacing Judas came from reading Old Testament Psalms about the betrayers of King David. Another had to be chosen to take 'the place of leadership' of Judas who had betrayed King Jesus.

Peter's point in verses 18-19 is not how Judas died but what happened to his body. The words translated 'fell headlong' in verse 18 are simply 'became prostrate/ prone'. Alternatively, the words could be translated 'swelled up'. Either way, this was a graphic picture of the judgment that he would face for his treachery against the Lord.

The Lord Jesus chose His new apostle through the casting of lots (Prov 16:33). This is not a model for guidance in all decisions – that decision was unique because an apostle is the authorized, authoritative representative of the person who appoints him. Thus, only Jesus could choose His apostle. We are to make our decisions under the authority of God's word and in prayer for wisdom to apply it.

Judas was replaced because he fell away, not simply because he died. Later on, when James was killed, no one was chosen to replace him. Matthias who replaced Judas met the criteria set down by Peter. He was a witness of Jesus' resurrection and had been with the disciples beginning from John's baptism to the time of Jesus' ascension (v 22). With the number complete, God was ready to use the apostles as the nucleus of a restored Israel. Paul, also a witness of the resurrected Jesus was later added by Him as the apostle to the Gentiles.

Judas betrayed Jesus for money and came under the awful judgment of God. What are we tempted to exchange for Jesus in our lives?

The Feast of Pentecost was one of three major Jewish festivals that was compulsory for every Jewish adult who lived within a 20-mile radius of Jerusalem to attend. Pentecost (also known as the Feast of the First Fruits) is 50 days after Easter Sunday as it marks the beginning of the harvest. Thus, Pentecost represents a fulfilment of the prophecy concerning the coming of the Holy Spirit and the harvest of souls (Acts 2).

With the presence of the Holy Spirit to teach, guide and protect the Church, we do not read again of the casting of lots in order to determine the will of the Lord.

There were three supernatural phenomena at Pentecost - the mighty rushing of wind, tongues of fire and speaking in tongues ('glossalalia') or unknown languages. Something like 15 different languages are mentioned here. Yet, these men were Galileans! Note that in subsequent occurrences of the empowering of the Spirit, only 'glossalalia' is mentioned (see Acts 10:44-46).

Another significance of Pentecost is that it points to the grace of God who seeks to reverse the judgement that fell upon mankind in the Tower of Babel incident (Gen 11). In that historical judgement, mankind manifested his rebellion against God by building the Tower of Babel. A result of divine judgement was the confusion of tongues (Gen 11:7-9). The Holy Spirit came to bring salvation, guidance, unity and harmony to those who respond positively to the gospel. Today, we hear the voice of the Spirit through Scriptures. That is why regularly reading, understanding and obeying the Bible is so important for growth in the Christian life.

**Pray for God to grant you the discipline to read His Word,
the wisdom to understand and the love to obey Him.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have you submitted to the rule of the ascended Christ?

P.R.A.Y

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JUN 2, WEDNESDAY

Act 2:14-47

A New Nation

Act 2:38

Peter's preaching was scriptural, simple, Christ-centred and powerful. It was scriptural in that Peter quoted extensively from the Old Testament (Joel, Psa 16, Psa 110); simple because the people were clearly told about three things: a. Repent (38). b. Be baptised (38) and c. Be saved (40) and Christ-centred because the focus was on Christ and God's purposes accomplished through Him. Finally, the sermon was powerful because 3,000 souls repented.

Repentance is more than just being sorry. A young man was caught stealing from members of the church. When confronted, he broke down and cried buckets of tears. Someone concluded that he was repentant and was ready to forgive him. However, an elder remarked, 'Those were crocodile tears. He was not repentant. He was simply sorry that he was caught. He was sorry for himself that he had been exposed as a thief.' The same young man was nevertheless forgiven. Subsequent events proved that the elder was right; the young man stole again.

How we readily associate repentance with feeling sorry for something bad that we have done. The Bible's meaning of repentance goes beyond feeling sorry. Notice the reaction of the people to Peter's message. They were 'cut to the heart' and they asked, 'What shall we do?' Their response corresponded with the meaning of repentance. Repentance is a compound of two Greek words. The first means a change of direction and the second refers to the mind. Repentance is a change of the mind that results in life being turned around in a different direction.

Father, help me to do right and to repent when I am wrong.

The acronym '**W. I. F. E.**' stands for **Worship, Instructions, Fellowship and Evangelism**. The four words aptly describe how the 3,000 who repented and were baptized organised themselves.

First, they devoted (it was not just a Sunday ritual) themselves to 'the breaking of bread and to prayer'. That is a description of their worship, which involves observing the Lord's Supper and prayer. The Lord's Supper (or 'breaking of bread') is one of the two sacraments that Christ commanded believers to observe. In taking the Lord's Supper, believers are called to remember the death, resurrection and the second coming of Christ (1 Cor 11:23-26).

Second, they were devoted to the Apostles' teaching (instructions) in the Word. The 3,000 believers understood the importance of learning and obeying God's Word.

Third, they were devoted to fellowship with one another. Koinonia is the Greek word used here and it means sharing what they have with one another (43-44). There can be no fellowship apart from sharing; that means selfishness did not mar the unity of the church.

Fourth, there was evangelism (outreach) since the Lord added to their number daily (47). However, this seems to be the outcome of the above three - worship, instruction and fellowship. No work is more demanding, more tiring than the constant caring for infants and children! Young ones need protection, nurturing and training till they are able, as adults, to protect and train others.

That was what the Apostles did with the 3,000 young believers. The 3,000 became disciple-makers too. How was that possible? All because of W.I.F.E! Our Father in Heaven, may our hearts be united in fellowship, in worship, in knowing Your Word and in evangelism.

A Second Chance

Act 3:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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JUN 3, THURSDAY

Act 3:1–26

Jesus @ Work

Act 3:6

While driving down a busy road. I saw the sign, 'CAUTION - Men At Work: I knew what that sign meant. Motorists had to be careful and be aware of men working by the roadside. Although Jesus is in heaven. He is still working through His disciples. A man is healed in His name (the name of Jesus is mentioned twice: 3:6, 16). Going to the temple to pray (v 1), Peter and John came across a crippled man (40 years old, 4:22). Needy persons are often found in the vicinity of the temple because worshippers are inclined to be more charitable. The crippled man was used to receiving alms but Peter told him that he had no silver or gold to give. The man received something better - healing! A crowd began to gather (v 11) and what was originally meant to be a prayer time became an evangelistic meeting (vs 12-26)!

The process:

- I. They wanted to pray (v 1);
- II. Jesus used them and gave them the power to heal (v 6);
- III. A crowd gathered (v 11b); and Peter seized the opportunity to proclaim the message (vs 12-26).

The proclamation-

- I. The rejection, death and resurrection of Christ were clearly presented:
- II. That this is the fulfilment of Scriptures is stated (vs 18, 22, 24-25); and
- III. Man is told specifically how to respond - repent (v 19) and turn to God for blessing (v 26).

No wonder we will read later that the number of believers increased to 5,000 (4:4).

**Father, thank You that Jesus died for my sins and rose again from the dead,
As Jesus continued to use and work through the apostles,
may He today use and work through and in me too.**

Author Mark Twain suggested that whatever we look at in life—and how we see it—can influence our next steps, even our destiny. As Twain said, “You can’t depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.”

Peter too spoke of vision when he replied to a lame beggar, a man whom he and John encountered at the busy temple gate called Beautiful (Acts 3:2). As the man asked them for money, Peter and John looked directly at the man. “Then Peter said, ‘Look at us!’” (v. 4).

Why did he say that? As Christ’s ambassador, Peter likely wanted the beggar to stop looking at his own limitations—yes, even to stop looking at his need for money. As he looked at the apostles, he would see the reality of having faith in God.

As Peter told him, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (v. 6). Then Peter “helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk” and give praise (vv. 7–8).

What happened? The man had faith in God (v. 16). As evangelist Charles Spurgeon urged, “Keep your eye simply on Him.” When we do, we don’t see obstacles. We see God, the One who makes our way clear.

By: Patricia Raybon

**What are you focused on instead of God?
With refocused faith, what could you see in Him for your life?**

Heavenly Father, when my eyes wander from You, focus my gaze on Your unlimited power.

JUN 4, FRIDAY

Act 4:1-31

Standing Firm

Act 4:12

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

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

Peter and John were brought before the same Jewish council, the Sanhedrin that had conspired against their Lord. We can well understand if they were fearful for their own lives at the time. However, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to speak God's word boldly (v 8, Lk 12:11-12).

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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JUN 4, FRIDAY

Act 4:1-31

Boldness in Witnessing

Act 4:29

It was possibly not more than two months earlier when Peter thrice denied Christ. Yet, amazingly, how bold Peter had become in witnessing. A night locked up in jail (v 3) did not deter or disturb him or John, not even dire threats from the authorities (v 21). If anything, the authorities were more disturbed by his preaching (v 2).

One reason to account for the boldness of Peter is the power of the indwelling Spirit (v 8). Such was the fulfilment of the promise from Jesus to His disciples prior to His departure (Jn 14:12, 16, 26; 15:18, 20, 26-27). Peter and John gave the facts of the gospel clearly - His crucifixion, death and resurrection (v 10) and declared how this was a fulfilment of Scriptures (v 10, cf Psa 118:22). Is this kind of preaching lacking in our pulpits today?

The boldness of Peter and John did not go unnoticed by the authorities. Neither of them was intimidated by the interrogation by powerful persons (Annas, the High Priest from AD 6-14; Caiaphas, the High Priest from AD 18-36 and John, another son of Annas, who was High Priest in AD 37). These people attributed the boldness of the Apostles to the fact that they had been with Jesus (v 13). Notice the prominence of the name of Jesus (vs 7 [implied], 10, 12, 17, 18). Jesus had personally trained them. However, all the training or spiritual knowledge is useless without a heart of obedience (v 19). The filling of the Holy Spirit (v 8) gives boldness and obedience to witness.

**Father, grant to me boldness and obedience to witness for You today.
Help me to be unafraid for Jesus' sake.**

How easily we forget that God is in control, especially in the face of hardships. This was not the case of the apostles. Note what they did upon their release from jail.

They went to the church. They could have just taken their struggle to God in prayer. But that was not what they did! In the clause, 'they went back to their own people,- the word 'people'- (NIV) is not in the original. It is added to clarify the text. However, the original shows that the apostles went to their own kind. In their need for encouragement, they sought for people with a kindred spirit! We should do likewise when we need encouragement.

They prayed. The reports led to unity in prayer. Nobody said, 'Let's pray ...' The text indicates that it was a spontaneous act upon the receiving of the report.

Their prayer:

- a. They acknowledged God's sovereignty (vs 24-28). What a comforting and strengthening theological viewpoint to hold to in the face of persecution! The Sanhedrin was not in control, God was.
- b. They used Scriptures (v 26. cf Psa 2:1-2) and so must we.

Their requests:

- a. That God would note the enemies ' threats' (v 29) and
- b. That God would grant boldness. Some in a similar situation have prayed for wisdom to escape. Instead, the apostles prayed for boldness to continue to preach!

No wonder the place was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. If we are in His work and in His will, we may expect the same Holy Spirit to fill us.

Sovereign Lord, grant us, the body of Christ, the same unity and boldness to witness.

JUN 5, SATURDAY

Act 4:32-5:11

Deceit and Disaster

Act 5:3a

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

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

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

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

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

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JUN 5, SATURDAY

Act 4:32–5:11

"Why did God kill Ananias and Sapphira for lying?"

Act 5:3a

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is found in Acts 5, and it is a sad story, indeed. It actually begins at the end of chapter 4 with the description of the early church in Jerusalem, a group of believers so filled with the Holy Spirit that they were of one heart and one mind. Great power and grace were on the apostles, who preached and testified of the risen Savior. So knit together were the hearts of the people that they held all their possessions loosely and willingly shared them with one another, not because they were coerced but because they loved one another. Those who sold land and houses gave of their profits to the apostles, who distributed the gifts to those in need.

Two members of this group were Ananias and his wife, Sapphira; they also had sold a field. Part of the profit from their sale was kept back by the couple, and Ananias only laid a part of the money at the apostles' feet. However, Ananias made a pretense of having given all the proceeds. This hypocritical show may have fooled some, but not Peter, who was filled with the power of the Spirit. Peter knew instantly that Ananias was lying—not just to him but to God—and exposed his hypocrisy then and there. Ananias fell down and died (Acts 5:4). When Sapphira showed up, she, too, lied to Peter and to God, saying that they had donated the entire proceeds of the sale of the land to the church. When her lie had been exposed, she also fell down and died at Peter's feet.

Some speculate that these two deaths were from natural causes. Perhaps Ananias died from shock or guilt, but Peter pronounced Sapphira's death before she died, and the coincidental timing and place of their deaths indicate that this was indeed God's judgment. The question is why. Why would God kill two people for lying?

God's reasons for bringing about the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira involve His abhorrence of sin, the hypocrisy of the couple, and the lesson for the rest of the church, both then and now. It can be easy today to gloss over the holiness of God, to forget that He is righteous and pure and that He hates sin wholeheartedly. This particular sin of hypocrisy in the church was dealt with swiftly and decisively.

Were Ananias and Sapphira saved? We believe they probably were. Their story is told in the context of the actions of "all the believers" (Acts 4:32). They knew of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), and Ananias's lie could have been an earlier promise that he would give the whole amount of the sale to the Lord. But the best evidence that they were children of God may be that they received discipline: "If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all" (Hebrews 12:8; see also 1 Corinthians 5:12). Ananias and his wife had conspired to garner the accolades of the church; but their conspiracy led to the sin unto death.

The case of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates the fact that even believers can be led into bold, flagrant sin. It was Satan that had filled their hearts to lie in this way (Acts 5:3) and "to test the Spirit of the Lord" (verse 9). Covetousness, hypocrisy, and a desire for the praise of men all played a part in their demise.

The sudden, dramatic deaths of Ananias and Sapphira served to purify and warn the church. "Great fear seized the whole church" (Acts 5:11). Right away, in the church's infancy, God made it plain that hypocrisy and dissimulation were not going to be tolerated, and His judgment of Ananias and Sapphira helped guard the church against future pretense. God laid the bodies of Ananias and Sapphira in the path of every hypocrite who would seek to enter the church.

Furthermore, the incident involving Ananias and Sapphira helped to establish the apostles' authority in the church. The sinners had fallen dead at Peter's feet. It was Peter who had known of the secret sin and had the authority to pronounce judgment in the church (see Matt 16:19). If the hypocrisy of Ananias and Sapphira had succeeded in fooling Peter, it would have severely damaged the apostles' authority.

The sad story of Ananias and Sapphira is not some obscure incident from the Old Testament regarding a violation of Mosaic Law. This occurred in the first-century church to believers in Jesus Christ. The story of Ananias and Sapphira is a reminder to us today that God sees the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), that He hates sin, and that He is concerned for the purity of His church (1 Cor 11; 1 John 5). As Jesus told the compromising church in Thyatira, "All the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds" (Rev 2:23).

JUN 6, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 7, MONDAY

Act 5:12-42

The Way of Courage

Act 5:29

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 7, MONDAY

Act 5:12-42

Four Different Responses

Act 5:29

Four different groups of people responded in different ways to the apostles in this passage. Three are negative and one is positive.

The first negative group is found in verse 13 - 'No one else dared join them ...' Today, fear still prevents some from believing in the Word of God. Fear of what others - parents, relatives or friends - might say. Proverbs 29:25 teaches us that 'the fear of man is a snare'.

The second negative group comprises the high priest, all his associates and the Sadducees. These people were filled with jealousy (17). They had the apostles arrested and jailed. The religious authorities were jealous that the apostles were gaining in popularity, jealousy, we all know, is a green-eyed monster.

A group of superstitious people made up the third negative group (15). These 'people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats' hoping that as Peter's shadow fell on them, they would be healed!

The fourth and positive group is found in those who believe (vs 12, 14-16). Dramatic miracles were happening; people were healed physically and spiritually. Those demonized were delivered from their bondage.

When the apostles were jailed, an angel came to release them. The apostles did not ask questions as they were told to go to the temple courts to preach again. No wonder the guards and the chief priests were puzzled (24). Which group do you belong to?

Father, I believe. Help me in my unbelief.

Satan attempted to destroy the church by threats from without and then by deceit from within. Here, he resorts to violence.

To the amazement of the soldiers, the priests and the crowd, the apostles were preaching again in the very same place where they were first arrested (25-26). Brought again before the Sanhedrin, their response was focused - 'we must obey God rather than men' (29). There are times when obedience to God takes precedence over men's laws. Peter courageously accused the Sanhedrin of murder and wisely used the occasion to preach about Christ's resurrection and the good news of repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel (30-31). The Sanhedrin was furious and wanted to kill the apostles straight away.

However, Gamaliel, (the same man who had taught Paul) a respected rabbi, stopped them. He advised (35-39) them to leave the apostles alone for if their preaching was of man, it would fizzle out on its own (he cited two historical examples). However, if their preaching was from God, no one would be able to stop it. and they would find themselves fighting God. This is an excellent word of wisdom for us today.

The Council took his advice. They had the men severely flogged and released them after another warning not to preach. The smart of the pain from the beating did not stop the apostles. They rejoiced in that they were counted worthy to suffer for His Name and they continued to preach! No doubt many came to believe. No trials, no triumphs.

**Father, I believe that if there were no trials, there would be no triumphs.
Therefore teach me always to obey You.**

JUN 8, TUESDAY Act 6:1-15

First Things First

Act 6:3-4

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 8, TUESDAY

Act 6:1-15

Ministry Models

Act 6:3-4

Pastors face problems in the ministry. What ministry models do they follow to solve those problems? Are pastors like the Chief Executive Officers of a business corporation; or the Seminary lecturers like professors in a big seminary classroom; or preachers like celebrity entertainers where the congregation is the audience?

The apostles provide a model of ministry for pastors today.

The problem stated - Seeing that their widows within the church are neglected, the Greek-speaking Jews complained against the Hebrew-speaking believers. As a church grows, some members may find themselves 'lost' in a large church! It becomes easy to think that nobody cares. The ministry must emphasize that each member is important. The body metaphor of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14 emphasizes this point.

The solution suggested –

- a. The leadership is clear about their priorities, namely prayer and ministry of the Word (4);
- b. The leadership acknowledges the problem and direction flows from top to the congregation;
- c. The leadership delegates work to others and allows the congregation to have a hand in the solution of the problem;
- d. The people chosen by the congregation are willing and able.

How often is the church managed by willing people who have no ability while those who are able are not willing! But the seven chosen are full of the Spirit and wisdom; their involvement helps to release the apostles to fulfil their gifts and calling.

The result - As expected, when human problems are met with divinely guided solutions, there is growth (7).

Heavenly Father, grant wisdom to our leaders to know their priorities, and to delegate work to people who are hath aide and willing. Should it be who have the heart and are willing.

What qualities must a servant of God possess? Stephen, the new deacon, is an example of one who has some of those qualities.

In 6:5, Stephen is described as one who is 'full of faith and the Holy Spirit', and in 6:8. he is said to be full of God's grace and power. These qualities enabled Stephen to face fierce opposition with calmness and wisdom (10).

The problem came from the Synagogue of the Freedmen, former Jewish slaves freed by the Romans. These Jews had formed themselves into various synagogues. Most were from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia. Interestingly, Cilicia was where Paul came from (Acts 22:3) and probably Luke received the information of Stephen's face shining like that of an angel (15) from Paul himself. These Jews lost their arguments with Stephen (9) and resorted to violence and lies (13). They dragged Stephen to the Sanhedrin and produced false witnesses against him.

Although their accusations of Stephen were false, a fair idea of Stephen's preaching may be derived from their charges. It is not far-fetched to think that Stephen had picked up on Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, and of the Pharisees' misunderstanding of the law. Typically, the enemies twisted what Stephen had said.

Stephen, being full of power and grace, withstood his enemies. If he were only full of grace, he would have been a pushover in the difficult situation. If he were simply powerful, he would be intimidating. However, his life was a balance between grace and strength!

Father, break, mold and make me till I have these qualities of servanthood-faith, humility, peace and power.

JUN 9, WEDNESDAY

Act 7:1-8:1a

The First Martyr

Act 7:55

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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JUN 9, WEDNESDAY

Act 7:1-8:1a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 9, WEDNESDAY

Act 7:1-8:1a

Learning From History

Act 7:55

Stephen faced two charges of teaching against the temple and the Law of Moses (6:13). Strangely, he defended himself by giving his accusers a history lesson! It wasn't that the Sanhedrin was ignorant but that they had a misconception of God, a result of their misunderstanding of Israel's history.

Stephen started with Abraham (vs 2-8). God had given Abraham the promise of blessing through his seed. Next, Joseph (vs 9-16) and Moses (vs 20- 22) were mentioned because both are types of Christ. The envious brothers sold Joseph into slavery (cf Mk 15: 10), but God used him to save Israel and the world from famine, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers only on their second visit just as it will be at Christ's second coming that Israel will know the Messiah. Just as Christ saves us from the bondage to sin, so Moses led Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

Stephen testified for the glory of God. The Jews were tied down by their traditions concerning the land, the temple and the law. Yet, the Law of Moses pointed to Christ and the gospel would not be tied down by the Jewish culture relating to the temple or the land. The gospel is for the world and God is to be worshipped everywhere.

There is spiritual nourishment to be received from the history of Israel. 'Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope' (Rom 15:4). Are we like Stephen who received such wisdom from the Old Testament?

Reveal Yourself to us, O Father, each time we read the Old Testament.

Since he was accused of teaching against the Law of Moses, naturally, Stephen spoke at length about Moses. In doing so, he drew parallels between Christ and Moses.

Moses tried to deliver his people who were slaves in Egypt. His people rejected him as their deliverer (vs 25. 35, 39) and reconciler (v 27). Likewise, the Sanhedrin had rejected Christ. The typology becomes even clearer when Stephen reminded his hearers that it was Moses who had prophesied the coming of a prophet that would be like him (Deut 18:15).

However, Moses' method and timing to save his people was wrong and he had to flee to Midian (v 29). Forty years later, God met Moses at the burning bush in Sinai - a site that was far from Jerusalem (v 38). Here again is the typology in the use of the word ekklesia which the Christian community took over to refer to themselves: there is the similarity between Moses who led Israel in their pilgrimage to the Promised Land and Christ leading the Church in this earthly pilgrimage to Heaven. But the more important point is that God gave Moses the 'living words' (the Law) that Israel rejected and disobeyed (v 39). Sadder still, they turned to worship idols (vs 40-41). Thus far from being loyal to the Law and the temple, the Jews who accused Stephen belonged to the same nation that from the beginning had rejected the Law and the true worship of God (vs 42-43). Although the phrase, 'history repeats itself' may be trite, it is often a fact we have to take note of.

Father, teach me to learn from my past and help me not to repeat the same mistakes.

Death comes to everyone and Stephen's death helps us not to be fearful of it. Moreover, one's death may have a beneficial influence on others as it was in the case of Stephen.

Stephen had been accused of speaking against the temple (6:13). Therefore he spoke about the temple and the roles of David and Solomon concerning it. Perhaps sensing that his time was short, he began to summarize the rest of Israel's history: in one verse (45) he compacted the events in Joshua through 1Samuel: the next two verses (46-47) form a summary of the temple built by Solomon (the heart of 2 Samuel through Chronicles) and in the last three verses (48-50), he completed his survey of Ezra through Malachi by quoting from Isaiah. 'The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands' (Isa 66:1-2).

Then Stephen turned the spotlight on his accusers (51). He called them 'a stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears'. The Sanhedrin was 'furious and gnashed their teeth' (54). Violently, they seized Stephen, dragged him out of the city and stoned him to death. But before he was seized, Stephen was strengthened and assured by a vision of the 'Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (56). In death, God has a way of comforting those who are His. Before he died, Stephen had two prayers: one for himself and the other for his enemies (59-60). His prayers and his death eventually affected Saul profoundly (8:1-3; 22:20-21).

Lord, thank You for taking away my fear of death. Teach me to forgive my enemies and to pray for them.

JUN 10, THURSDAY

Act 8:1b-25

No Pain, No Gain

Act 8:17

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

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

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

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

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

It was persecution in Jerusalem that triggered the spread of the Gospel to Judea and Samaria. This reminds us that God is in control and is fulfilling His promises, even through things that look like setbacks. How can knowing this encourage you in your life and ministry?

P.R.A.Y

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JUN 10, THURSDAY

Act 8:1–25

"Who was Simon the Sorcerer?"

Act 8:17

Simon the Sorcerer, sometimes referred to as Simon Magus or Simon of Gitta, is mentioned by Luke in Acts 8:9–24. He appeared in the wake of the newly established church in Samaria. A minor figure in New Testament history, Simon also appears in Gnostic texts in which his character and biography are expanded upon, but these accounts are unlikely to be historically reliable due to the nature of these writings and their anonymous authors.

It is not clear where Simon was born. In the book of Acts it is stated that he "amazed all the people of Samaria" (Acts 8:9), but the account does not identify him as a Samaritan himself. Christian apologist Justin Martyr is believed to have propagated the idea that Simon was a Samaritan from the city of Gitta, and this has been accepted in early church tradition and today by some church historians. The Jew called Simon who "pretended to be a magician" is referred to by the historian Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, book 20, chapter 7), but this appears to be a different historical figure, as he was born in Cyprus.

Sorcery, which is strongly condemned by God (Deuteronomy 18:9–13), was common in the ancient world, and, while some acts and demonstrations were no more than illusions of the mind, others were empowered by Satan in an attempt to discredit the power of God (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9). It appears Simon was the latter, as Luke states that he had amazed the Samaritans "for a long time with his sorcery" (Acts 8:11), some even declaring that he was "the great Power of God" (Acts 8:10), a messianic title. Interestingly, however, Simon's empowerment by Satan did not include loyalty to the demonic. In the wake of hearing and seeing the disciple Philip "as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12), Simon was baptized into the early church and "followed Philip everywhere" (Acts 8:13).

The Bible says that "the Holy Spirit had not yet come" upon the Samaritans (Acts 8:16). Later, the apostles Peter and John arrived, at which time the Spirit came upon the believers. Simon witnessed this event and "offered them money and said, 'Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 8:19–20). At this point, Peter strongly reprimands Simon for his greed and states that he needs to "repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart" (Acts 8:22). Fearful of the apostle's words, Simon pleads with Peter to pray to the Lord on his behalf.

After this event, the Bible never again refers to Simon the Sorcerer. It would appear, contrary to apocryphal and Gnostic texts that seek to glorify his role as sorcerer and his previous satanic abilities, that Simon was repentant and may have continued to be a member of the local church in Samaria. However, Justin Martyr and other Christian apologists like Irenaeus insist he was an antichrist and continued his sorcery, even founding Gnosticism itself. The greed of Simon is recalled in the modern word simony, "using religion as a means of profit.

Contemporary Christians should take from the account of Simon that the church, even today, must be careful of those claiming to possess supernatural abilities, and those claiming to be Christians who desire to "buy the gift of God with money," for their "heart is not right before God" (Acts 8:20–21).

Stephen's martyrdom unleashed a rage of violence against the church. But persecution serves to strengthen the believers with three results:

- a. Christ was proclaimed by the scattered believers (4-5):
- b. Christ gave power to them to heal (7):
- c. Christ gave joy (8). God used the persecution as a catalyst to spread the gospel (4-5, 8, 14), even to Samaria!

Philip, a deacon (Acts 6), preached the Word in Samaria with miracles that caught the attention of Simon the sorcerer. Before the arrival of Philip and the apostles, Simon had the attention of the city because of his magical powers. He recognized that the power of Philip and the apostles was different and superior to his magic. He became a believer and was baptized.

The Samaritan believers did not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came to lay their hands on them. This was God's way of preventing the long-lasting hostility between the Jews and the Samaritans from getting into the new Christian community. Other explanations such as the gift being given only by the laying on of hands or that the Samaritans had not yet responded fully to the gospel lack credible support from Scriptures. Seeing that the empowerment of the apostles came from the Holy Spirit, Simon offered to buy the gift from the apostles. Amazingly, Simon, the baptized believer, had failed to realize that salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit were to be received by the grace of God. No one could ever buy or bargain with God for His gifts of grace.

Father, thank You for salvation and the empowerment from the Holy Spirit.

JUN 11, FRIDAY

Act 8:26–9:19a

Grace to the Worst of Sinners

Act 9:15–16

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 11, FRIDAY

Act 8:26-9:19a

"Who was the Ethiopian eunuch?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 11, FRIDAY

Act 8:26–9:19a

Soul- Winning

Act 9:15–16

What makes a soul-winner? One who is Spirit-filled, sensitive to His prompting, obedient, tactful and has knowledge of Scriptures. Such a one is Philip, 'full of the Holy Spirit' (6:3), sensitive to the Spirit's prompting (29) and obedient (27, 30).

Philip could have doubted or debated when he was given the strange command to go to the desert road leading south of Jerusalem towards Gaza. No one was likely to be there at that time. Yet Philip obeyed.

God had prepared the Ethiopian eunuch by bringing him to worship in Jerusalem and sending him back on the same road. He was reading the scroll of Isaiah. This was strange because by Jewish law (Deut 23:1), no eunuch was permitted to worship in the temple. 'Eunuch' is used here as a reference to a court official.

Under normal circumstances, no ordinary person would think of getting near to a traveler sitting in his chariot, reading. Philip needed the assurance of this second divine command (29). It was not by chance that the official was reading Isaiah 53:7-8, a passage about the death of Christ. God arranged for Philip to be there, tactfully to ask a question, to listen, to explain the good news about Jesus (35). Soul-winning at its best builds on what God had already begun in a person's life.

An important factor that led to the eunuch's salvation was his humility. He was an important official but in spiritual matters, he humbly admitted his ignorance (30-31) and he submitted to God's command to be baptized (36-38).

Father, help me develop the qualities of a soul-winner.

Are you discouraged by hostile responses from people you witness to? Or, are you worried that your dear ones may never believe? Be encouraged as you read of Paul's amazing conversion. Paul's conversion is encouraging. It is told three times - here, and the second and third times by Paul himself in 22:3-16 and 26:4-18. That a persecutor should become a preacher, a tormentor turned into a teacher and prolific writer (he wrote 14 books if including the book of Hebrews) of over half of the New Testament is truly exciting.

Armed with warrants from the high priest to arrest Christians in the synagogues of Damascus, Paul set off from Jerusalem. It was a week's journey. But for Paul, it was to become the beginning of his journey to eternal life. He knew nothing of this till Jesus confronted him: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' What a surprise (perhaps also terrifying) to Paul but comforting to persecuted believers in later centuries.

When he heard the voice. Paul had the sense to ask a question (5). Besides an answer, Paul received instructions to go to Damascus. For three days, Paul could not see, the better for him to reflect and pray about his blinding encounter with the Lord. Meanwhile, God told Ananias to visit Paul. Ananias objected because he knew of Paul's hostility. However, by faith he obeyed, and was God's instrument in Paul's healing and in conveying the divine message to him (15-16).

Press on in your service and witnessing. Let not hostile people or demons discourage you.

JUN 12, SATURDAY

Act 9:19b-43

From Persecutor to Persecuted

Act 9:31b

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Who was Dorcas / Tabitha in the Bible?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 12, SATURDAY

Act 9:19b-43

Salvation, Suffering & Service

Act 9:31b

Be faithful and God will prosper you, enlarge your borders, keep you from harm and free you from pain. That seems to be a popular message in some pulpits today. However, faithfulness to God is no guarantee of freedom from problems or suffering. Paul's life is an example.

Faith and service does not guarantee freedom from problems. Right after his healing, Paul began to preach in the synagogues of Damascus. His original plan was to seize Christians in these synagogues. Instead, he is now preaching about Jesus and showing from Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. No wonder the people were astonished (21). Paul's bold witnessing incurred the wrath of the Jews who conspired to kill him (23). Paul escaped to Jerusalem and there he met with another problem: rejection from fellow believers. Fortunately, Barnabas, true to his name, spoke up for Paul before the apostles. In Jerusalem, the Greek-speaking Jews wanted to kill him (29). This time, the believers took Paul to the coastal town of Caesarea and sent him by boat to Tarsus, Paul's hometown.

Paul's conversion ended persecution for the moment. Persecution had failed to stop church growth (31). Luke noted five characteristics in this period of growth: peace, strength, encouragement, growth and godliness.

Conversion is only the beginning. The grace that brings us salvation will lead us to service, where suffering may come. However, God will bring others to help us on the way.

If you are not a Paul, will you pray to be an Ananias or a Barnabas?

There was no fanfare. The healing of Aeneas was so straightforward, the Healer so clearly named: "Jesus Christ heals you" (34a), the evidence of the miracle so visible: "Immediately Aeneas got up" (34b). The power and presence of the living God arrested the people in Lydda. "All who lived in Lydda and Sharon saw and turned to the Lord" (35). Revival broke out! Note how Peter directed the paralytic to Jesus, not to himself. Note how the people turned to Jesus, not to Peter (35). This is an important ministry principle we need to establish in our lives. *'Channels only, blessed Master, but with all Thy wondrous power flowing through us. Thou canst use us every day and every hour'*

In Joppa, 12 miles from Lydda, Dorcas used needle and thread to minister to needy widows (39). Her ministry' tools were simple, even insignificant, but she yielded them to the Master's use. With magnificent results! Pick up another ministry principle here. Do we wish to serve the Lord? Then we need to identify the tools God has already placed in our hands and set our minds to excel in using them for the Master.

Yet another ministry principle emerges. Know the group the Lord is leading us to minister to. Dorcas knew hers - poor widows in need of robes and clothing (39). Did Dorcas pray for each widow as she stitched? Feel the joy that erupted in that room when Peter presented Dorcas to them alive!

Lord, clean me up that I may be a channel of blessing where You have placed me.

JUN 13, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of Acts 9:32-16:5

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

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

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

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

JUN 14, MONDAY

Act 10:1-23a

Crossing Borders

Act 10:15

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

"Who was Cornelius in the Bible?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 14, MONDAY

Act 10:1-23a

Angels in the Afternoon

Act 10:15

Do good men need Christ? Today's passage provides the answer. Cornelius and his household were good people who excelled in good deeds (2). They believed in one God and sought to live righteously. Cornelius had already adopted some of the Jewish religious practices. He was praying at three o'clock in the afternoon - this was the Jewish hour of prayer (Acts 3:1).

The divine revelation that came through the angel was to link Cornelius up with Peter, the messenger, who would bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the household of this God-fearing centurion. God knows our addresses and the exact location of our homes - the house in Joppa was 'by the sea' (6). Notice the care Cornelius exercised in selecting the men (7) and the effort he made to communicate the significance of the mission. 'He told them everything' (8). This was, after all, no ordinary assignment. Wisely, Cornelius assigned a devout soldier (7) to head the team.

Meanwhile, God was preparing the messenger. Peter, ingrained in the observance of the laws of clean and unclean animals, had to be corrected (15) three times. God is a patient Teacher. Are we as patient with those whom we teach? New converts carry baggage from old religious practices and may need repeated instruction in Biblical truths. In God's excellent providence, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at the house as Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision. Catch the mounting excitement as they called at the gate. Cornelius, the day of your salvation draweth nigh!

Pray for God to send a Peter to a God-fearing man in your family whose heart is ready to receive the Savior.

God speaks to us primarily through His Word, the Bible. Sometimes, however, He directs in ways we do not expect.

Gary Dougherty, a co-worker at RBC Ministries, was walking home from church one evening when he saw a young man coming from the opposite direction. A strong urge came over Gary to talk with him about becoming a Christian. He hesitated at first, but then he said to this total stranger, "Pardon me, but I believe God wants me to tell you how to become a Christian."

"I just asked my girlfriend's mother that question," said the man, "but she didn't know." "You mean you want to become a Christian?" Gary asked. "Yes, I do!" he replied. Still incredulous, Gary asked him again and then shared the plan of salvation with him. That night a young man met Jesus as his Savior.

Some might call this a coincidence, but there's a biblical parallel in Acts 10 with Cornelius and Peter, two men who were in touch with God's Spirit.

Not all believers have equally dramatic experiences. But if God's Word, prayer, and obedience are a daily part of our lives, we will be tuned in to the Spirit's leading and be ready to convey God's love to others.

By: Dennis J. DeHaan

**Father, thank You for Your Spirit, Fill us with His love and power;
Change us into Christ's own image Day by day and hour by hour. —Anon.**

When you open your heart to the Lord, He opens your eyes to the lost.

JUN 15, TUESDAY

Act 10:23b-48

God's Witness to His Promise for the Gentiles

Act 10:34-35

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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JUN 15, TUESDAY

Act 10:23b-48

Eager Hearers, Expectant Hearts

Act 10:34-35

Peter had not fully grasped the meaning of the vision, but in obedience to the bidding of the Holy Spirit, he went down to greet the visitors. As he listened to the men, the light shone through for him. He was now ready to take the first step towards accepting the Gentiles: he invited the men into the house to be his guests (23). Obedience is crucial if we desire to understand the ways of God in our lives. To stay upstairs in reverie mulling over the vision would only have increased Peter's perplexity. Are you struggling with a certain set of circumstances in your life right now? Is there a step of obedience the Holy Spirit is prompting you to take? Take it.

In the home of Cornelius, Peter preached to a congregation that every preacher dreams about (33):

- The people were all gathered and waiting
- They were aware that they were in the presence of God
- They believed the Lord had a message for them
- They were ready to listen to every word Peter was going to preach!

What a congregation! What an extraordinary seeker of truth Cornelius was! The longing to know God was so strong and the conviction that the hour of revelation had come so overwhelming, that Cornelius enthusiastically called together his relatives and close friends (24). The generosity of the man's heart and spirit was unmistakable. May we exhibit that same spirit of generosity that will stir us to gather our relatives and close friends to hear the Word of God preached.

**Holy Spirit, plough my heart till it becomes as soft and ready for your Word
as Cornelius' heart was.**

Peter states an essential truth immediately: God does not favor any particular individual or nation. Everyone may come to Him (34). The message of the vision now clearly understood. Peter proceeds to preach about the 'good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all' (36). As a faithful witness, he tells his attentive listeners the 'things of first importance' (1 Cor 15:3-5): that Jesus died for our sins, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day and was seen by many witnesses. Peter declares, 'We are witnesses of everything' (39). Having presented Jesus, he now extends the invitation (43). Note the emphasis believes in Him, receives forgiveness through His name (43). There is no other way. Good men need Jesus to be their personal Savior too.

What happened next would forever make that meeting memorable. While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message (44), as the Spirit of God discerned the response of every heart to believe in Jesus and to receive forgiveness of sins.' The conditions were met and the Holy Spirit came to confirm God's acceptance of the Gentile believers. The small group of Jewish believers was astonished but they could not deny the evidence of their eyes and ears (45-46). Peter's call to have the new believers baptized was an acknowledgement that the church will accept whoever God accepts.

What a glorious day it was for both Jewish and Gentile believer! The barriers dividing the two communities had crashed. In Christ a new solidarity was established. Peter accepts the invitation to stay with his new Gentile brethren (48). He would spend the time to teach and guide the new believers in the ways of the Lord.

God welcomes all believers into His household. Do our churches do the same?

JUN 16, WEDNESDAY Act 11:1-30

As God is My Witness

Act 11:17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 16, WEDNESDAY

Act 11:1-30

Four Hammer Blows

Act 11:17

The word is out. The Gentiles have also received the word of God! And Peter has stayed in the homes of the uncircumcised and eaten with them! It is difficult for us who are non-Jews to catch the impact of these events. It was of grave concern to the Jewish brethren that Peter had eaten with men who did not observe the laws of clean and unclean food and who would, in all probability, have violated Jewish regulations concerning food preparation. Peter, who had shared the same beliefs (Acts 10:14) prior to the vision, now proceeds to explain.

Peter took care to explain everything with precision (4). Here's an example we could emulate. Instead of taking offence when criticisms are directed at us, let us try giving clear and detailed explanations that will enable the critics to see the whole picture.

John Stott in his book 'The Message of Acts' describes the four significant parts of the divine revelation Peter received as the 'four successive hammer blows' that overcame Peter's racial and religious prejudice. They are: **the divine vision** (4-10); **the divine command** (11-12); **the divine preparation** (13-14) and **the divine action** (15-17). The narrator was one of their own, the details were astounding. Did the brethren listen with bated breath as Peter narrated the sequence of events? As he drew to a conclusion, it was clear to all the Jewish brethren that the divine hand had been clearly at work. All opposition fizzled out even as Peter asked, 'Who was I to think that I could oppose God?' Who would dare?

When God does a new thing in our midst, let's check out the facts before we criticize.

The gospel comes to Antioch! Crowds get saved! Men from Cyprus and Cyrene are the evangelists of the hour! Imagine the excitement these headlines are whipping up. Before too long, these evangelists (unnamed) could well be in our churches speaking at Evangelistic Expertise Clinics. Our banners might welcome them as the Antioch Aflame team, come to teach us the Antioch Approach to successful evangelism. We are on our marks, getting set and once they impart the methods, we are ready to go.

Whoa! Whoa! Aren't we missing out something of paramount importance here? Six words that so easily skip our attention as we read of exciting events and large numbers: **'The Lord's hand was with them'** (21a). This is the key to the bountiful harvest in Antioch. Beware lest we get sidetracked and feed an insatiable appetite for methods. Shall we not instead hunger after and seek for the Lord's hand in our midst and in our evangelistic endeavors? Draw us after You, O Lord!

Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement (4:36) continues his ministry of encouragement in Antioch. Note his sensitive and generous spirit (23).

- He rejoices and cheers the believers on. He is not a wet blanket and is not green-eyed that the new church is prospering.
- He discerns the need for instruction of the new believers. He seeks out Saul, introduces him to the church and teams up with him for a whole year to teach great numbers of people.

Was Barnabas not worried that Paul would outshine him? Shouldn't he be guarding his own turf, his own position and popularity? God saw the man's heart. Listen to the heart-warming tribute accorded Barnabas. 'He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith' (24a).

Are you wanting to go when God is saying, 'Whoa!'?

JUN 17, THURSDAY

Act 12:1-24

The Unstoppable Gospel

Act 12:5

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 17, THURSDAY

Act 12:1-24

Pray, Always Pray

Act 12:5

It is not uncommon on the night before an important event to feel anxious and restless. Sometimes, sleep may evade us completely. That is why Peter's behavior (v 6) catches our attention. He had been arrested and put in prison. He was aware that James had been put to death by the sword (v 2). The same end could well await him. And now the night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains (v 6). Yes, sleeping, and sleeping so soundly that the angel of the Lord had to strike him on the side to wake him up (v 7). Where were the night-before jitters? The clue to Peter's peace of mind and heart could well lie in verse 5 - 'the church was earnestly praying to God for him'.

Some years ago I had to go through major surgery'. My family, friends and church members gave me the best gift they could possibly give - prayer. My church activated a round-the-clock prayer covering for me. The night before the surgery, the church gathered in my house to pray. I slept soundly. The surgeon, a committed Christian, prayed with me before surgery. My sisters and some church members prayed in my hospital room while surgery was in progress. I was wonderfully blessed by the priceless gift of prayer in my time of need.

Because family, friends and church members were earnestly praying to God for me (v 5), I experienced the peace of God which passes all understanding (Phil 4:6). That peace guarded my heart and mind and gave me the courage to face life-threatening circumstances with His strength.

Give someone the gift of prayer today.

'Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall' (Prov 16:18). King Nebuchadnezzar learnt it the hard way (Dan 4). Herod did not live to tell the tale. Herod exulted in the outward display of his power: the people (v 20), the royal robes, the throne, the public acclaim (v 21). Hungry for the praise of man and haughty in spirit, he drank in their flattery (v 22) and exalted himself (v 23). Josephus records that he was carried out in violent pain and died five days later (Josephus, Antiquities. XIX.8.2).

God's judgement fell on Herod because he glorified himself instead of God. Note how Peter responded when Cornelius fell at his feet in reverence. Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself' (10:26).

Consider also the heart of David when he proclaimed. 'What is man that you are mindful of him. the son of man that you care for him?' (Psa 8:4). Do we know our place and our position? Do we take pride in our eloquence when we stand behind the pulpit? Do we flourish in the praise of man? Beware lest we strut around like peacocks and forget that the Lord is God and that He will not give His glory to another (Isa 42:8).

Acts 12 begins with the record of Herod troubling the church; it closes with Herod out of the way and the word of God flourishing: 'But the Word of God continued to increase and spread' (v 24). It also reports the successful progress of the Work of God: 'Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission' (v 25). The Lord alone is God. Ascribe all glory and praise to Him.

Meditate on Micah 6:8.

JUN 18, FRIDAY

Act 12:24-13:12

Service in the Spirit

Act 13:2-3

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 18, FRIDAY

Act 12:24–13:12

Opportunities and Obstacles

Act 13:2–3

Paul's first missionary journey was borne out of a praise and prayer meeting. The Holy Spirit had earlier called Barnabas and Paul and confirmed it with the church at Antioch. Here we have a very important principle of how God calls into ministry. He calls individuals and gives confirmation through the local church.

At Paphos on the island of Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul had the opportunity to witness to a very prominent person, the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. This provided a tremendous opportunity for the missionaries. They were actually summoned by the Roman proconsul who wanted to hear the word of God. Barnabas and Paul must have gone with great excitement and anticipation.

However, challenges and obstacles often accompany opportunities. Elymas the sorcerer represents the god of this age who seeks to blind the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4). As with Paul, we need the Holy Spirit to overcome such obstacles in sharing the gospel. With the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, we can face the obstacles with boldness and confidence. Ironically, the one who sought to blind the proconsul from faith in Christ was punished with temporary physical blindness.

Obstacles are bound to arise in the course of Christian service, but the Holy Spirit who called us will grant us the power and resources to overcome them. We just need to be faithful in proclaiming God's message of salvation.

Father, I pray for those who have answered Your call for overseas missions. I bring their needs before You. I pray that the Holy Spirit will empower them to overcome challenges and obstacles. Grant them boldness to speak in Your name.

Again and again we hear of groups who claim to be doing things in God's name yet don't seem to be truly serving Him. For instance, we see cults rising up—groups that are headed by a leader with personal magnetism, who draws people to himself with promises, claiming to have special knowledge from God.

To avoid being carried away by this kind of person, it might be helpful to look closely at the suggestions of Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian writer. He said God will bless:

- what He initiates
- what depends on Him for its success
- what is done according to His Word
- what is done for His glory

The work of Paul and Barnabas in their first missionary journey met those guidelines. As we read Acts 13, we see that God initiated it (v.2), the people depended on God (v.3), it was done according to the Word of God (v.5), and God received the glory (v.12).

Whenever we wonder whether some work we hear about is done with God's blessing, we need to apply this four-step test. It's the best way to make sure things are done God's way, not man's.

By: Dave Branon

**They truly lead who lead by love, And humbly serve the Lord;
Their lives will bear the Spirit's fruit, And magnify His Word. —DJJ**

The only leader worth following is the leader who is following Christ.

JUN 19, SATURDAY

Act 13:13-52

The Messenger of the Gospel

Act 13:39

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 19, SATURDAY

Act 13:13-52

God's Plans and Promises

Act 13:39

Paul often used history to give perspective to the present. To the Jews and Gentile proselytes at Antioch of Pisidia, he traced the history of the Israelites from the time God chose them and showed them how God unfolded His plan of salvation for the world through Jesus. He emphasized time and again that Jesus' death and resurrection are a fulfilment of God's plan as spoken by their prophets. The good news is that what God promises, He fulfils; what He says, He does.

In the hustle and bustle of modern living, it is good to spend time to reflect on our past and bring to memory how God has worked out His plan for our lives. It is amazing how God uses good and bad experiences to shape our lives and to bring us to where we are now. While we thank God for blessings, we often question Him about the trials, just like gold is refined by fire, life may get a little hot as God burns away the dross.

Like a patient father, God puts up with our ups and downs, our complaints and grumbling. Ultimately, He wants to bring us to that land of milk and honey where we can enjoy His presence and His blessings. The journey may be a long and tedious one but what God promises, He will fulfil.

Thank God that He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Look back on your past and see how God has been faithful in fulfilling His promises.

Jesus' resurrection was the central message of the early Church. Paul showed from the Psalms and Isaiah that Jesus' resurrection was a fulfilment of Scripture and that David was not the one referred to in the passages. The powerful message of the apostles was their personal witness to the resurrection of Jesus. They saw the risen Christ and witnessed His ascension into heaven.

Christians in the new millennium need to recapture this conviction and fervor regarding Jesus' resurrection to impact those around them. We should not be talking about Christ's resurrection only during Easter. Like the apostles, we too may testify to the reality of the risen Christ's presence in our lives as we walk with Him in our faith journey. The risen Christ must be real to us before we can share Him with others.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, our preaching is useless and our faith is in vain. Our faith is the only one that claims the immortality of its founder. The resurrection proves that Jesus is the Son of God.

It is Christ's resurrection that gives us the glorious hope of life after death. It also gives us hope while living in a world of turmoil and uncertainty. Let us share about the Christ who not only died on the cross for our sins, but who rose from the dead to give us meaning and hope for living.

Father, I thank You for Your great plan of salvation, which did not stop at the cross.

Thank You for the empty tomb. Help me to share this good news with conviction and fervor.

JUN 20, SUNDAY – Father’s Day

What does the Bible say about Christian fathers?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 20, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 21, MONDAY

Act 14:1-28

The Gospel Divides

Act 14:3

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

Synopsis of Paul's first missionary journey

The apostle Paul went on three pioneering missionary journeys, followed by a trip to Rome. His first missionary journey, most likely in the years AD 47 through 48, started in Syria and took him to Cyprus and Asia Minor.

After Paul witnessed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), was confronted and converted by Jesus (Acts 9), and visited Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30), the church leadership tucked him safely away in his hometown of Tarsus on the southeastern coast of modern Turkey. Meanwhile, the persecution in Jerusalem grew, and believers fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch, which wasn't too far from Tarsus (Acts 11:19–30). The dispersed Christians brought the gospel with them, and when the leaders in Jerusalem learned how quickly the church was growing, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to verify what was happening.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 21, MONDAY

Act 14:1–28

Only Human

Act 14:3

Persecution and plots seemed to be the order of the day for Paul and Barnabas as they journeyed on their first missionary journey from Pisidian Antioch to Iconium. They had to flee for their lives but they continued to preach the good news.

Spectacular healing and miraculous signs are always attributed to God. Even the most primitive of civilization holds this belief. The healing of the cripple at Lystra was spectacular. The healed man, crippled from birth, could now jump up and walk. It was truly a medical wonder.

The local Lycaonians thought that the gods had come down in human form and proceeded to worship their newfound deities. Paul and Barnabas quickly objected. As always, they used this opportunity to direct their audience to the true and living Creator-God who provided rain for their crops at the right time. Paul often tailored his preaching in accordance with the background and culture of his audience.

Servants of God may be lifted beyond their humanity and even acknowledged as possessing an element of divinity. It takes great humility and integrity to acknowledge our humanness. Learn from the example of Paul and Barnabas.

Father, we acknowledge that we are mere human beings to whom You have chosen to show Your grace and mercy. Help us to identify with those You have called us to minister to.

It would be unthinkable to bring newborn children into the world and then leave them to fend for themselves. Whenever we read of such incidents, our hearts go out to the defenseless little ones. Similarly, it is not enough to just bring people to faith in Jesus. It is not the end of the journey but the beginning.

New believers need to be strengthened and encouraged to remain true to their faith in spite of hardships, which are bound to arise. Infant believers can be most zealous, and vulnerable at the same time, just as the greatest rate of physical growth in a baby is in the first year of life, new believers often have the greatest potential for service provided they are guided with wisdom and care.

The effectiveness of Paul's ministry lies in his strategy to organize the churches he planted. Young plants need to be propped up until their stems are strong. New believers need the most amount of support in all aspects, not only in the spiritual realm. Paul supported the new churches with much prayer and fasting. He appointed leaders to shepherd them. Young plants need to be watered constantly until their roots are developed. Young believers need help to feed on God's Word until they are mature enough to feed themselves.

How can you encourage the new believers you know of.

JUN 22, TUESDAY

Act 15:1-35

Accepted in the Beloved

Act 15:8-9

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 22, TUESDAY

Act 15:1–35

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 22, TUESDAY

Act 15:1-35

Grace, Not Rituals

Act 15:8-9

As Christians we do not need to sever our cultural roots but we do need to discern practices that are not in tandem with our faith. The Pharisees belonged to a sect whose members were extremely strict in religious observances, which for the most part, were merely outward show. They claimed to have a stricter and more accurate interpretation of the Law of Moses. The Early Church had believers who were Pharisees and who brought with them their pre-conversion practices and attitudes. Paul was a Pharisee himself and was very familiar with their empty religious observances.

Today's reading brings us to the crossroads faced by the Early Church. Should Gentile Christians be required to undergo circumcision and obey the Law of Moses? Circumcision of every male Jew at eight days of age was a vital part of God's covenant with Abraham. The Jews had always thought that they were the exclusive people of God. To accept Gentile believers into the Church would involve a drastic change to their mind-set. The essential fact remains that we are saved through grace by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and not by strict religious observances. The old covenant has been superseded by the new.

Ask God for the circumcision of our hearts by the Holy Spirit – the removal of that which does not please the Lord.

Although the early Gentile Christians were granted freedom from circumcision, they had to abstain from certain practices that were either not consistent with their faith or which hindered fellowship with their Jewish counterparts. Sexual immorality was inconsistent with their newfound faith. Eating of food polluted by idols and meat of strangled animals would prevent Jews from eating with Gentiles. Drinking of blood was also prohibited.

Although we are free to eat all foods that are sanctified by prayer and thanksgiving, yet in love and with discernment, we should avoid those which may cause division or cause some to stumble. As Asians, we live in countries with diverse faiths. Most religious festivals are associated with particular practices and types of food. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with food offered to idols, our consumption of it could well associate us with idolatrous worship. Refer to Paul's teaching on this subject (1 Cor 10:14-33).

I remember my own teenage experience. Coming from a typical Chinese family which practiced Taoism and ancestral worship, I had a deep conviction not to take food offered to idols. I was ridiculed and scolded for refusing good food. After a few festivals, my conviction was respected and food was separately prepared for the Christians in the family. Thank God for His faithfulness.

**Father, we thank You that when we seek to honor You, You will honor us.
Thank You for freedom in Christ to choose that which pleases You.**

Good news encourages us. It lifts our spirit and brightens our day. The letter from the apostles and elders was good news to the Gentile believers. They must have been anxiously awaiting the outcome of the Jerusalem Council. It was good news that they would not be burdened beyond the four requirements (v 29).

The representatives of the Jerusalem church also brought words of exhortation to strengthen the believers at Antioch. The ministry of encouragement is much needed today. When people are grinding to a halt, a word of encouragement often gives them new resolve to pick up the mess and move forward. In a world where morality and hope are fast decaying, we need to find ways and means of spurring one another on towards love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). Encouragement can be given through either spoken or written words. It does not take much time to pick up the telephone and encourage someone. Letter writing - a fast declining practice in today's world of electronic mail - will take more time. Yet it is the letters that will be kept and treasured. If writing a letter is too time-consuming, a simple card is just as meaningful.

**Remember those whom God had sent to encourage you during times of difficulty and need.
Thank God for their ministry and lives. Be open to the Holy Spirits prompting to encourage someone today.**

Overview of Galatians

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

Among his earliest letters was the Epistle to the Galatians which he wrote around AD 48-49. It was a letter addressed to the churches of Galatia (1:2). There is some dispute among Bible scholars as to the location of these churches. The majority say that they were in the cities of Psidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, cities that Paul visited during his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). During Paul's time, Galatia and the whole of Asia Minor were under Roman imperial control.

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

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

Defend the True Gospel

Gal 1:3-5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 23, WEDNESDAY

Gal 1:1–24

Let Your Personal Story Authenticates the Gospel

Gal 1:24

And they praised God because of me. Gal 1:24

What attracts a person to Jesus Christ? I have been thinking about this as I see many religions today vying for people's attention in Asia. Everyone says he has the truth and tries to show it rationally, logically and scientifically. Others show their power over nature and perform miracles such as healings. But what would convince people of the truth of Jesus Christ? Will seeing Jesus in a person convince people of the truth of Jesus?

Paul, in this section of his Galatian letter, makes use of his life experiences to tell the truth of the Gospel to the Galatian believers. He tells them that he 'received it by revelation from Jesus Christ' and not from any man nor was he taught it (vs 11-12).

He tells them that in the past, he was one who was so zealous for the Jewish beliefs that he persecuted the Christian believers and tried to destroy the church of God. What stopped him was the fact that God revealed his Son to him (on his way to Damascus) so that he might preach Jesus to the Gentiles (vs 13-14).

He was not taught the Gospel by anyone - not even by the apostles. He did not go to Jerusalem to consult them but rather he went straight away to Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Then later on, he went to Jerusalem and stayed with Peter for 15 days and also met James the brother of Jesus. After that he went to the region of Syria and Cilicia. Reports came to the churches in Judea that he who had earlier persecuted the church was now preaching the faith (vs 16-24).

Paul used his personal story to authenticate the Gospel that he was preaching.

Pray that as believers, our lives might daily authenticate the Gospel to which we bear witness.

Peer pressure is part of everyday life. Sometimes we base our decisions on what other people will think or say rather than on our convictions and on what will please God. We're worried that we'll be judged or made fun of.

The apostle Paul experienced his fair share of peer pressure. Some Jewish Christians believed that Gentiles should be circumcised to be truly saved (Gal. 1:7; see 6:12-15). However, Paul stood his ground. He continued to preach that salvation is by grace through faith alone; no further works are required. And for that he was accused of being a self-appointed apostle. They further asserted that his version of the gospel had never received the apostles' approval (2:1-10).

Despite the pressure, Paul was very clear about whom he served—Christ. God's approval mattered most, not man's. He made it his goal not to win the approval of people, but of God (1:10).

Similarly, we are Christ's servants. We serve God whether people honor or despise us, whether they slander or praise us. One day "each of us will give an account of ourselves to God" (Rom. 14:12). That doesn't mean that we shouldn't consider what people think or say, but ultimately, we make pleasing God our main concern. We want to hear our Savior say, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matt. 25:23).

By: **Jaime Fernández Garrido**

**Dear Lord, no matter what others may say or do,
give me the courage to be faithful to You today.**

Keep following Jesus.

JUN 24, THURSDAY

Gal 2:1-21

Be Accountable to Others

Gal 2:20

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 24, THURSDAY

Gal 2:1-21

Dare To Confront Wrong

Gal 2:20

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.
Gal 2:11

One of the hardest things to do as Asians is to tell our leaders their mistakes. Our cultural inclinations tell us to respect, and perhaps even revere our leaders who have led our nation through many trials and difficulties. In church, our leaders are given much respect and there is hardly any public outcry over their leadership unless it is really amiss.

What did Peter do that was in Paul's eyes an error to be refuted publicly (vs 11-14)? Peter had come to Antioch (the 3rd largest city of the Roman empire) where Paul and Barnabas had based their ministry to the Gentiles. Peter had been associating himself with the Gentile Christians before the arrival of certain men from the church in Jerusalem. When these men turned up, Peter withdrew himself from the company of the Gentile Christians because he was afraid of those from the circumcision group (the Judaizers). Other Jews, including Barnabas, joined him in this 'hypocrisy' and so Paul 'opposed him to his face' (publicly).

In refuting Peter's actions, Paul proposes two major arguments against what the Judaizers were suggesting the Gentile Christians ought to follow. First, he says that the law plays no positive role in one becoming a Christian as the Jewish believers knew that a man is not justified by the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. By observing the law no one will be justified (vs 15-16).

His second argument states that the law plays no positive role in Christian living. He declares, 'the life I now live is lived by faith in Jesus Christ who loved me and gave Himself for me' (vs 17-20). If righteousness could be gained through the law, then Jesus died in vain (v 21).

Paul knew that he had to face Peter and the other Christian Jews with the facts of the Gospel. He had to tell them to conform to the tenets of the Gospel, especially so when they were clearly in the wrong and their actions were causing the Gentile Christians to question aspects of their faith which they had learned from Paul. We need to have such clear understanding of the Gospel that we will not entertain any deviation from it.

Two little saplings grew side by side. Because of the action of the wind they continually crossed each other. In time the bark of each tree became wounded and the sap began to mingle, until one day they bonded together. As they grew, the stronger began to absorb the life of the weaker. One became larger and larger, while the top of the other began to wither and die. Now there are two trunks at the bottom and only one at the top. Death has taken away the one; life has triumphed in the other.

There was a time when you and Jesus Christ met and your heart was joined to His. Where are you now? Are your two lives running parallel, or does your life show more of Christ and less and less of your old sinful self? Do people see more and more Christlike character and less of you? Can you say, in the words of the apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"? (Gal. 2:20).

Our goal must be the same as that of John the Baptist, who said when he met Jesus, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30).

By: M.R. DeHaan

**Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered;
None of self and all of Thee. —Monod**

The more we serve Christ, the less we will serve self.

JUN 25, FRIDAY

Gal 3:1-25

Do Not Be Foolish

Gal 3:11b

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

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

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

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

**Have we somehow put other ideas into our understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
 Let us hold fast to true Biblical content.
 Let us return to the word of God and be steadfast.
 Let not the winds and waves of 'new' teachings toss us around.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 25, FRIDAY

Gal 3:1-25

Do Not Add to the Gospel

Gal 3:11b

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. Gal 3:25

George Whitefield said, 'It is best to preach the new birth, and the power of godliness, and not insist so much on the form: for people would never be brought to one mind as to that; nor did Jesus Christ ever intend it.'

He was replying to senior Anglican clergymen in Boston, Massachusetts right at the start of his evangelistic campaign in the seven colonies of North America in the year 1740. That campaign would bring thousands to hear him and signal the beginning of the 'Great Awakening' revival. Many years earlier, Paul faced the Judaizers in Galatia who wanted to add to the Gospel - they wanted Gentile believers to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. They said that if they did so they would experience the more perfect Christian life.

Paul informs the Galatian believers as to the purpose and function of the Mosaic Law (3:19-25). He highlights its relation to God's redemptive promises (vs 19-20), its condemnatory objective (vs 21-22) and finally, its supervisory function until faith is revealed (vs 23-25).

With Christ's coming and work completed, the law as a supervisory custodian to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith, has come to an end. There is no necessity any more to return to the law. If we did that, we would be renouncing Christ and the work of redemption.

George Whitefield was concerned to preach the Gospel truth. Paul taught that we cannot add Mosaic Law observance to the Gospel. What do we add to the Gospel today?

"Change: From the Inside Out or the Outside In?" the headline read, reflecting a popular trend today—the idea that outward changes like a makeover or better posture can be an easy way to change how we feel on the inside—and even change our lives.

It's an appealing concept—who wouldn't want improving our lives to be as easy as a new look? Many of us have learned the hard way that changing deep-rooted habits can seem nearly impossible. Focusing on simple external changes offers hope that there is a quicker path toward improving our lives.

But although such changes can improve our lives, Scripture invites us to seek a deeper transformation—one that is impossible on our own. In fact, in Gal 3 Paul argued that even God's law—a priceless gift that revealed His will—couldn't heal the brokenness of God's people (vv. 19–22). True healing and freedom required them to, through faith, be "clothed" in Christ (v. 27) through His Spirit (5:5). Set apart and shaped through Him, they would find their true identity and worth—every believer equally an heir to all of God's promises (3:28–29).

We could easily devote much energy to self-improvement techniques. But the deepest and most satisfying changes in our hearts come in knowing the love that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:17–19)—the love that changes everything.

By: Monica La Rose

Lord, we're so grateful we don't have to rely on ourselves.

Thank You for Your Spirit renewing us every day and drawing us closer to You and Your love.

In Jesus, true and lasting transformation is possible.

JUN 26, SATURDAY

Gal 3:26-4:7

In Christ We Are God's Children

Gal 4:6

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

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

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

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

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

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

What is the centre of our Christian lives? Is it some kind of prescribed 'Christian' behavior similar to what the Judaisers were asking the Galatian Christians to adopt? If it is, we would be going back to the Law.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 26, SATURDAY

Gal 3:26–4:7

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 26, SATURDAY

Gal 3:26-4:7

Who Are You?

Gal 4:6

Have you ever experienced an identity crisis—a time when you asked yourself who you really were, and why you were here? There are three specific times when this crisis is most common.

Teens often go through a period of wondering who they are—trying to fit into their circle of friends, while trying to learn the meaning of life. During middle age some people struggle with identity, perhaps out of disappointment for not having achieved all they had hoped. In later years people realize that life is approaching its final stages, and they wonder what kind of person they have become.

Because Christians are not immune to such questions, it's good to review who God says we are. This can be encouraging as we remember what Christ did when He redeemed us. The Bible tells us that because of our relationship to Christ, we are forgiven (Acts 10:43), reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-19), new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), joint heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:16-17), God's adopted children (Gal. 4:4-7), and God's witnesses and ambassadors (Mt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 5:20). Best of all, we are destined to be like His Son (Rom. 8:29).

Such wonderful truths should leave no doubt about who we really are and why we are here!

By: Dave Branon

**New life in Christ—miraculous
That we're not bound by sin!
The power of God—how glorious
That we've been changed within! —Sper**

When we know we are identified with Christ, we will have no identity crisis.

There is an ancient story about a man named Astyages who determined to do away with a royal infant by the name of Cyrus. He summoned an officer of his court and told him to kill the baby prince. The officer in turn delivered the youngster to a herdsman with instructions that he should take him high up into the mountains where the baby would die from exposure.

The herdsman and his wife, however, took the child and raised him as their own. Growing up in the home of those humble peasants, he naturally thought they were his real parents. He was ignorant of his royal birth and his kingly estate. Because he thought he was a peasant, he lived like one.

Many Christians fail to realize all that is theirs in Christ. They live as spiritual peasants when they should be living royally. According to the apostle Paul, believers “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). He also said, “Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal. 4:6-7).

God has given us everything we need to live victorious, fulfilling lives. Let's not live like peasants.

By: Richard DeHaan

**God has given all we need
For life and godliness,
But we still have to put to use
The gifts that we possess. —Sper**

A child of the king shouldn't live like a slave of the world.

JUN 27, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUN 28, MONDAY

Gal 4:8-31

Plead Passionately For Christ

Gal 4:31

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 28, MONDAY

Gal 4:8–31

"What is the story of Sarah and Hagar?"

Gal 4:31

Sarah was the wife of Abraham. Hagar was the servant of Sarah. God had promised Abraham many descendants, but, ten years after the promise, Sarah was still unable to have children, and they were both on the verge of becoming too old to have children at all. Sarah chose to give her servant Hagar to Abraham, in accordance with the custom of the day, so that Sarah could have a child through her (Genesis 16:2).

Hagar conceived, and Sarah despised her. Sarah began to deal harshly with her, and Hagar fled to the desert to escape the resentment of her mistress. The angel of the Lord met Hagar in the wilderness, commanding her to return to Abraham and Sarah. The angel relayed a promise from God: "I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (Genesis 16:10). The angel also predicted Ishmael's name and character (Genesis 16:11-12).

Later, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham and Sarah. Sarah gave birth to a son named Isaac (Genesis 21). Hagar's son Ishmael would have been about 14 years old at the time of Isaac's birth. Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away after Isaac was weaned (around age 2 or 3, making Ishmael approximately 16), according to God's command. At that time, God repeated His promise that Ishmael would father a great nation. Hagar was in the desert and near death when the angel of God called to her, saying, "What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation" (Genesis 21:17-18).

Ishmael and his mother lived in the wilderness of Paran, where he became an expert with a bow and later took an Egyptian wife (Genesis 21:20-21). He is seen once again in Scripture when he returned to help bury his father Abraham (Genesis 25:7-10). Ishmael, the son of a bondservant, became the father of 12 sons who were called princes. He lived to 137 years of age. Sarah died at the age of 127 in Hebron, where she was buried (Genesis 23:1-2).

Many observations can be made regarding the story of Sarah and Hagar. First, God can and often does work through ways that appear unlikely from a human perspective. Abraham miraculously became a father at age 86 and again at age 99. Isaac's mother, Sarah, was barren. God's promise to Abraham did not depend on human strength, and with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37). God used a seemingly impossible situation to make Abraham the father of the Jewish people, just as He had predicted.

It is clear from this story that God works despite misguided human effort. Sarah had no business offering her servant to Abraham, and Abraham had no business sleeping with Hagar. And Sarah was wrong to mistreat her servant as she did. Yet God worked through these situations. Hagar was blessed, and Abraham and Sarah were still the recipients of the promise. God's mercy is great, and His sovereign will is accomplished regardless of human frailty.

This unlikely family story is one readers would expect to end badly. Yet God kept His promise; Isaac became the son of promise through whom the tribes of Israel would arise. Hagar's son, Ishmael, also became a great leader. Regardless of how a situation looks from a human perspective, God continues to work both to accomplish His will and to fulfill His promises.

In Galatians 4, Paul uses the story of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the results of two different covenants: the New Covenant, based on grace; and the Old Covenant, based on the Law. In Paul's analogy, believers in Christ are like the child born of Sarah—free, the result of God's promise. Those who try to earn their salvation by their own works are like the child born of Hagar—a slave, the result of human effort.

JUN 29, TUESDAY

Gal 5:1-26

Be Free To Serve One Another

Gal 5:14

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUN 29, TUESDAY

Gal 5:1–26

Show The Fruit Of The Spirit

Gal 5:22–23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law. Gal 5:22-23

I am doing follow-up sessions with a young believer as I write these devotions and Paul's words from his letter to the Galatians have been resonating in me. As I encourage and give guidance to a young Christian on living the Christian life, I am constantly affirming that this new life is to be lived by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Judaizers wanted to add Torah compliance. Paul also saw that these believers had a culture that promoted freedom to indulge the sinful nature. To counter these two challenges, Paul says that the Christians are to 'live by the Spirit' (v 16), to be 'led by the Spirit' (v 18), to 'keep in step with the Spirit' (v 25) and to sow 'to please the Spirit' (6:8). To live by the Spirit, the Christians were to show the ninefold fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against them to limit them in any way (vs 22-24).

The Spirit opposes the works of the flesh (our sinful nature - see the representative list of vices in verses 19-21) and He wants to replace our vices with His own fruit of virtues (vs 22-23a). Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (v 24) and so we cannot live in a freedom that seeks to indulge our sinful nature.

When we live by the Spirit we will show the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Richard Longenecker says that the fruit of the Spirit orientates us to a selfless and outgoing concern for others because it reflects the selfless and outgoing love of God Himself for us.

As we nurture our young believers in the way of the Spirit, let us (as nurturers) exhibit such fruit in ourselves first.

When my daughter Ann was in the high school marching band, I loved to watch the young musicians march in step. Whether they were performing before a panel of judges at a district competition, at halftime during a football game, or on tour in Austria, they moved as one to the cadence of the drums and the lead of the drum major.

Galatians 5:25 states, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." That last phrase can also be translated, "Keep in step with the Spirit." It means that as we walk along in our Christian lives, we are to follow the Spirit's lead. We are to be in harmony with Him. If we get out of step, follow a wrong cadence, or stray off the correct pathway, the results will be obvious (vv.19-21).

How can we tell if we are walking in step with the Spirit? Paul spelled it out clearly in Galatians 5. We will not be guilty of the practices mentioned in verses 19 through 21. Rather, the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control—will be clearly evident in our lives (vv.22-23).

How would you rate yourself when it comes to walking in step with the Spirit? Are you in cadence? Or are you following a drumbeat of your own making?

By: David C. Egner

**Oh, may the life of the Savior flow through us,
Bearing rich fruit by the Spirit within,
And may each longing for selfish enjoyment
Be overcome lest it lead us to sin. —DJD**

If you keep in step with God, you'll be out of step with the world.

Do Good To All

Gal 6:2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUN 30, WEDNESDAY

Gal 6:1-18

We Are God's New Creation

Gal 6:2

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Gal 6:15

Paul was a very astute and clear-minded letter-writer. He made sure that his readers - the young Galatian Christians — knew what he was saying. To fix his message in their minds, he repeated the important points of his letter in these few verses.

Firstly, he exposed the Judaizers for what they were (vs 12-13). The reason they were advocating circumcision and observance of the Law of Moses for the Galatian Christians was not because they were zealous for these but because they wanted to escape persecution. In fact, they themselves did not fully obey the Law. Next, he focused on the centrality of the cross of Christ (v 14). The cross meant everything to Paul and it should mean everything to us. It is through the cross of Christ that we are made new creations (v 15). As such, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything.

Paul was a man of stature. He wrote clearly to avoid misunderstanding in order to draw the Galatian Christians back to the path of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He had shared the Gospel with them and nurtured them in the faith. He would not allow the Judaizers to sidetrack them, for that would cause them to return to the works of the law and of the flesh. And there was no salvation there.

‘The Lord Jesus Christ, our justifier and Savior, who gave me (Luther) the grace and power to expound this epistle, and to you likewise to hear it, preserve and establish both you and me that we daily, growing more and more in the knowledge of His grace and faith, may be found unblameable and without fault in the day of redemption.* - Martin Luther

Cooking can become tedious work when I do it three times a day, week after week. I get tired of peeling, cutting, slicing, mixing, and then waiting for food to bake, grill, or boil. But eating is never tedious! It's actually something we truly enjoy even though we do it day after day.

Paul used the illustration of sowing and reaping because he knew that doing good can be tiring (Gal. 6:7-10). He wrote, *“Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart”* (v.9). It's difficult to love our enemies, discipline our children, or pray without ceasing. However, reaping the good we have sown isn't tedious! What a joy when we do get to see love conquering strife, or children following God's ways, or answers to prayer.

While the cooking process can take hours, my family usually finishes a meal in 20 minutes or less. But the reaping that Paul talks about will be eternal. As we have the opportunity, let's do what is good and wait for the blessings in God's timing. Don't lose heart today as you go about following God's ways. Remember that joy is guaranteed for more than a lifetime.

By: Keila Ochoa

**Dear Lord, help me not to become weary of doing good today.
I'm thankful that some day I will be with You for a joy-filled eternity!**
Keep running the race with eternity in view.

Overview of James

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

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

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

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

JUL 1, THURSDAY

Jam 1:1-27

Flabby or Fit?

Jam 1:5

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

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

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

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

Are you facing some difficult circumstances?

Have you been crying out to God for a while?

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 1, THURSDAY

Jam 1:1-27

Giving Birth to Sin OR Giving Birth to Maturity

Jam 1:5

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. James 1:15

James' use of the process of birth is spot on in helping us see that something as serious as sin which leads to death could start innocently as desire, albeit evil desire. Verse 14: 'But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed' helps us understand that the power of temptation lies within ourselves. We are dragged away. James says. By whom? By our own evil desire. Temptations start small and probably innocently enough for us to find excuses to give in. But they lead us on. eventually giving birth to sin and sin giving birth to death.

Can we blame God when we fall into temptation? We are tempted to say, 'Well, He put us in such a situation, didn't He?' When we do so. instead of seeing opportunities for spiritual development in the situation that we find ourselves in, we are tempted to use evil means to escape.

James encourages us not to be deceived, but to see beyond the unattractive situations we find ourselves in, to the God who gives out of His goodness, day in and day out. Our circumstances might have changed, but God has not. His desire is to bring a different birth in us, the birth of a new people, demonstrating His new creation.

Take some time to think about temptation, and how you may have been deceived, enticed and dragged, into full-blown sin. All of us have our weaknesses.

Identify yours and bring these before God in prayer. Once again, renew your faith in Him, and acknowledge His goodness and love towards you. Think about the mature Christian He wants you to become.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. James 1:22

We do this all the time when God's word touches us: we give token responses such as. 'Let us give God a clap offering' or 'Pastor, that was a wonderful sermon' and even, 'God, I promise I will do better next time' - words that we probably mean sincerely at the emotional level but fail to back up practically. We might even cry or come forward to the altar to rededicate ourselves. But we let things end there and fail to carry through our promise. Good intentions, but nothing more.

James tells us that we deceive ourselves when we behave like this. We do not earn brownie points for listening well but forgetting soon after. True reward comes to those who listen and act. They will be blessed in their obedience. In this passage, James gives us some useful advice to deal with several common human failings:

- Be slow to speak (to prevent hurting someone with our careless speech or promising what we cannot deliver)
- Be slow to anger (this usually arises from a quick temper and hasty judgement of another person's actions)
- Put away filthiness and wickedness (in what we think, watch, say and do)
- Bridle our tongue
- Keep ourselves unstained from the world
- Be a blessing to those who are powerless and needy (and who cannot benefit us in any way)

Pick one exhortation from the list and do something about it. Do not just pray; plan. Do not just plan; do. And do not just do; persevere.

JUL 2, FRIDAY

Jam 2:1-26

Divide or Unite?

Jam 2:26b

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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JUL 2, FRIDAY

Jam 2:1-26

Empty Talk or Faithful Walk

Jam 2:26b

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James 2:26

This is clearly a continuation of the thoughts in James 1:19-27. If our faith is not evidenced by deeds, would it not be right to suggest that perhaps that faith is dead? And surely a dead faith cannot save.

This truth is not for us to use against another believer. It is for us to examine ourselves.

James is not jumping into the 'salvation by faith versus salvation by works' debate. His focus is on the need for faith to be evidenced by good deeds. He asks: 'Is that faith real?' Real faith, James says, must be evidenced by deeds and not (if I may add), by words, rituals, promises, good intentions ...

It is not for us to argue how many deeds will constitute sufficient evidence because that falls right into the 'salvation by works' trap. If something is alive it must be producing fruit; and according to James, the fruit of faith is deeds. You don't have to proclaim it. People around you will know that there is faith that is alive inside this person. If you read through the passage again, you will catch the phrase 'you see'. The whole tone of James' argument is simple – faith that is alive is not a concept defined by theological arguments. It is something you can see.

Go through the readings of the past few days again. They will help you come to an understanding of what evidences 'faith that is alive'. They are found in the things you say, the values you uphold, the decisions you make and the things you do. They reveal the person that you are.

Some people see a contradiction between James and Paul in their understanding on how a person is actually justified or made righteous before God. Paul declares that 'we are justified by faith, apart from the works of the law' (Romans 3:28); James however asserts that we are 'justified by works, and not by faith alone' (v 24).

The contradiction between James and Paul is more apparent than real. This apparent contradiction disappears when we realize that they are not addressing the same issue. In Paul's case, he is dealing with whether one could be justified by the 'works of the law', namely, keeping the law to be saved. For James, he is not discussing the 'works of the law', but the 'works (evidences) of genuine faith'. In addition, James is not writing a treatise on how to be saved, but on how 'saved people' should live.

In particular, James is explaining the nature of genuine faith.

1. First, faith is not a personal and private matter. It should issue in love and practical care for others (vs 15-16). There is always a social dimension to faith. We downplay our social responsibility when we gravitate towards Ephesians 2:8-9 and conveniently ignore verse 10.
2. Second, faith is not just believing in sound doctrines. Otherwise, the demons would immediately qualify (v 19).

What then is genuine faith? It will be demonstrated eventually through our actions or deeds. This is true of both Abraham (a Jew) and Rahab (a Gentile). Both showed that they possessed real faith through their deeds or 'works' (vs 21-25).

As James puts it, 'Faith without works is dead' (v 26).

What good works in our lives express our genuine faith in Jesus?

JUL 3, SATURDAY

Jam 3:1-4:10

Small But Deadly!

Jam 4:8

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

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

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

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

'Remember your tongue is in a wet place; it is likely to slip often.'
Pray for forgiveness for the slips it has made.

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

JUL 3, SATURDAY

Jam 3:1-4:10

Earthly or Heavenly Wisdom

Jam 4:8

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. James 3:13

Everybody has an opinion and wants to tell others what they should do. But it is one thing to be on the wrong path – if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth (v 14) – and it is quite another to influence others to go down that same path.

How do we make sure that what we teach is truly wisdom? The answer is that we live it out. When there is consistency between what we think, how we live and what we teach, we will learn 'the wisdom that comes from heaven, which is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.'

If we only talk, without having first walked, we will find that the tongue can be 'a restless evil, full of deadly poison.'

For James, true spirituality is not found in listening to great teachers (Jul 1 Plus reading).

It is not found in loud professions of faith (Jul 2 Plus reading).

It is not found in intellectual arguments and theological dissertations (today's reading).

It is found in the life we live – a life of purity, peace, thoughtfulness, humility, mercy, justice and integrity.

Read Philippians 4:8-9 and spend time 'thinking about such things'.

Why are there quarrels and contentions in the Christian community? James attributes them to the envy and selfishness in the human heart (v 2). We have to examine our own hearts first before imputing blame on others. When we fail to curb our 'flesh' or sinful nature, it will inexorably lead to open strife and warfare among believers. To overcome envy, James counsels' believers to pray for God's blessings instead (v 2b). Yet our prayer has to be altruistic in nature since God will never hear an insincere prayer (v3).

Another major struggle of believers is with the world. A believer who stakes his lot with the world has certainly become a spiritual enemy of God (v 4). This is a serious indictment against us! Beware lest we become an enemy of God by succumbing to a worldly lifestyle, which is pleasure-oriented, materialistic and status conscious (1 John 2:15-16).

The Devil is our third spiritual enemy. His task is to hinder us from obeying God, but how do believers overcome the evil one? The first strategy' is to resist the Devil (v 7b), just as Jesus Himself did in the wilderness temptations. Resolutely seek to do God's will (v 7a). Satan has no power over a believer who is completely sold out to God!

God is not expecting us to combat these three traditional spiritual enemies by our own strength. He has promised to impart grace to every' believer (1 Cor 10: 13).

Come in a posture of humility, acknowledging our weaknesses, and draw upon the all-sufficient grace of God today.

JUL 4, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 5, MONDAY

Jam 4:11-5:20

Curse or Blessing?

Jam 5:16

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. James 4:17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 5, MONDAY

Jam 4:11-5:20

God Will Right All Wrong

Jam 5:16

In this passage, James offers sympathetic and encouraging counsel to believers who had suffered injustice and oppression at the hands of the rich landholder class (for context, see James 5:1-6).

First, James exhorts them to be 'patient' (v 8). The original Greek word literally means 'long-suffering'. The implication is that believers should be able to withstand suffering until the Lord returns. He gives an agricultural illustration in which a farmer has to wait patiently for the early and late rains before the crops can ripen. Likewise, believers should not expect immediate deliverance from their present predicament. Instead, James urges them to strengthen their hearts in the light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ who will right all wrongs and also punish the wicked. The certainty of ultimate justice should comfort any exploited believer, then and now.

Second, James reminds believers not to indulge in complaints as they go through injustice or adversity. He cites the example of the Old Testament prophets who did not grumble when they were badly mistreated by their contemporaries. Neither did Job when he went through the severe trials of losing his health, wealth, and even his family members. God restored Job's fortunes when he endured patiently. This is due to the Lord's mercy and compassion upon him (v 11). Similarly, when we are afflicted by injustice or adversity, we should remind ourselves of who God really is. A God of mercy and compassion will always alleviate our sufferings in the end.

Lord Jesus, help me to be patient and hopeful even when I have been unfairly treated by others. You will ultimately right all wrongs.

Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:13-14

In this concluding passage, James counsels patience. Just as the downward spiral from temptation to sin to death is a process over time, so too the upward spiral of perseverance, to maturity, to being complete in Christ requires time.

However, we do not struggle alone. We are in a Christian community. While this community can hurt us and drag us down, it can also help us and cheer us on. In this passage, James mentions grumbling against one another. Elsewhere, he deals with discrimination and slander, wrong teaching based on earthly wisdom, insensitive boasting by the well-to-do, and oppressive exploitation by those in power. Such behavior in the community serves to destroy those who are already weighed down by their trying circumstances.

On the other hand, the suffering Christian can be positive and draw strength from the community of Christ. By sharing with the community and allowing the community to share with him or her, through prayer, through songs of praise, through the laying on of hands and through confession, they can find strength and support from the community. Those who might otherwise have gone astray are thus restored and strengthened by the community.

Take time to think about the Christian community you are a part of.

How can you let them into your struggles so that they can strengthen and support you? How can you participate in the community in ways that are positive, rather than negative? We cannot make it alone, but the God who has called us has not left us to struggle alone. He is Emmanuel, the One who is always with us.

JUL 6, TUESDAY

Acts 15:36–16:5

A Friend in Failure

Acts 15:39–40

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

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

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

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

By: James Banks

What mistakes or failures have you faced recently?

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

Jesus, thank You for being there whenever I want to talk to You.

I praise You for the comfort and hope only You can give!

P.R.A.Y

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JUL 6, TUESDAY

Act 15:36–16:5

Churches Established

Act 15:39–40

As they travelled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So, the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. Acts 16:4-5

The phrase used by James 'it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (v 28) summarizes the tone of the conclusion. The delegates of the church are of one mind with the leading of the Holy Spirit who has been instructing the nascent church on the Gospel and its implications for service to the Lord.

It is with the church's recognition of God's mind on the matter of salvation then that the strengthening of the church can take place. We saw this 'strengthening' of the Jewish churches at the end of chapter 9. Now, in a short space, the word is used four times with regard to the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas. From the point of Paul's conversion, the strengthening of the churches has been associated with God's work, especially through Paul (see 9:31, 14:22, 15:32, 16:5).

So appropriately, with the matter of the council finished, Paul's concern is the continued growth of God's church 'where we preached the word of the Lord'. He takes the initiative to keep doing the 'work' the Holy Spirit set for him and the Lord Jesus commissioned to him. Even though Paul and Barnabas have a sharp disagreement over John Mark for his leaving the mission field (13:13), God's churches are well served in the outcome. Barnabas and Mark go to the churches in Cyprus, whilst Paul chose Silas (v 22) who was similarly qualified to replace Barnabas (see 15:32 and note also that Silas, a Jew and a Roman citizen was also a leader in the Jerusalem church). Along the way, through the work Paul and Barnabas had done two to three years ago, God provides another 'disciple' for the 'work': Timothy (v 1). In time Paul's relationship with Mark is restored and strengthened as they work together for the sake of the Gospel (Col 4: 10, Phile v 24, 2 Tim 4:11).

The Gospel begets both the results of the Gospel as well as more workers for the harvest. In the Gospel, we have all we need to equip God's people for the task of strengthening His church.

'Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible' (1 Corinthians 9:19).

It saddens us when co-workers in Christ who had shared so much part ways. Here the differences between Paul and Barnabas surfaced when the issue over John Mark arose.

Barnabas received his name from the apostles because he was a very generous and encouraging person. When everyone doubted and questioned the genuineness of Paul's conversion, Barnabas was the one who stuck out his neck for him before the apostles at Jerusalem. Now in his contention with Paul, he wanted to give Mark a second chance even though he had deserted them during the first missionary journey.

Paul looked at the problem differently. He was not taking the risk of another desertion, which would hinder their work. He would rather the place be given to someone who had a good track record, like Timothy. In the end, everything worked out well. Mark wrote one of the gospels. He matured and proved himself in ministry (2 Tim 4:11). Barnabas' choice of Mark was vindicated, and Paul was gracious enough to change his opinion of Mark. Some of us are more people-orientated while others are more task-orientated. We should not be afraid to give others a second chance. After all, God is often giving us second chances.

Father, we thank You that in all things You work for the good of those who love You, who have been called according to Your purpose.

Overview of Acts 16:6–28:31

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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JUL 7, WEDNESDAY

Act 16:6-40

Ears To Hear

Act 16:31

Sometimes in our service for the Lord, we come across closed doors. We are frustrated and we question God. Today's Bible passage shows how the Holy Spirit guides. He said 'No' to Paul's plans. It was only when Paul obeyed the Holy Spirit on these two occasions that a door opened in Macedonia.

The Holy Spirit prompted, and Paul was sensitive to hear. God does guide very specifically.

In Philippi they planted a church where there was not even a synagogue (v 13). There was only a place of prayer by the river. This humble beginning led to the conversion of Lydia and her household and a church grew. It was to this church that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Philippians.

It was also here that Paul and Silas had an encounter with the demon-possessed slave girl. The evil spirit openly recognized and acknowledged Paul and Silas as servants of the Most High God. When Paul could not stand the repeated shouting of the slave girl, he cast out the spirit in the name of Jesus (v 18). It is only in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that we can have power and authority over the spiritual forces of darkness.

Father, help us be sensitive to Your Spirit 's prompting so that we will not lose out on opportunities that You have prepared for us.

As a consequence of delivering the slave girl from demon possession, Paul and Silas got into trouble with her owners. They were dragged before the magistrates in the marketplace, the local law court, falsely accused and severely beaten before being imprisoned. They were given no opportunity to defend themselves.

We may feel angry when we read of such injustices, unthinkable in our modern civilization. How could Paul and Silas pray and worship God after being physically abused and unjustly treated? Well, they did. Surprisingly, the other prisoners listened to them at that late hour of the night instead of demanding that they be quiet. Paul and Silas were not angry or sullen. Their very action spoke of the reality of their God. In this instance, they did not even have to preach to share their faith.

The violent earthquake did more than just jolt the jailer from his sleep. Amazed at Paul's concern for his welfare, he now wanted what they had (v 30). The night's events did not end there. Not only did the jailer believe in God, he and his whole family were subsequently baptized.

**Our attitudes and actions draw attention to our faith much more than our words.
Our conduct in difficult situations gives us opportunities to declare the reality of God's power in our lives.**

JUL 8, THURSDAY

Act 17:1-34

Persevering Obedience

Act 17:26

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 8, THURSDAY

Act 17:1–34

Search the Scriptures

Act 17:11

Congregations receive and respond to God's Word in different ways. The Jews at Thessalonica were jealous when many Gentiles believed Paul's message and followed him. Though well-grounded in the Scriptures, the Jews did not accept Paul's teaching even after he had reasoned with them. It was not head knowledge but response of the heart and spirit that made a difference between the responses of the Jews and Gentiles.

How would you define nobility? See God's definition (v 11). Note the results. It would do us good to follow the example of the Bereans. No matter how long we have been Christians or how much we know of the Scriptures, we should always receive teaching from the Scriptures with enthusiasm and eagerness. It is not wrong to check out the teaching received with the Word of God. This is not to insult the preacher, but to safeguard against errors. Our lives must be founded on the Word of God so that we may stand the test of time and trials.

May we be like the Bereans and search the Scriptures every day. God's Word should be part and parcel of our daily living, not just on Sundays.

**Father, we pray that we will always hunger and thirst for You.
Please help us make Your Word a part of our daily living.**

Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. 2 Tim 4:5

Paul was no curious sightseeing tourist when he arrived in Athens. He was a passionate soul-winning evangelist on fire for God. The idolatry that confronted him greatly distressed him (v 16). The religious Jews, the God-fearing Greeks and the ordinary Athenians were hopelessly lost without Christ. The pleasure-seeking Epicureans, the self-disciplining Stoics and the novelty-searching philosophers were ignorant of God's salvation (v 18). Paul could not sit still and remain silent (v 17). The invitation Paul received was God-given (vs 19-21).

Paul's address is a good example of how to contextualize the presentation of the Gospel.

He began by emphasizing the existence of the one true God, using examples the Athenians understood (vs 22-23). He established common ground by identifying what they agreed concerning God (vs 24-29). He then focused on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (vs 30-31). Using this approach, he did not spare his listeners these important facts concerning the Gospel:

- Man is superstitious and religious because he is searching for God (v 22).
- The unknown God they worshipped (v 23), Paul declared, is the Creator who is Lord of heaven and earth. God is not an idol, the creation of man. He does not live in temples built by man's hands (v 24).
- God is self-sufficient and needs nothing from man (v 25).
- God is the giver of life and breath and every thing else (v 25).
- God directs the history of all men and nations (v 26).
- God has a great purpose for creating man (vs 27-28).
- God commands man's repentance from the sin of idolatry (vs 29-30).
- God will judge the world one day (v 31).

Paul was stopped from completing his message. The results were both tragic and wonderful. Tragic because some sneered while others procrastinated concerning their salvation (v 33). Wonderful because some believed (v 34). Praise God. There was no riot when Paul left the Council (v 32). He had proclaimed uncompromisingly the glorious Gospel of salvation. Dare we be like Paul?

Why are we praying for sinners to come to Christ when He is pleading for us to go to sinners?

Blessed Assurance

Act 18:9-10

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

Paul arrived at Corinth alone in weakness, fear and trembling (1 Cor 2:3). He had been assaulted, imprisoned and expelled from Philippi. His life was in danger in Thessalonica. He was smuggled out from Berea. He had been mocked in Athens. Eighteen months later, Paul left Corinth a different man. He had been refreshed and reignited in Corinth. What changed him can be deduced from Acts 18. Paul made three important decisions that turned his ministry around.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 9, FRIDAY

Act 18:1–18a

Sadness and Joy in Service

Act 18:9–10

Paul had left Athens after his rather unproductive encounter with the philosophers and learned people. He then arrived in Corinth, the great commercial city of wealth, luxury and vice.

Every Sabbath, Paul devoted himself to persuading both Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue that Jesus was the Christ. Not only did the Jews not believe in his message, they became abusive and opposed Paul. We too may face such moments in our ministry. When we are up against a wall of rejection and futility, God may be calling us to move on. When Paul moved out of the synagogue, the response started. Many Corinthians believed, including the ruler of the synagogue and his household. God works in mysterious ways. Discouragement was followed by joy. A vision further strengthened Paul. When we are in the Lord's will and purpose, He will encourage us.

When the Jews attacked Paul and brought him before Gallio, the proconsul, the case was dismissed without a word from Paul. God was his Defender.

In ministry, there will be ups and downs, and joy. We need to persevere through it all, knowing that God is ever faithful and He will provide all our needs.

When Jesus sent His disciples out, He gave them this promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). Literally, the word always means "all the days," according to Greek scholars Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Jesus didn't simply say, "always," but "all the days." That takes into account all our various activities, the good and bad circumstances surrounding us, the varied responsibilities we have through the course of our days, the storm clouds and the sunshine.

Our Lord is present with us no matter what each day brings. It may be a day of joy or of sadness, of sickness or of health, of success or of failure. No matter what happens to us today, our Lord is walking beside us, strengthening us, loving us, filling us with faith, hope, and love. As He envelops us with quiet serenity and security, our foes, fears, afflictions, and doubts begin to recede. We can bear up in any setting and circumstance because we know the Lord is at hand, just as He told Paul in Acts 18:10, "I am with you."

Practice God's presence, stopping in the midst of your busy day to say to yourself, "The Lord is here." And pray that you will see Him who is invisible—and see Him everywhere.

By: David H. Roper

**God's unseen presence comforts me, I know He's always near;
And when life's storms besiege my soul, He says, "My child, I'm here." —D. De Haan**

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. —Isaiah 55:6

Overview of 1 & 2 Thessalonians

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

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

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

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

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

2 THESSALONIANS :

Since there is a preceding epistle - 1 Thessalonians, it is not surprising at all that much of what we read in 2 Thessalonians is in the form of reminders and reinforcements. The great theme of the Lord's return continues to dominate. However, several other key themes emerge in the three chapters of 2 Thessalonians:

Chapter One - Perseverance

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

Chapter Two - Deception

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

Chapter Three - Dedication

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

JUL 10, SATURDAY

1 Th 1:1-2:16

A Great Start

1 Th 1:3

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

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

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

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

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

**As we draw close to the celebration of Christ’s birth, pray that God will open the eyes of people in communities that oppose Christ and are hostile to the Gospel.
Pray for friends and family by name.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 10, SATURDAY

1 Th 1:1-2:16

Contagious Living

1 Th 1:3

Suffering is usually a good test of what we believe in or are committed to. It cultivates a rich soil for tough love and authentic living. Our commitment and real convictions are often tested under the weight of a rigorous life.

In flipping the pages of his memories, Paul's joy abounds when he remembers the Thessalonians who had undergone severe suffering. They were a community radically alive, distinguished by faith, love and hope. These qualities were not inward-looking: rather, they looked towards God, others and the future respectively. In fact, they had given birth to a new way of living – work produced by faith, labor prompted by love and endurance inspired by hope. Yes, this was the authentic gospel and the powerful living of it in the Holy Spirit!

Suffering did not seem to have stopped them or weakened them in any way. The Thessalonians seemed to have created waves amongst their neighbors by their example. The words of the gospel had been translated into powerful living that touched other lives; a proof that they now served the living God. They were just passing on the legacy they themselves had received from their role models, the Lord Jesus and Paul. Indeed, the gospel had become contagious through them.

This is true of all genuine recipients of the gospel - a radical transformation evidenced by faith, love and hope - which then becomes the message of our lives that rings out to everybody. What about the gospel in you? Whose life is it touching and overflowing into?

Lord, thank You that Your gospel brings life. Come and release in me faith, love and hope, in order that I may be fully alive, transformed and contagious for You.

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 1 Thes 2:8

The apostle Paul mentored the Thessalonian believers - he was like a father and mother to them. He fathered them with instruction, encouragement, and godly persuasion. He mothered them with gentle care and fond affection. He came alongside to journey with them in their walk with God.

Paul was like a 'sifu' or a 'guru' (master-teacher) in many ways. Like the Thessalonian believers, we need a modern-day Paul who would be like a true father and mother helping us grow in our relationship with God. We need people who are disciplers, coaches, counsellors, sponsors, or teachers who will mentor us to deeper spiritual maturity. We need spiritual fathers and mothers who will be real with us and walk with us into greater Christlikeness.

Today, there are many spiritual orphans in the church who mentally know what it means to be a believer but do not have a close-up model to look at. Do you need a spiritual father or mother to encourage you in your walk with the Lord? Pray and look for an older mature Christian to come alongside you. Or perhaps you are in a position to help and build up a younger believer. Ask God to help you invest time to be a spiritual father or mother to someone.

'Some people come into our lives and quickly go, some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts, and we are never the same.' - Anonymous

Thank God for parents including spiritual parents, who contribute to our lives in many ways. Then express your appreciation to our Heavenly Father who is also a 'Father to the fatherless' (Psa 68:5).

JUL 11, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 12, MONDAY

1 Th 2:17-3:13

Our Glory & Joy

1 Th 2:20

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

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

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

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

**‘There is nothing that makes us love people so much as praying for them.’
-William Law –**

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 12, MONDAY

1 Th 2:17-3:13

Standing Against The Odds

1 Th 2:20

Embracing Christ and becoming a Christian is costly in many of our Asian homes. For many a parent, this is interpreted as a denial of our roots and defecting into a Western religion. It becomes even more difficult when citizens of a country are denied freedom of worship. Bearing Christ's Name in our society is not at all popular. Many have given up because it is too costly and painful.

It must have been difficult for Paul to be 'torn away' from his children, the Thessalonians. Their reception of the Word of God as coming not from men but God Himself, made Paul very thankful. The Word began its deep work in their lives and this was evidenced by their unwavering faith amidst trials. Their faith was refined through the fire of persecution and hostility. They had been called to the same path of suffering as their Judean brothers.

Paul's absence from the Thessalonians was very much against his own will. His intense longing to be reunited with them though thwarted again and again by Satan, must have encouraged their fervency when it was conveyed in his letter to them. More than that, Paul's affirmation that they were his joy and crown must have spurred them on to greater steadfastness.

When the storms of hostility and other trials buffet you because of your beliefs, which alternative do you choose - to give up or to go on; to stand up for your faith or to compromise with your surroundings?

Father, let Your Word be a living sword in my life, doing a deep work of redeeming, healing and restoring me to unwavering faith in You.

May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. 1 Thes 3:12

We can almost imagine Paul's heart feelings for the Thessalonian believers and vice versa. Paul kept on encouraging them with words of affirmation, commendation, and prayer. And Paul prayed that they would have the same kind of love for each other as modelled by himself and Timothy. Paul came right down to the basics of Christianity - relationships of love as summed up by the two great commandments - loving God and loving others.

The relational aspects of life are an important asset of the Asian community. Yet modern living is slowly robbing us of the relationships that are so important to us. In urban centers, we often do not even know our immediate neighbors. In some urban churches, we can come and go and not know more than 20 members.

We need to have personal relationships with people we work with or minister to, and not just have working relationships. We need to love one another. By this, all people will recognize Christ and we as His followers (Jn 13:34-35).

Do our relationships reflect Paul's description of his relationship with the Thessalonian believers (v 12)?

**Consider ways to build deeper heart-to-heart relationships in your family.
Pray for each other's growth.**

JUL 13, TUESDAY

1 Th 4:1-5:11

Do the Right Thing

1 Th 4:7

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 13, TUESDAY

1 Th 4:1-5:11

The Grand Finale

1 Th 4:7

Death always seems so final. To lose a loved one is to lose a part of oneself. It shows up our utter frailty and we can be overwhelmed by a sense of pain and hopelessness.

Paul urges the Thessalonians not to despair. He does not forbid them to grieve altogether, but as believers, they are not to grieve as men without hope. In referring to death as 'sleep', he also implies 'an awakening', a 'rest from labor'. It is only temporary. Death will be followed by resurrection. While they would miss their loved ones, there was no need to be hopeless about it. Death will not be the end - there was going to be a grand finale, yet to come!

In order to allay their fears that their loved ones who had died would miss out on something here on earth, he goes on to chronicle the grand finale. He encourages the weak-hearted with the certainty of the resurrected Christ's return. This would be followed by the resurrection of those who had died. And then, the living at that time would be snatched up to meet them. This would culminate in an abiding reunion with Jesus, the dead and the living!

Picture the scene as an awaited coming of a dignitary and the citizens going out to meet him and escort him back on the final stages of his journey. Their anticipation will be overwhelming. Think of loved ones or friends who are 'asleep'. Think of your glorious reunion with Christ and with them. Ask the Lord to encourage your heart and give thanks for this anticipated reunion.

Father, thank You that death will never be the final end.

**You have a glorious reunion planned for us. Lord, encourage my heart
when I think of my loved ones and friends who have gone on to be with You.**

We know there are thieves. Yet, we get complacent and are completely shocked when they strike. Similarly, too is the panic of a pregnant mother who just thought that the baby would not come today, but it did!

Both situations were examples used by Paul in thinking about the Lord's coming again. The unexpected nature of a break-in and the sudden yet unavoidable labor pains of a pregnant mother are equally upsetting to the unprepared. One can never predict when! Paul had already taught the Thessalonians that the coming of the Lord could never be pinned down to a particular day or a particular time. There will be no warning. Destruction will descend without prior warning.

Paul therefore warns the Thessalonians to be alert and disciplined. There is no need to fear the Day of the Lord. They will all be saved because of who God is as revealed on the cross and the salvation He has provided for them. This is not because of who they are but because of who God is. They are children of the day and this calls for 'daytime' behavior from them. Unpreparedness usually occurs when one is in 'darkness', ignorance, sleep or drunkenness. The coming Day of the Lord should lead us to live our lives with alertness and discipline.

What shapes the way you live out your days? If the Second Coming were to take place now, would you be prepared? Let us not be in a stupor or yawn our way through life! Think about what Christ Himself would say to you about how you have lived your life.

Father, may my life here on earth always be lived with Your coming again in view.

Grant me the urgency to be alert and self-controlled that I may be prepared to receive You.

JUL 14, WEDNESDAY

1 Th 5:12-28

No Matter What

1 Th 5:16-17

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

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

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

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

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

**Father, grant me a spirit of brotherhood towards all,
especially those whom You have appointed to lead.
To the weak, give me a generous heart that will go all out to strengthen them.**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 14, WEDNESDAY

1 Th 5:12-28

Work Together

1 Th 5:16-17

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 1 Thes 5:12

After his words of affirmation, Paul gave his final instructions. He told the believers to work together with those who labored among them. This included those who were over them and those whom they worked with, including those who were timid, weak, or slow. Paul outlines important attitudes in working together: respect, love, patience, joy, thankfulness, etc. The final goal is to give no ground for blame at the second coming of Christ.

One thing that often hinders or sabotages the progress of God's work is poor relationships. When people are not rightly related, they will not work rightly. The top reason why most pastors or missionaries leave the ministry is because of the inability to work together. When believers cannot work together, God's work suffers. Christianity is about relationships - right relationships with God and with others.

One important starting point is to learn to value those who labor over us - pastors, missionaries, teachers, counsellors, small group leaders, parents and grandparents. They often labor without much acknowledgement. A simple word of thanks said to them or sent to them through a card or sms (mobile text message) means a lot.

We also need to value those we lead, both in church and at home. We may be burdening them with heavy expectations or wearing them out with our authoritarian style of leadership. Ask God for wisdom as you take stock. Be ready to change!

'Zero in on caring for people.' - Ron Jenson -

Pray for our parents who labor over us in the home and for leaders who labor over us in the church.

Technology today seems to demand our constant attention. The modern "miracle" of the internet gives us the amazing capacity to access humanity's collective learning in the palm of our hand. But for many, such constant access can come at a cost.

Writer Linda Stone has coined the phrase "continual partial attention" to describe the modern impulse to always need to know what's happening "out there," to make sure we're not missing anything. If that sounds like it could produce chronic anxiety, you're right!

Although the apostle Paul struggled with different reasons for anxiety, he knew our souls are wired to find peace in God. Which is why, in a letter to new believers who'd endured persecution (1 Thessalonians 2:14), Paul concluded by urging the believers to "rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances" (5:16-18).

Praying "continually" might seem pretty daunting. But then, how often do we check our phones? What if we instead let that urge be a prompt to talk to God?

More important, what if we learned to exchange a need to always be in "the know" for continual, prayerful rest in God's presence? Through relying on Christ's Spirit, we can learn to give our heavenly Father our continual full attention as we make our way through each day.

By: Adam R. Holz

How would you say technology impacts your faith, both negatively and positively? What might help you grow in undivided focus on God?

Father, thank You for inviting us into a relationship with You, one in which You long to hear from us continually.

JUL 15, THURSDAY

2 Th 1:1-2:12

God is Just: He will Pay Back

2 Th 1:6-7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 15, THURSDAY

2 Th 1:1-2:12

The Overthrow of the Lawless One

2 Th 1:6-7

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 2 Thes 2:8

The battle waged between the glorious Lord Jesus and the 'lawless one' is plainly described in one sentence (v 8). It is a no contest – 'the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.'

While the main concern in chapter one was persecution, the chief concern in chapter two is deception. Deception can happen at any time, but this is deception 'concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him' (v 1). Believers are vulnerable to deception about the Lord's return and the apostle mentions several specific and actual examples in v 2.

The deception has to do with 'saying that the day of the Lord has already come' when it has not. Paul refutes the deception by explaining that the two events, which must first precede the day of the Lord have not yet come to pass - 'the rebellion' and the emergence of the rebel himself who is called the 'lawless one' (v 3).

Paul exhorts, 'Don't let anyone deceive you in any way' (v 3). No doubt, one of Paul's concerns is the ignorance of the present active operation of lawlessness and its blinding consequences even if the lawless one himself is not yet discernible on the world stage. 'As for the work this man of rebellion and hell will do when he comes, it is already going on, but he himself will not come until the one who is holding him back steps out of the way' (v 7, TLB).

Note this sober warning: Those who are perishing, 'perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved' (v 10).

'Behind the great deception, there lay a great refusal.' — John Stott

Now, before the Lord returns, is the time to witness, and to proclaim the Gospel.

In the US, more long-distance calls are made on Mother's Day than any other day. But on Father's Day, the most collect calls are made. It seems that children still depend on their fathers to provide, even when they are far away from home.

Fathers are needed and wanted for much more than financial help. While 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12 is primarily directed toward church leaders, Paul talks about how their role is similar to a father's. He states: *"You know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children."*

Exhorted is "to call near." It is easy for fathers to think that all that's required of them is to bring home a paycheck. But children need their close encouragement.

The word **comforted is "to console."** Nothing is more valuable to a child than the time given by a father to listen and talk. Without constant relating, relationships turn cold.

Charged is "to affirm." Fathers challenge their children by affirming the truth of God's Word as they live it out in front of them. And even in failings, they affirm what is right through the asking of forgiveness.

How thankful we can be for fathers who help their children "walk worthy of God" (v.12).

By: Albert Lee

**We're thankful for our fathers, Lord, They're special gifts from You;
Help us to show we honor them By what we say and do. —Sper
Good fathers reflect the heavenly Father.**

JUL 16, FRIDAY

2 Th 2:13-3:18

Brothers and Sisters, Stand Firm

2 Th 2:15

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

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

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

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

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

Stand firm.

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

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

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

JUL 16, FRIDAY

2 Th 2:13–3:18

The Lord Is Faithful

2 Th 3:3

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 2 Thes 3:3

Evangelism and the fulfilment of the Great Commission are much more dependent on faithfulness (God's and ours) than on cleverness. Paul, at the end of his letter here, states his personal priority and also that of the church to be involved in spreading the Good News. In many churches, evangelism is a personal ministry entrusted to just the select few with the necessary flair and talent.

- The first task in evangelism is reaching up - praying. This task requires faithfulness since the verb for 'pray' is a present imperative - 'keep on praying' (v 1).
- Secondly, the focus of faithful praying is the messenger or evangelist. It is hard, if not impossible, to faithfully pray with love for the intended recipients if we do not first pray faithfully and lovingly for those among us who preach the message.
- Thirdly, keep on praying faithfully that the Lord of the message will make the preaching of the message fruitful.
- Fourthly, keep on praying faithfully for protection over those who preach (v 2).

Paul and his companions had to faithfully preach, and the church had to faithfully pray. So must we. And as we obey, the Lord will strengthen us and protect us from the evil one (v 3). He will ensure a good harvest.

As Christians, we must preach and practice what we preach. Paul urgently discourages inappropriate conduct in the church that will harm the witness of the church.

The Lord is faithful to do His part (v 1). Are we faithful to do ours?

'May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance' (v 5)

The European cuckoo bird is a freeloader. When spring comes, it doesn't construct a home for its yearly brood. Instead, the female invades the nest of some unsuspecting bird and lays her egg there. The cuckoo's offspring is left to be hatched and cared for by its "foster parent."

While still featherless and blind, the intruder soon dominates the nest by pushing the rightful occupants over the edge to their death. Then it monopolizes all the attention of its new parents. The selfish habits of the cuckoo family sound a lot like the irresponsible behavior that existed among believers in the early Thessalonian church (2 Th. 3:11). Those who sponged off others, lived undisciplined lives, and did no work were warned by the apostle Paul to change their ways. Their refusal to work involved more than just being allergic to perspiration. They were referred to as busybodies and disorderly. "They were," says one commentator, "at nothing working, yet too busily working."

When we neglect our God-given duties and begin interfering in the affairs of others, the result can be disastrous. Christian, beware of "cuckoo" behavior! Instead, faithfully accomplish the work God has given you to do.

By: Mart DeHaan

**We must not meddle in affairs To which we're not assigned;
Instead, let's do our work for God The way He has designed. —Anon.**

No one is unemployed who minds his own business.

JUL 17, SATURDAY

Act 18:18b–19:22

Eloquent, Yet Humble

Act 18:26b

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

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

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

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

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

By: Cindy Hess Kasper

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

The place of humility is the place of power.

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

JUL 17, SATURDAY

Act 18:18b-19:22

Extraordinary Ministry

Act 18:26b

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Acts 19:11

To know God's will was Paul's greatest desire. To do God's will was his highest privilege. God's commands come with His enablement. The grace of God empowered Paul for ministry. No wonder Paul's ministry blossomed in Ephesus. God blessed him with extraordinary success.

- Apollos was discreetly instructed before he was released back into ministry (18:24-28).
- The 12 disciples of John the Baptist were baptized in the Holy Spirit after Paul's probing and instruction (19:1-7).
- Some Jews were saved after 3 months of bold and persuasive proclamation of the Gospel (vs 8-9).
- The church in Ephesus was successfully established. Paul's public preaching was heard throughout Asia Minor for 2 years (vs 9-10).
- Miracles authenticated Paul's preaching and credibility (vs 11-12).
- Counterfeit practices were exposed (vs 13-16).
- The fear of God was instilled and the name of Jesus was honoured (v 17).
- Genuine conversions evidenced by renouncement of the occult were widespread (vs 18-19).
- The word of God spread widely impacting many people (v 20).

Paul had a fruitful ministry in Ephesus. If probed for his phenomenal success, Paul might well advise us:

- Don't be a speaker who does not do or a doer who does not speak. Walk your talk.
- I can do little, yet I have resolved through the grace of Christ that I will never quit my ministry as long as I have legs to go.
- It isn't my ministry. It's God's. It isn't what I'm doing for God, but what He is doing through me.
- My highest aspiration in life and in ministry is that God's will be done. Nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.

Dare we be like Paul?

'Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways.

You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours' (Psa 128:1-2).

The sons of Sceva were in for a rude shock. They soon learnt that the name of Jesus was not to be taken lightly by those who do not know Him.

This incident has a very sobering message for us as Christians. We often use the name of Jesus, although not always to cast out demons. How well do we know Him? How much time do we spend with the Lord in His Word? How often do we talk to Him in prayer?

How much of Christ do our friends and family see in us? Beware lest we be presumptuous and misuse the name of the Lord our God (Exo 20:7). When we use the name of Jesus, we must be careful that we know Him. Only then can we exercise His authority. This incident in Ephesus had a profound effect on the people. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ was held in high honor. Many believed and came confessing their sins, including those who practiced sorcery. They renounced their evil practices and burnt their scrolls. There was genuine repentance from sins and the beginning of new life in Christ.

The Name of the Lord is powerful. Let us know Him more intimately.

JUL 18, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 1 Corinthians

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

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

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

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

JUL 19, MONDAY

1 Co 1:1-17

That They May Be One

1 Co 1:10

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

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

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

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

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

**Pray for church leaders in our country to recognize the work of God
in a Kingdom that is His and not man's.
Are we guilty of using spiritual gifts that are intended to build us up,
to tear us apart instead?**

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 19, MONDAY

1 Co 1:1-17

The Church: A People Called Apart

1 Co 1:10

What is the first impression that comes to your mind when the word 'church' is mentioned? A building with a steeple? Stained glass windows? Pews? The Bible concept of 'church' is not the place where believers worship: rather 'church' is used as a collective noun to describe a group of believers. While church buildings are held together by concrete or nails, the Church of Jesus is held together by a shared faith in Jesus Christ, a common experience of His saving grace and a continual experience of His Presence.

Paul sees the church at Corinth as a group of believers who had been called by the Lord. We often speak of having 'found God' but the Bible clearly indicates that it is God who initiates this relationship. We merely respond to His call which comes through circumstances orchestrated by Him or a messenger sent by Him, so that we are made aware of His love for us (Acts 17).

The church is a group enriched by His grace. Grace is often explained as being 'unmerited favor' or 'unearned kindness'. We are saved by grace and our relationship with Him is sustained by grace. Our desire to please Him is a response to His gracious nature.

This group is kept by His strength. God is constantly working in us and for us by His Spirit. Paul reminds us often in this letter that it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is the source of power for both personal growth and ministry expression.

**What a privilege it is to be part of the Church of Christ! Lord,
thank You for the Church, a people called apart.**

May Your indwelling Holy Spirit sanctify and empower me for ministry in my daily life.

Paul was disturbed at the knowledge that there were many factions or 'cliques' in the Corinthian church. It seemed as if the people were spending their time comparing the qualities and qualifications of prominent leaders and were identifying themselves as 'followers' of the person they felt was more 'successful' or 'authoritative'. This led to disunity in thought and purpose. Sadly, this is a situation not confined to the Corinthian church but is observed in churches even today.

Instead of 'hero-worshipping' leaders, Paul wrote that they ought to be united in their understanding of who Jesus is. He is their Savior and Lord. He alone is worthy of their loyalty and allegiance.

Paul noted that they should also have remembered who they were in Jesus. All were 'brothers' in the Lord and though God raised different persons into leadership, each one was merely ministering on His behalf. To claim special honor just because one was baptized by a particularly admired leader was incorrect thinking. All who minister, do so only under the delegated authority of Jesus Christ.

Finally, Paul urged the Corinthian church to be united by what Jesus had done for them. Only He was crucified. No leader, no matter how gifted or successful, died for them.

This passage has great relevance for us today. It reminds us that we must never be followers of 'personalities'; we follow only Jesus. While we can be thankful that God has raised up many gifted teachers and preachers, we must look beyond the merits or demerits of their presentation styles or perspectives and remember that each one serves to point us to Jesus alone.

Lord Jesus, keep my heart and mind firmly fixed on You and You alone.

JUL 20, TUESDAY

1 Co 1:18-2:5

Wiser Than Man's Wisdom

1 Co 1:25

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are called to follow God's Christ.

Many see us as foolish to place our faith in Christ.

But we rejoice in Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 20, TUESDAY

1 Co 1:18-2:5

Wiser Than Man's Wisdom

1 Co 1:25

During Roman rule, crucifixion was the vilest, most shameful way to die. The sight of men writhing on crosses staked along major roads invoked feelings of disdain and disgust in many. The claim that God sent His Son to die on a cross was scandalous to many minds. The Greeks thought this to be irrational while the Jews interpreted this as a demonstration of futility. Some in the Corinthian church apparently also seemed to have trouble understanding this.

Paul's response to the Corinthians was to remind them that God had already warned them through the prophet Isaiah that the workings of His plans would baffle them. He reminded them that their philosophers and wise men, in all their wisdom, had not been able to save them from their sinful state or enable them to live holy lives. This was in contrast to the power and blessings that had come to those who believed through the 'scandalous' cross. Paul's thoughts concerning God's wisdom should continue to help believers persevere in tough, often incomprehensible situations:

- The greatness of God's wisdom may seem to be foolishness to man but is far more wonderful than man at his wisest. We must trust that He knows why things are the way they are.
- The expression of God's wisdom is often baffling as He chooses what appears to be foolish to us to bring about blessings in our lives.
- The power of God's wisdom cannot be thwarted by the rationale or strength of man. His ways are always energized by His power. We must believe He can bring all things to pass.

Loving God, help me to understand that true wisdom comes only from You. Help me to trust Your Holy Spirit in all my undertakings and to turn my foolishness into wisdom.

For 2 decades, ecologist Mike Hands has worked to help farmers in Central America adopt more effective methods of growing their crops. It's difficult, however, for them to abandon their long tradition of "slash and burn" agriculture, even though they know it destroys the soil and pollutes the air.

So instead of merely talking to them, Mike shows them a better way. In the documentary film *Up in Smoke*, he says: "It has to be demonstrated. You cannot preach it. You can't describe it. People have got to be able to get their hands on it and see it."

Paul took a similar approach to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wrote to the believers in Corinth, "My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2:4-5). Later in his letter, Paul told them again, "The kingdom of God is not in word but in power" (4:20).

As you live each day, ask God to help you accompany your words with actions. When we allow God to show Himself through us, it's a powerful demonstration of His grace and love.

By: David C. McCasland

**Allow us, Lord, to demonstrate
Our faith by what we do,
So that the gospel can be seen
By those who seek for You. —Sper**
Our words need actions behind them.

JUL 21, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 2:6-3:23

God Reveals by His Spirit

1 Co 3:16

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

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

Paul makes three points:

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 21, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 2:6-3:23

Competing or Complementing?

1 Co 3:16

Who do you think is most important? The usher at the door, the worship leader or the preacher for the day? Most people will say, 'The preacher, of course!' Yet, upon reflection, all have very important roles. An usher who is rude or an ill-prepared worship leader can create such a negative environment that even the most gifted preacher will have a difficult time getting God's truths across to His people effectively. God's servants complement one another and not compete with each other in their ministry for Him.

This tendency to compare was evident in the Corinthian church. Paul reminded them that each leader's work had been assigned to him. It is God who has determined the role each one plays in His work. To participate in ministry in a church is a God-given privilege – a privilege to serve Him and His people.

Furthermore, each person's work is noted by God Himself and it is He who will reward in a way that is most fair. There is no need for us to 'root' for a particular leader to draw attention to his or her contribution.

Finally, Paul noted that each man's work will be tested on the day of reckoning. The motives of each man's efforts will be laid bare before the Master. Only then will the true value of each man's contribution be seen.

Lord, help me to appreciate each one who serves in my local church.

**Let me affirm the diversity of God's enabling
so that Your work is accomplished and Your Name glorified.**

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. 1 Cor 3:6

Paul's discussion on wisdom and the cross is a central issue. The very pursuit of worldly wisdom has caused the church to be divided. The Corinthian church thought of themselves as 'spiritual' while they were in fact 'carnal' in their disunity. The cause of their disunity was a wrong understanding of the nature of the church and its leadership.

Paul's main focus here was to correct and instruct the church which was placing too much emphasis on her teachers and putting them on pedestals. It was also to correct the leaders from being too full of themselves. They claimed the church belonged to Christ but acted like it was theirs.

Paul addressed two related issues using imagery from agriculture and architecture (vs 5-17). With the farming metaphor, Paul taught that the growth of crops was totally dependent on God. Any adulation of the 'servants' of the farm was misdirected.

Using the building metaphor, Paul spoke to the teachers, reminding them that the church must be built with imperishable materials upon Christ the foundation, and not upon man's work.

In conclusion (vs 18-23), the train of thought that began in 1:10 comes back fully: what foolish people these were, boasting in human leaders who were mere 'servants' when all things belong to the Lord and Master Jesus Christ. We are all united with, and belong to Christ.

**Pray for each other - and especially our church leaders
- against thinking and behaving like the 'carnal'/'fleshly' world.**

The Corinthians were not people without the Spirit. They had the Spirit, but they were not allowing the Spirit to control their thoughts and behavior. How do we measure up?

JUL 22, THURSDAY

1 Co 4:1-21

Do Only as I Say

1 Co 4:20

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 22, THURSDAY

1 Co 4:1-21

Do Only as I Say

1 Co 4:20

A Persian king wanted to teach his four sons never to make rash judgments. So, he told the eldest to go in winter to see a mango tree, the next to go in spring, the third in summer, and the youngest in the fall. After the last son returned from his autumn visit, the king called them together to describe what they had observed. "It looks like a burnt old stump," said the eldest. "No," said the second, "it is lacy green."

The third described it as "beautiful as a rose." The youngest said, "No, its fruit is like a pear." "Each is right," said the king, "for each of you saw the tree in a different season."

How often we forget that brothers and sisters in faith are not all alike; they are at different stages of spiritual growth. Conversion to Christ is just the beginning. Spiritual maturity requires a lifetime of replacing old thoughts, attitudes, habits, and actions with new ones created by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

To avoid making unfair and unfounded conclusions about people, we need to realize that each one of us is a work in progress. To judge prematurely is to judge wrongly. When we take the time to get to know people, understand them, learn their back-grounds, and find out what season of spiritual development they are in, we will be less hasty in our judgments and more kind in our attitudes and actions. — DJ DeHaan

God sees the whole picture, and He never draws hasty conclusions. Neither should we.

Ever been to a soccer match and heard hundreds of 'coaches' yell instructions to the 22 men on the field? These 'experts' are convinced that their moves and strategics would 'demolish' the opposing team. Some of us need venture no further than our living rooms to hear these cheers and jeers - armchair critics yelling at television screens.

Spectators seldom desire to participate but are very quick to offer their 'expertise'. The Corinthians were like that. They were quick to boast about their apparent abilities and achievements and were critical about how Paul and his friends were carrying out their ministry.

Paul presented three reasons why such behavior was wrong.

- Firstly, it was useless to boast of what they had achieved because all that they claimed to have done was achieved not through their own ability but through a gracious God.
- Secondly, they really had no cause to boast because even though they felt they had attained much, they were still far from where they ought to have been. They were still people in need who depended on God's grace.
- Thirdly, Paul reminded them that mere talk was useless - if they were indeed spiritually mature, it would show in their lives.

We also need to reflect on these thoughts today. It is so much easier to criticize than to do. How much better it would be if we spent our time seeking to be genuinely transformed by God's Spirit so that His power in us can bring about a real transformation of our environment.

Lord, may Your kingdom come through transformation in me.

JUL 23, FRIDAY

1 Co 5:1-13

Get Rid of the Old Yeast

1 Co 5:7b

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 23, FRIDAY

1 Co 5:1-13

Sin – No Trivial Matter

1 Co 5:7b

Today, issues of vital importance are trivialized because of continual media exposure. Reports of an assassination attempt are repeated so often on cable networks in any given day that one tires of the news. The element of shock and concern deteriorates into sheer apathy.

This media desensitization also spills over into the realm of sexual behavior. The constant portrayal of sex apart from marriage as being acceptable, especially in situation comedies, has dulled the fact that both pre-marital and extra-marital sex is sin in God's sight. Sexual sin is no laughing matter.

Apathy towards sexual sin is not new. Paul was appalled by the manner in which the Corinthian church responded (or rather did not respond) to what he felt was despicable behavior. He was flabbergasted that the church made light of man's sin and was even amused by it. In doing so, they were also making light of Jesus' atoning work on the cross.

Paul was convinced that sinful activity had to be openly rebuked by Christians so that unbelievers would clearly understand the gravity of the sin and the evil effect this sort of behavior would have on the fellowship if it remained unchecked.

Yet, even though he was upset with the sin, Paul showed that his ultimate concern was for the sinner. While the course of action Paul prescribed might seem harsh, it was designed to bring about repentance and ultimate reconciliation with God and fellow believers.

What about us today? Are we sensitive to the Spirit's convicting power or have we also become desensitized to wrongdoing? What if a person we know is living in sin – do we care enough to pray, counsel and condemn the sin?

Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. —1 Cor 5:7

Several days before their New Year celebration, many Chinese families give their home a thorough cleaning. There's a Cantonese saying that goes: "Wash away the dirt on ninyabaat" (28th day of month 12). They practice this tradition because it is believed the cleaning sweeps away the bad luck of the preceding year and makes their homes ready for good luck.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, he asked them to give their lives a thorough cleansing—not for good luck but to please God. He told them to "purge out the old leaven" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Paul used the Jewish feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12:1-28) as a backdrop for this statement. Leaven (yeast) was a symbol of sin and corruption and was to be removed from Jewish homes to celebrate these festivals (Deut. 16:3-4). Because Jesus is the Passover Lamb who cleanses us from sin, the Corinthians were to scour their hearts and remove the leaven of sexual immorality, malice, and wickedness from their lives and their assembly (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Out of gratitude to Jesus for His sacrifice, let us purge out the sin in our lives and celebrate the holiness that only He can bring.

—D. De Haan

**The holiness of God demands A heart that's pure within,
Yet grace unites with holiness To purge the heart from sin.
*Sin's contamination requires the Savior's cleansing.***

JUL 24, SATURDAY

1 Co 6:1-20

And They'll Know We Are Christians

1 Co 6:19

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 24, SATURDAY

1 Co 6:1-20

Washing Dirty Linen in Public

1 Co 6:19

The scenario presented is one that is easily understood and appreciated by Asians. Protecting the name and honor of one's family is among the first lessons learned by an Asian child. Many have heard the warning never to tell any 'outsiders' about the affairs of the home at the threat of a smack from mum!

Paul's admonition against taking fellow believers to court surely echoes the above sentiment. Paul saw it as 'shameful' that believers, who claimed to be able to 'judge' their leaders, had to resort to law courts to arbitrate disputes among themselves. He reminded them that they would one day be judging angels, implying that if they could not even settle disputes among themselves, how could they hope to perform this lofty task?

What caused this 'shameful' behavior? Right at the top of the list was an unforgiving spirit. Surely at the heart of the Gospel they received was the fact that God had forgiven their sin and expected them to forgive those who wronged them. Then there was the fact that many of them were guilty of the very behavior that they wanted to sue their brothers over. Paul warned them that no one who continued in sin would be saved.

Lessons we can learn? Well, let us be quick to present fellow believers to non-believers in a good light rather than to run down their reputation. Let's show loyalty. Then let us remember that there is no excuse for us to continue to sin as we would then forfeit His blessings.

**Give me a forgiving heart,
Lord and help me to show compassion to my sisters and brothers in Christ.**

Have you ever been asked by a friend if some relationship or activity he was considering was appropriate for him as a believer? How can we help believers make sound moral decisions? For some reason the Church at Corinth had concluded that 'all things are permissible' to a believer. Implied within Paul's answer to them are three questions that will help us in this task.

- Firstly, **'Is it beneficial?'** Does the activity promote personal growth - mentally, emotionally, physically, socially and spiritually? For example, involving oneself in the activity may mean a widening of one's social circle, which could be good for career advancement, but it might rob you of time set aside for family or ministry.
- Secondly, ask: **'Will I be mastered by the activity?'** Is there a danger, however remote, that I may become 'enslaved' by it? In themselves, golf, surfing on the Internet, fishing, etc. are often beneficial. But, if care is not taken to ensure that boundaries are drawn, these can become areas of obsession! We have all probably heard of someone who is 'unable' to make time for church activities because 'I am too busy' with one activity or another!
- The third and perhaps most vital question to ask would be: **'Is it honoring God?'**

Paul had no doubt that any sexually immoral behavior was totally inappropriate to a believer. He did not mince his words when dealing with the Corinthians. God's Word is clear on what brings Him honor and what does not. If we are to continue to grow and enjoy His blessings, we must obey His Word and walk in His ways.

**Lord, I ask for the guidance of Your Holy Spirit in helping me discern correctly the choices /
make in life.**

JUL 25, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

JUL 26, MONDAY

1 Co 7:1-40

The Ministry of Marriage

1 Co 7:23

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 26, MONDAY

1 Co 7:1-40

Changing from the inside

1 Co 7:23

'Joseph Chan?' Old Madam Chan looked incredulously at her eldest grandson. 'What happened to the name I gave you?' she enquired in Cantonese. 'I suppose you will also now only speak English and will no longer observe our traditions. Must be that church he has been going to,' she went on to mutter sadly to herself.

It is possible that a variation of this imaginary scenario has been played out in hundreds of homes in Asia. The debate over how receiving Jesus as Lord changes a person's standing in his society is an old one. While Paul was primarily dealing with the issue of whether it was better to get married or otherwise, his advice concerning the relationship between our earthly status and obedience to God comes in useful to believers seeking to re-adjust to life in their former social environment.

Paul notes that change is firstly internal. The believer now has a new Master who supersedes all former authority figures. Former mind-sets, values and behavior patterns must be evaluated in the light of Scripture. Paul stressed the need to obey the Truth. Obedience, declared Paul, was more important than adopting external forms and rituals. All outside change should result from an internal change of value systems arising from acknowledging Jesus as Lord.

Furthermore, the new believer should be more concerned about his standing before God than focusing on his status in society. Any change in status will come in God's perfect time. He would doubtlessly order circumstances, expressing His favor and grace in ways He knows will be for the highest good for all. Our part? Trust and obey!

**Give me a trusting heart and obedient spirit that in all things
I may seek to bring honor and glory to Your Holy Name.**

*Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.
1 Cor 7:24*

In this chapter Paul takes up matters related to marriage (divorce, marriage and second marriages).

Paul is dealing with the pressure within the Corinthian church to either dissolve marriage or abstain from it. The mistaken belief was that people who are 'spiritual' do not have fleshly needs (if you are married, abstain from sexual relations; if that is difficult go for a divorce). This continues to show how deeply the church had misunderstood the meaning of true spirituality.

In matters related to marriage, Paul's central message is: 'Stay as you are' (while allowing for exceptions in each case); therefore, to the married, stay married (vs 1-7, vs 10-16); to the unmarried, it is good to stay single (vs 8-9, vs 25-38); to married women and to widows, stay as you are (vs 39-40).

Paul is aware of the reality and urgency of the end-times. But more importantly, Paul's main concern is that as believers, we should faithfully live out our calling in whatever situation we find ourselves in, while we await Christ's return.

What matters is that we are faithful in service and stewardship to what God has given us and where He has placed us. The seeking of any other position, power and possessions, is ultimately irrelevant with God, and useless before Him.

JUL 27, TUESDAY

1 Co 8:1-13

Tearing Down or Building Up

1 Co 8:3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 27, TUESDAY

1 Co 8:1-13

Guided by Love

1 Co 8:3

The question was posed to Paul as to whether it was all right for believers in Corinth to eat food that had been offered to idols. It seems also that there were some who saw themselves as being 'mature' and 'knowledgeable'. They held the view that eating this kind of food was harmless as idols were themselves powerless, and so eating such food would bring no harm. If they expected Paul to support their viewpoint, they were in for some disappointment.

Paul took this opportunity to remind them (and us) that there were other things to consider besides mere head knowledge. First, he gently reminded them that to be known by God as being faithful and kind was more important than knowing many things. As believers we need to be constantly reminded of this. We try so often to dazzle others with the depth of our theological knowledge instead of showing loving concern and seeking to nurture their faith in God.

Mere knowledge can make a person proud, dogmatic and impatient with those who think otherwise. Mere knowledge can make a person uncaring. In our anxiety to defend a position we hold about some belief or practice, another person could be deeply hurt and discouraged. For example, a believer may feel it is all right to drink alcohol as his conscience is clear but another is appalled because he associates liquor with a lifestyle he has been saved from. Paul's admonition to the 'stronger' believer would be to reconsider whatever is thought to be 'right' in the light of that which would build the faith of the 'weaker' brother. This is love in action.

May my entire life be guided by Your love expressing itself through me.

*But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.
(1 Cor 8:9)*

Many states in the U.S. allow motorists to make a right turn when the traffic signal is red—if the way is clear. This gives drivers liberty and keeps traffic moving. At some intersections, however, signs say, "No turn on red." These corners are exceptions because they are potential danger spots. By turning on red there, a motorist could cause a serious accident.

In 1 Corinthians 8, we have a similar situation concerning Christian liberty. Paul had perfect freedom to eat meat offered to idols. He knew that there was only one true God and that idols were nothing. Eating meat offered to them was neither right nor wrong. But not all believers felt that way. A person who had a weak conscience believed that the meat was defiled by the idol, and therefore it was off limits. Paul recognized the need to take special care lest by eating he would influence such a person to eat, thus violating his conscience. Concern for weaker believers kept him from exercising his liberty.

As Christians, we are free in Christ—free to engage in social practices and customs not specifically forbidden by biblical commands. Yet the Holy Spirit may prompt us to refrain from some legitimate practices. Then the principle of love must take precedence over the principle of liberty. A mature Christian will heed the "no turn on red" sign to keep from causing a weaker believer "to have a serious accident."

—D J DeHaan

None of us has a right to do as we please, unless we please to do right.

JUL 28, WEDNESDAY 1 Co 9:1-27

Free of Charge

1 Co 9:22b

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JUL 28, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 9:1-27

Acknowledging A Blessing

1 Co 9:22b

Gratitude for help rendered. This response needs to be constantly encouraged within the Body of Christ. The idea that those 'called' by God to serve should do so selflessly without any need of appreciation or remuneration finds no basis in the Word. In fact, it appears that Paul was indignant that the church had seen no need to support Barnabas and himself as they faithfully ministered God's Word to them. Paul reminded the Corinthians that like other workers those who served God and His people deserved appreciation and support.

This is true today too. Regardless of whether those who minister to us are committed laypersons or supported clergy, those who serve God's people deserve our affirmation and our generosity. Paul points out that even vinedressers and dairy farmers who have labored hard at their jobs enjoy the fruit of their labor. If the world clearly understands that a workman is worthy of his wages, should not the church show in some tangible way that the labor of God's servant is also given some value?

Is there someone who has been instrumental in your spiritual growth? Take time to reflect on how that individual has blessed you. Think of the many times he or she stood by you in difficult times. While your friend probably sees service as a God-given privilege and has no expectation of material reward, a small token of appreciation will doubtlessly spur him/her to even greater works for His glory.

Write a thank-you note, make a phone call to express your gratitude or show your appreciation by giving the person a gift.

Biographies of great men and women of God are consistent best sellers. Thousands have been enthralled and encouraged by the life stories of Hudson Taylor, Corrie Ten Boom, John Sung and Sadhu Sunder Singh.

In the passage we are considering today, we find an autobiographical sketch of Paul the apostle. Though brief in length, it nevertheless allows us to catch a glimpse of the passion with which he served his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. A passion, which if kindled in our lives, will undoubtedly spur us on to serve Jesus with greater fervor.

Paul was driven by a compulsion to preach. The impact that the risen Lord had made on him compelled him to fervently proclaim the gospel of love. He was immensely grateful to God for forgiving his sinful past and he was enveloped by a sense of wonder that God could love even someone like him who had caused so much pain and grief to God's people.

Paul was committed to the task of sharing the message of salvation. No personal sacrifice was too great. Proclamation of the gospel was paramount to him so any talk of 'rights' to be claimed or defended was of little consequence.

Paul was convinced that serving Christ is the only true purpose one can have in life. He was determined to finish the race of life well, remaining true to this conviction to the end.

**Lord, may I be as determined to develop this passion for You
which inspires dogged perseverance in times of intense testing.
May I live a useful life directed by a deep sense of Your calling and purpose.**

JUL 29, THURSDAY

1 Co 10:1-11:1

The Glory of God

1 Co 10:13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let us renew our commitment to the Lord.

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 29, THURSDAY

1 Co 10:1-11:1

Finishing Well, Learning from The Past

1 Co 10:13

Running the first 10 kilometers of a marathon well does not guarantee a runner will complete the course. Consistency during the run and a good finish is what determine success. This same principle applies to a believer's spiritual journey. Sadly, many have not ended their journey well. King Saul and Judas Iscariot are two examples of characters in the Word who started well but ended badly.

The Corinthians appeared to be rather smug spiritually and seemed to think that they were doing well in their Christian walk. Paul reminded them that their ancestors had also started off well under the leadership of Moses but faltered as they wandered in the wilderness.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that mere external conformity to religious practices was unacceptable to God. The Israelites had observed the stipulated rituals and yet God was not pleased with them. Their 'godliness' was only 'skin-deep'. They had not enthroned God as Lord internally and this was evidenced by their disobedience.

Paul further warned the Corinthians that if they thought they were more spiritual than their ancestors, they were treading on dangerous ground, as every believer is susceptible to the temptation to disobey. They could, however, count on the help of the Holy Spirit to be overcomers.

**Heavenly Father, let me take these warnings to heart
so that I will finish my race well and not find myself stumbling out of it.**

I remember being told as a little boy of five that the way to be really joyful was to always think of other people before myself. I was taught to 'First consider Jesus, then others, only then yourself'. To a self-centered kid, this was tough work! However, I have since found out that this is indeed true. To be Christ-like demands that one always seeks to please God and the good of others before indulging in one's own desires and preferences.

Among the issues the Corinthians found perplexing was whether or not it was permissible for a believer to eat food offered to idols. Paul responded by asking them to first consider if doing this would please the Lord. While eating the food itself would bring no physical harm, the close association of this practice with idolatry made this behavior 'questionable' as idolatry greatly displeased and dishonored God.

Some appeared to have appealed to the saying: 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' to justify their behavior. They rationalized that since everything belonged to God, the food in question also belonged to God so it was all right to eat it.

While not disputing their viewpoint, Paul urged them to also consider the effect their actions would have on others around them. Many in Corinth had been saved out of idolatrous lifestyles and seeing a fellow brother participate in something they were saved from would greatly distress and confuse them. So, for their sake it was better to abstain.

Responsible Christian behavior always takes into consideration God's perspective and others' wellbeing before indulging in one's own desires.

JUL 30, FRIDAY

1 Co 11:2-34

Receive and Welcome One Another

1 Co 11:26

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 30, FRIDAY

1 Co 11:2-34

True Worship – Honor and Adoration

1 Co 11:26

How rich the church world-wide has become in her expression of worship. The abundance of new music, rediscovery of the role of dance as well as fresh arrangements of beloved time-tested hymns have all blended together to provide believers with exciting and exuberant times of worship. Yet worship goes far beyond the recitation of liturgy, singing of songs, external postures, gestures and forms. True worship of God flows from a genuine love relationship with Him so that all its expressions originate from the desire to honor and to adore Him.

Worship services at Corinth were exuberant events. From different parts of Paul's letter, we can infer that there was no lack of participation in the expression of spiritual gifts. Yet Paul shared with them a word of caution that the church today must also heed.

While this passage appears on the surface to be dealing with matters of dress and decorum in a particular church setting, the underlying principles have relevance to the Church for all time. It speaks of the mutual respect and love that must be seen among the members of a congregation claiming to be coming before God in worship. Here, women were asked to behave in a manner that showed that they respected their husbands and God while the men were to ensure that their behavior honored women and God. How well this echoes the call of Jesus that we put right our relationships with one another before we come before Him with our worship.

Let us excel in our expressions of Christian love and respect in as much as we desire to be creative in worship.

The early church was characterized by the depth of their commitment to the Lord and to one another. They were 'of one heart and one mind', providing for each other's needs (Acts 4:32). This was love in action – the kind of behavior that Jesus said would define His people in the midst of a selfish world.

The church at Corinth however lacked this. Reports Paul received from Corinth concerning behavior at communion services greatly disappointed him. The customary shared meal at these services revealed that the elements of true Christian love and fellowship were absent.

Genuine fellowship is expressed through care for others in the Body of Christ but many in Corinth appeared to be thinking of themselves before others. They were seen eating and drinking more than their share and rushing for the best portions being served.

Genuine fellowship is expressed through the desire to share with others in the Body. This meal was one to which everyone contributed. It was meant to reflect the ideal that believers had all things in common. Sadly, individual greed nullified any expression of 'community'.

Worst of all, their behavior made a mockery of the reason for their coming together. Partaking of the Lord's Supper was an occasion meant to remind them that Jesus had died for all mankind. Everyone present at the meal was a sinner saved only by the grace of God. If they understood this truth, they would have shown love and concern towards one another in the manner in which they shared the meal.

**What is my main intention when I partake of the Lord's Supper?
Do I have genuine love and concern for those with whom I worship?**

JUL 31, SATURDAY

1 Co 12:1-31

Diversity Within Unity

1 Co 12:7

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

P.R.A.Y

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

JUL 31, SATURDAY

1 Co 12:1-31

For His Glory

1 Co 12:7

The Corinthian church was rich in spiritual gifts. Regretfully, many of those exercising these gifts had lost sight of the purpose for which these gifts were given. Instead of understanding that they were for the encouragement and strengthening of the church, they saw them as personal possessions they could boast about and use as they wished.

While Paul did not question the validity of these gifts, he noted they were being misused. His comments on this issue are an invaluable help in instructing us to ensure the responsible stewardship of gifts bestowed on the Church by the Spirit. God's gifts are never given to glorify the person chosen to exercise them. God is glorified in the proper use of gifts. Spiritual gifts are to build up the Church so that she becomes a glorious effective witness to the majesty, authority and compassion of Jesus. These gifts are not worked for and neither do they indicate that the person through whom they are manifested has reached a special level of holiness or spiritual maturity. These are gifts of grace - unearned.

There is a diversity of gifts and each one has a specific purpose. The distribution of these gifts is the prerogative of the Spirit. These are given to whoever the Spirit chooses and members should count it a privilege and use the gifts with humility to serve the Body of Christ. The guidelines concerning spiritual gifts apply equally to talents given to us by God. Some excel at singing, others at cooking, and others at handicraft. All these talents are meant to bless God's people and to result in praise and thanksgiving to Him as the Giver of all good gifts.

What do you do well?

Bless His Body with the talent(s) God has given you.

The Church of Jesus should be a place where a corporate CEO, an uneducated farmer, an unmarried mother and a college professor regard each other as equals, persons touched by the grace of God. It is a place where unity comes not through uniformity of educational experiences, appearance or personality traits but through shared values and a shared desire to be more Christ-like in character and behavior. The local church should celebrate diversity rather than to regard differences as divisive or threatening.

Paul's letter to the Corinthian church reminds us that it is the Lord who places persons where they are. This truth must encourage us to love and accept all our fellow brothers and sisters with whom we worship and serve the Lord.

Paul's comments that the 'less honorable' parts be deserving of even greater honor corrects a common misconception that those who are 'sore thumbs' in the assembly be ignored. On the contrary, more love and attention need to be lavished on them.

We are reminded too that each believer is assigned a different role by the Lord. In His wisdom, God ensures that each person's gifts and abilities complement that of the others. While some people have roles that are more visible than others, those whose contribution is unseen or appears insignificant are no less important to the church. The one who intercedes for the ministry in the 'closet' is as vital to the church as the person teaching from the pulpit.

**The call is for us to accept, respect, show love and be concerned
for all whom the Lord has placed within the local expression of His Universal Church.**

AUG 1, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 2, MONDAY

1 Co 13:1-13

The Most Excellent Way

1 Co 13:13

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AUG 2, MONDAY

1 Cor 13:1-13

The Way of Love

1 Cor 13:13

When I was a teenager, a poster given by a close friend hung on my bedroom wall for many years. On it were these words. 'Love is a feeling to be learned.' I stared at it often, trying hard to make sense of the wisdom behind the saying. I never deciphered the mystery. How can a feeling be learned?

Then one day, when I was reading the passage of scripture we are considering today, I suddenly realized that the poster would make far more sense if it read, 'Love is an attitude to be learned.' Paul saw love as an attitude in the carrying out of activities. One could make big sacrifices but this would amount to nothing if the deeds were not done in love.

The Corinthian church might have been rich in spiritual gifts but their lack of loving behavior was seen in their willingness to take their brothers to civil courts to settle disputes. It was displayed at the communion meal when self-interest and greed prevailed. They boasted about their knowledge and the abundance of Spirit-inspired prophetic utterances in their midst but Paul reminded them that there would come a day when these would be redundant. Only the way of love was eternal. Paul thus implied that if the church was to pursue anything, she should pursue the way of love.

Finally, Paul's teaching shows us that it is possible to obey Jesus' command to love even our enemies. Since deciding to love means choosing to be patient, refraining from boasting, opting to be polite, etc., we can choose to love – even those who normally are difficult to love.

O Lord, let me love as You love.

During a devotional session at a conference, our leader asked us to read aloud 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 and substitute the word "Jesus" for "love." It seemed so natural to say, "Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy; Jesus does not parade Himself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek His own ... Jesus never fails."

Then our leader said, "Read the passage aloud and say your name instead of Jesus." We laughed nervously at the suggestion. "I want you to begin now," the leader said. Quietly, haltingly I said the words that felt so untrue: "David does not seek his own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. David never fails."

The exercise caused me to ask, "How am I hindering God from expressing His love through me?" Do I think that other expressions of faith are more important? Paul declared that from God's perspective, eloquent speech, deep spiritual understanding, lavish generosity, and self-sacrifice are worthless when not accompanied by love (vv.1-3).

God longs to express His great heart of love for others through us. Will we allow Him to do it?

**To love our neighbors as ourselves, Is not an easy thing to do;
So Lord, please show us how to love, As we attempt to follow You. —Sper**

Living like Christ is loving like God.

AUG 3, TUESDAY 1 Co 14:1-40

Follow the Way of Love

1 Co 14:33a

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AUG 3, TUESDAY

1 Co 14:1-40

For A Purpose

1 Co 14:33a

As with the other spiritual gifts, Paul did not question the validity of 'tongues' in the life of the individual believer or in the church. His concern was again a proper understanding of tongues and its usage. The advice he gave to the church on this issue makes clear our understanding of how Paul pictures worship.

Any form of worship in the church is always to be inclusive. There is no room for any expression that willfully excludes anyone from a shared spiritual experience meant to bring spiritual encouragement. If a particular activity does not benefit the entire body, it is best enjoyed elsewhere by the segment that finds it edifying or encouraging.

This has great implications for the local church. During a worship session, a worship team should not lead the congregation in songs that may not be meaningful in content and style to the majority of the congregation. Worship is to unite the church in corporate adoration and not leave some out as mere spectators. A preacher needs to communicate effectively so that all God's people hear and understand God's Word.

All worship activities must be carried out with sensitivity and purpose. All postures adopted, liturgy employed and music selected should have a Scriptural basis established through careful reflection and consideration. All that is done should bring about a sense of reverence for the Lord and an appreciation of His great love for us.

When this is done, even a non-believer who joins the service will feel welcome and will acknowledge that he is in the presence of an awesome God.

**It is not likely that agree about everything. But when we come together in church,
let us agree on the purpose: to worship God in the way that pleases Him.**

Most believers attend worship services anticipating that they will enjoy the time of worship, be both enlightened and strengthened by the Word and leave the church with enough spiritual 'fuel' to see them through the week. However, not many will go with the determination to contribute towards the success and purpose of this gathering of believers.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to bring a hymn, an instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation when they came together, thus bringing about a 'strengthening' of the church. How wonderful it would be if every believer spends time in prayer to seek the Lord for a word or a way to make the worship service a meaningful one for all present! What can you do to help?

First, determine to be present. This by itself speaks of the importance you place on the gathering together of believers. It also testifies to the reality and validity of the Christian faith in your life. Next, put your whole heart into all that has been planned. Sing every song from the depths of your heart. Read the scriptures, if called upon to do so, with conviction. Your enthusiasm will be contagious. Flow with the leading of God's Spirit. Ensure that your brothers and sisters are not hindered in their praise by the manner in which you carry yourself. Seek always to find ways to facilitate the 'fitting together' of all that goes on, so that the Body is edified and the Lord is honored and glorified.

Try the above this Sunday - it may change your perception of a worship service forever!

AUG 4, WEDNESDAY **1 Co 15:1-34**

Do We Believe Heaven Really Exists?

1 Co 15:12

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Let us also pray that we will be lights shining into the darkness
to bring resurrection hope and joy to friends and family.**

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

AUG 4, WEDNESDAY

1 Co 15:1–34

Because He Lives

1 Co 15:10a

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It is so vital that Paul declares that his preaching would be in vain if this was not true. So would the faith of all believers. Paul assured the Corinthians that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead by describing in detail the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Jesus' resurrection proves that His word can be trusted. All He had predicted in His discourses with His disciples concerning this event, came to pass. This strengthened their faith in Him and they went about boldly preaching, applying every principle learned and holding fast to every promise given.

Jesus' resurrection proves to us that there is life after death and that we must prepare for it. The tendency to live just for the joys and the thrills of the moment, without thought of eternity, is irresponsible. The world would have us believe that we should live for the 'now' but the believer knows that one day we will be held accountable for all we do and say on earth.

Jesus' resurrection proves that He has successfully paid for our sin and we now have access to God the Father. Take this glorious opportunity given to you to draw near to Him through prayer and worship. No other relationship can bring greater joy or a greater sense of security and rest.

Finally, His resurrection is a powerful life-changing truth which we must proclaim. We must share the joyful truth that all can be set free from their bondage to sin if they would turn to the risen Savior. Because He lives, there is hope for all.

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the assurance Your resurrection gives me.

For the sake of the gospel, missionaries like John and Betty Stam and Nate Saint gave their lives to share Jesus with people who had not heard of Him. For the sake of the gospel, D. L. Moody gave up a lucrative business career to reach the urban poor and marginalized with the message of salvation. For the sake of the gospel, thousands of unheralded Christians have ministered in prisons, taught Sunday school to unruly children, adopted orphans, given up vacations in order to participate in mission trips, or worked to free people from the bonds of slavery.

What is this gospel, that could compel people to action like this? As Paul nears the end of his letter, he returns to what is the fundamental issue at hand, the very theme with which he began: the gospel. In chapter 15, Paul defines what the gospel is and what its implications are for the Corinthians and indeed, for all believers.

In verses 3 through 5, Paul is citing what may be one of the earliest of Christian creeds. It announces that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and then raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the cataclysmic events of history. They have fulfilled the story God began with the nation of Israel, which He has carefully recorded in the Scriptures. The gospel is both an Old and New Testament story of God's person and work with His people.

The gospel isn't just a story rooted in past events. The gospel provides an expectant hope for what is to come. Jesus, having died for our sins and been raised, now lives to destroy the enemies of God. God's kingdom will finally and fully come through Jesus at the end of time. Our bodily resurrection is a witness to this future redemption of the world.

Because of the salvation secured by Christ and verified through the resurrection, we are compelled to act. As we share the news about Jesus with others, we are participating in God's promise to renew all creation.

Apply the Word :Some people like to force a divide between doctrine and doing—and then emphasize whichever element they prefer as most important. But theology and practical ministry can't be split apart; they inform each other. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is full of the connections between sound theology and life together in the church.

The ability to know God and the ability to serve others are both rooted in the truth and power of the gospel, the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

AUG 5, THURSDAY

1 Co 15:35–58

The Resurrected Body

1 Co 15:58b

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” 1 Cor 15:55

In what form will the dead be raised? The answer: ‘In a new body.’ This body is ‘new’ because it will be heavenly, ‘spiritual’, and incorruptible, in contrast to our present earthly, ‘natural’, decaying body.

Had the Corinthian church misunderstood the ‘resurrection’ to be the reanimation and resuscitation of the body? Paul points out that Christ’s resurrection was obviously the transformation of His human physical body into a ‘glorified body’.

Paul attempts to explain the idea of a ‘spiritual’ (heavenly/glorified) body by comparing it to seeds and plants. When one wants to grow a plant, one does not put a full-grown plant into the soil. It is the seed that undergoes a marvelous metamorphosis into a different type of ‘body’ altogether. The seed and the plant are one and the same, the former transfiguring and transforming into the latter in one continuous reality.

Since the present body is under the original curse of sin, it must be transformed. The perfected body is imperishable and incorruptible, enabling believers to appropriately enter their heavenly dwellings. ‘Corruptible must be clothed in incorruptible.’

Let us give thanks for Christ’s resurrection.

Without this cornerstone truth, all will be lost.

Let us take time to reflect on what the finished work of Christ has won for us.

And let us give grateful thanks.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 5, THURSDAY

1 Co 15:35–58

The Resurrection Life

1 Co 15:58b

One of the greatest blessings of the resurrection is the fact that a Christian no longer needs to fear death. Because of Jesus' triumph over sin, death to the believer no longer holds the terrors of divine judgement. Because of Jesus' resurrection, Paul declared that to a believer, death is only a doorway to a new, more glorious phase of life.

He explained that just as animals had different kinds of bodies to allow them to adapt and flourish in a particular environment, there was also a need for a special type of spiritual body in order for us to enjoy the blessings and rewards of heaven. Our bodies, while perfectly fine for life on this earth, are totally unsuitable for the glorious dimension in which God Himself dwells.

How do we get this new body? In a simple yet very profound way, Paul compared the burial of a dead believer to that of a seed that was planted in the ground, just as the 'death' of the seed results in the birth of new life in the form of a plant (which is more complex and beautiful than the seed that was buried), in like manner God raises the believer up to an existence of greater beauty and value than was enjoyed in the confines of the human body.

Therefore we do not need to sorrow and mourn like people without hope at the death of a saint. Instead we should joyfully acknowledge that the one deeply missed is enjoying a glorious homecoming in the presence of the Lord, where we too, will be one day.

***'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'
'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.'
(Rev 14:13)***

In his book, *A Grace Disguised*, Gerald Sittser describes his journey of grief. In one tragic car accident, he lost his wife, his mother, and his youngest daughter. The book offers no easy answers about the problem of suffering. As hopeful as the book is, it's also honest about loss. Sittser admits, "We recover from broken limbs, not amputations." Through the pain, Sittser holds onto the hope of the gospel: "The Easter story tells us that the last chapter of the human story is not death but life."

Sittser's book offers a thoroughly Christian view of death, the only view that makes sense of the hope of resurrection. In order to fully appreciate the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of believers (a doctrine the Corinthian believers had failed to understand), we've got to face the reality of death in all of its horror. Death is our bitter enemy. It robs, and it destroys. It is the cruel weapon of Satan himself, whose every ambition it is to plunder the goodness of God's creation and destroy life.

It's the resurrection of our bodies and the redemption of all creation, which shouts the joyful chorus that Christ has won! He has defeated Satan! War, disease, starvation, decay—the fiercest weapons of the enemy will be destroyed on the day when Jesus returns to earth, and all believers are given new bodies, spiritual bodies.

Whereas the philosophers in the time of the Corinthians conceived of enlightened spirituality as the state of the soul escaping the body, the Christian doctrine of resurrection affirms the goodness of the body. In the resurrection, our souls don't escape to heaven in a disembodied form. We will put on a new body of a different sort: imperishable, immortal, strong, and glorious.

The doctrine of resurrection fuels our energy for obeying and serving Christ in this life. Because of the resurrection of Christ and the promise of the resurrection of our own bodies, we do not believe or hope in vain.

Apply the Word: Perhaps you've recently had someone close to you die, and you've struggled with the anger you've felt as a result. Maybe even your anger has been directed toward God. This passage of 1 Corinthians 15 tells us it's perfectly appropriate to be angry about death. It is not God's good plan for His creation! But death is not the final word; it will once and for all be destroyed. The resurrection of Christ guarantees it.

**If you are comforting a friend who's grieving the death of a loved one,
comfort them with the hope of the resurrection!**

AUG 6, FRIDAY 1 Co 16:1-24

Stand Firm

1 Co 16:13-14

Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. 1 Cor 16:13

Our possessions do not belong to us. It is useful to note the matter-of-fact way the issue of giving is approached. The church was asked to set money aside weekly according to the measure the Lord had prospered them. There is no cajoling, no gimmicks, no emotional blackmail to motivate members to give.

A material need had to be met, and the Corinthians were capable of meeting it. In our day of highly visible ruthless campaigns for money, there is something to be said for the more quiet consistent, purposeful approach outlined here.

Our ministry does not belong to us. Paul’s statement about sending Apollos is a clear indication that Paul does not see his ministry as exclusively ‘his’ ministry. The work, the ministry and the church are God’s and God’s alone. Apollos would otherwise not be on Paul’s invitation list to Corinth.

The church does not belong to us. The epistle ends on a note similar to its beginning. There is evidence of tension between what they are and what they will yet become in terms of obedience to Christ.

Christians must continually live in the tension between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’. What they must not do is to excuse themselves from obedience just because they are not yet fully there. The grace of the Lord and the hope of His coming should cause all to heed the words of this letter so as to be watchful and to do all things in love (vs 13-14).

We belong to God alone.

Reflect and thank God for all the lessons He has taught us through I Corinthians.

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

AUG 6, FRIDAY

1 Co 16:1–24

Passion and Priority

1 Co 16:13–14

Paul concluded this letter by reminding the Corinthians of their various responsibilities. In so doing, he reaffirmed his passion and priority for the work of God. Paul reminded the Corinthians to remember those who were in need. They were urged to give systematically - to set aside a certain sum from their income to be given each Lord's Day. Their giving was to be done with understanding and purpose - their brethren in Jerusalem were in need. This was their responsibility as part of the Body of Jesus. We too must learn to be givers. We must give systematically, purposefully and with the understanding that we are responsible to help those in need.

Paul spoke of his desire to visit them in Corinth so that he could share with them the various plans he had concerning the Lord's work. He desired that they would have a part in what he wanted to do. We must also look beyond ministry in our own communities and localities and see how we can be part of the greater work of God.

He warned them to be on their guard against false teachings and to be brave in the face of attacks on their faith. How important it is for us to heed this. Access to 'Christian' materials has never been easier nor have they ever been in such abundance as we have now. More, however, is not necessarily better. We need to be vigilant and be on our guard against teaching that is contrary to His Word and His Ways. And then, above all else. Paul shared an admonition we must all heed - to love the Lord whole-heartedly as we await His return.

**O Lord, let my life today be the channel through which some little portion of
Your divine love and compassion may reach the lives of the poor and needy around me.**

John Adams and his wife, Abigail Adams, wrote over 1,100 letters to each other during the period of their courtship and John's political career. Their correspondence is rich with the details of the turbulent times leading up to the Revolutionary War and the infancy of the American democracy. Their letters have provided historians with information about the political happenings of the day as well as the ordinary routines and concerns of the American family at that time.

A letter is a fascinating window into the world of someone else. Paul's letter to the Corinthians provides such a window. Reading the Corinthians' mail, we start to understand what it must have been like to belong to this newly converted Gentile community. There was still confusion about the fundamental truths of the gospel. They continued to puzzle over questions of Christian life and practice. The pagan philosophies of their day held sway over their moral and spiritual imaginations. We know now why Paul several times compared them to immature children!

For all their abundance of spiritual gifts and direct contact with Paul, we have blessings today that the Corinthians didn't. For instance, the Scriptures were still being written in their generation, and their teaching was sporadic at best, relying upon correspondence with Paul (1 Corinthians may have been the second of a three-letter exchange) and the frequency of his visits (infrequent, we infer from chapter 16). Before we judge this church too harshly and revel in our own superiority, we should note that we continue to struggle with some of the same issues in the 21st century.

Paul ends the letter like he started it. After all the time spent to correct and rebuke them, he now affirms his confidence in them. God's grace in their lives will prevail, despite their many serious problems. He returns to the theme of love in chapter 16. He urges the Corinthians to do all that they do in love and to express that love in tangible ways to one another. He affirms his love for them in an intensely personal way, writing the words in his own hand.

Apply the Word: First Corinthians 16 may seem like a laundry list of last-minute afterthoughts from Paul. He discusses travel plans. He arranges for the collection of an offering promised beforehand for the poor in Jerusalem. He affirms the ministry of Timothy and Stephanas. But one important conclusion we draw from this chapter is the attention to the interconnectedness of the church throughout Asia: from Ephesus, to Jerusalem, to Galatia, and to Corinth, they were all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. "There is one body ... and one Lord" (Eph. 4:4, 5).

AUG 7, SATURDAY

Act 19:21-20:1

Global Missions

Act 19:21

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." Acts 19:21

Why leave Ephesus for Rome?

Global missions was Paul's consuming passion. He had already planted churches in Cyprus and Galatia (Acts 12-14). He had established churches in Europe (Acts 15-18). From Ephesus the Gospel was rapidly penetrating Asia (Acts 19). The important cities from Jerusalem to Rome had been evangelized. Paul felt it was time for him to consolidate the church in Rome, the world's center of influence and power. God confirmed this for Paul through subsequent events in Ephesus (vs 23-41).

Why first to Jerusalem via Macedonia and Achaia?

Other than global missions, Paul was mindful of his other obligations as an apostle. The welfare of the saints in Judea was in his heart. They were suffering because of a famine. Before heading for Rome, Paul planned to visit Jerusalem with a love offering collected from churches in Macedonia and Achaia. Unable to leave immediately, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead. They were to encourage the churches in Europe and raise funds for the saints in Judea. Paul demonstrated what is important in ministry, namely global missions, the welfare of the suffering saints, the edification of believers and churches and the sending forth of disciples.

What had Paul learned from the riot in Ephesus?

Paul left Ephesus a wiser man because he had learned these 3 lessons:

- Expect opposition wherever the Gospel is preached in power, lives are transformed and society impacted (vs 23-28).
- It would be futile and foolish for Paul to defend himself, his friends and the Gospel against a frenzied hostile mob (vs 29-34).
- God was in control despite man's manipulation. God overruled the evil intentions of the schemers and dissipated the rage of the mob. Wisdom was given to the city clerk to dismiss the illegal assembly without harming Paul and his friends (vs 35-41).

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

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

AUG 7, SATURDAY

Act 19:21–20:1

God Is In Charge

Act 19:21

The mass conversions angered the businessmen in Ephesus. As the custodian of the temple of the Greek goddess of Artemis, Ephesus became the place where pilgrims and tourist-worshippers would come to purchase religious souvenirs. This contributed to the prosperous trade of the silversmiths, who made silver shrines and images of the meteoric stone that was believed to be Artemis' image. The riot at Ephesus was a result of a business slowdown hiding behind the facade of religion.

When Paul's companions were seized, he wanted to appear before the rioters. However, Paul, the experienced missionary and evangelist, humbled himself and submitted to the advice of his friends and disciples.

God is sovereign and He uses whoever He wishes to accomplish His purposes. Here, God used the local mayor who had the authority and power to speak to the people. God, in His wisdom, always chooses the right person for the right job. There is no need for us to feel sidelined for 'the battle is the Lord's' (1 Sam 17:47).

**Father, I thank You that our battles in service are ultimately Yours.
Grant us the wisdom to accept the advice of Your people
and the humility to step aside for others You may choose to use.**

In his Men of Integrity, Earl Palmer describes a lesson he learned in a defensive driving course. The instructor asked the class whether they should put their foot on or off the brake if they saw another car coming in their rearview mirror and knew they were going to be hit. Most students said it was better not to apply the brake. But the instructor explained that by braking hard and bracing for the impact, the car would be better able to sustain the impact and the driver would sustain less injury. Otherwise, the crash would create a whiplash effect.

Palmer says his driving lesson has a parallel in the Christian life. When we are firmly planted on solid ground, anchored in Christ Jesus, we can sustain the crashes that life throws against us.

The apostle Paul's life is Exhibit A of this principle. Had he not been firmly anchored in Christ, the enemy's heavy blows would have decimated Paul many times during his pioneer missionary ministry. One of these blows came after Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia to check on the churches there and collect the offering for the famine-plagued believers in Jerusalem.

The anger that Demetrius stirred up among his fellow silversmiths led to a riot that lasted several hours. These men professed to be guarding the worship and "divine majesty" (v. 27) of the goddess Artemis, whose temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. But the key to this story is the brisk business in silver statues that Demetrius and his friends enjoyed.

This was one of the few instances in the New Testament that Gentiles actively opposed the gospel message, the other being the beating Paul and Silas received in Philippi. Interestingly, that opposition also had to do with the fact that the gospel was destroying people's religious profiteering.

Paul's friends in Ephesus went to great effort to keep him out of the arena, maybe saving his life. Paul listened to them, but it's obvious he wasn't afraid of colliding with his opponents. After all, he was well anchored.

APPLY THE WORD: In the sea of hostility and opposition rising up against Christians, our anchor is Christ Himself; our stability is only in God. To withstand danger and face opposition we must, like Paul, be well anchored in Jesus. Sin, however, separates us from God. That's why it is so important for all Christians to open our hearts to God, be sensitive to His correction, and, if there is sin in our lives, confess it immediately.

Today, search your life and make sure you aren't harboring any unconfessed sin (1 Jn. 1:9).

AUG 8, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

Overview of 2 Corinthians

In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul continued to tackle the issues and problems facing the church. The most pressing concern was the infiltration of false teachers into the church. That had resulted in much confusion among the believers.

The false teachers were not only undermining the teaching of sound doctrine, but had also launched attacks on Paul's personal integrity as well as his apostolic claims. Obviously they had succeeded in some measure as we read of Paul having to present a solid defense of his calling as well as his ministry.

Paul also dwelt at length on his change of plans to visit the Corinthians. Apparently, the false teachers had exploited the change of plans and accused Paul of being fickle and not being a man of his word.

True to his calling to be a servant of Christ and a minister of God's word, Paul faithfully taught about comfort and suffering, the present life and the glory ahead as well as the ministry of reconciliation. He exhorted the Christians at Corinth to live holy lives, separated from the wickedness of the world, to give generously to those in need and to forgive the offenders.

The letter ends appropriately with stern warnings to set their house in order before he visited them. He stamped his authority as their spiritual father as well as his being 'an apostle of Christ, by the will of God'.

AUG 9, MONDAY **2 Co 1:1-11**

Hast Thou No Scar ?

2 Co 1:3-4

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Cor 1:5

No one likes to suffer. Hardships of any kind are most unwelcome. This is evident when the electricity supply is disrupted even for a short while. How we dislike the heat and the inconveniences of a blackout! Yet, for the disciple of Christ, suffering is part of the package deal. In fact, the Lord Jesus Himself left us an example of suffering - that we should follow in His steps (1 Pet 2:21).

The apostle Paul did just that. He endured great hardships and oftentimes he 'despaired even of life' itself (v 8). His list of sufferings would put any other disciple to shame. He was imprisoned, repeatedly flogged, persecuted, pressured and was in much distress. Even as we cringe in our seats and wonder if we can ever make that kind of grade, Paul's words of sweet assurance soothe the soul. He testifies that in the midst of it all, he tasted in deep measure, the comfort and compassion of the Heavenly Father. There we are! Suffering is inevitable but the comfort and love of the Father will bring us through.

Are we familiar with suffering? Specifically, suffering for the sake of Christ? It is hard to think of suffering as a way of life. It cuts right across our natural desire for a life of comfort and ease. Yet, the Lord's terms of discipleship are unmistakably clear. If anyone would come after Him, he must take up his cross and follow Him (Lk 9:23). The cross is synonymous with suffering. We may not be called upon as yet to suffer physical abuse for the sake of Christ; yet in so many ways, every true disciple should bear some scars of suffering. Do I?

**'No wound? No scar? Yet as the Master, shall the servant be
And pierced are the feet that follow Me; But thine are whole.
Can he have followed far, Who has no wound? No scar?' -Amy Carmichael –**

**When it comes to service in the Lord's work,
do I back off because it is inconvenient and troublesome?**

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

AUG 9, MONDAY

2 Co 1:1-11

See Right, Respond Right

2 Co 1:3-4

Have you ever been hurt by accusations made by those whom you care deeply for? Little else compares with the heartache that comes from being misunderstood by those whom you think ought to know you well enough.

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was written in response to criticisms and accusations that had been levelled against him by some members of the church. They insinuated that his word was not trustworthy (chapters 1-7). They hinted that Paul had misappropriated funds he had collected from them for the needy in Jerusalem (chapters 8-9). They also called into question his apostleship (chapters 10-13). Yet in these opening verses Paul mentions nothing of the above. He chose instead to affirm his relationship to Christ, how he viewed those who criticized him and his understanding of the nature of God. Firstly, he declared that he was an apostle and was fully convinced that he was in the will of God for his life. With this must have come a deep assurance of God's love and care. Secondly, he noted that the people he was relating with also belonged to God. He referred to them as the 'church' and 'saints'. He considered them not as his enemies but as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Thirdly, he spoke of God as the 'Father of compassion and the God of all comfort', believing that He could be counted upon to comfort, enlighten and empower believers in all circumstances of life.

These perspectives helped Paul respond rightly and lovingly to the Corinthians. How important right thinking is.

**When we know Who God is and who we are before Him,
we can find strength to face any hardship and pain.**

On New Year's Eve 1943, German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote the following from a Nazi prison: "I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil... I believe that God will give us all the strength we need to help us resist in all time of distress. But he never gives it in advance, lest we should rely on ourselves and not on him alone." Perhaps Bonhoeffer had the words of the apostle Paul from today's passage in mind.

Yesterday we saw that Paul's suffering caused some to question his apostolic status. The desire to correct the Corinthians' erroneous thinking probably explains why Paul continued to focus on his suffering for a few more verses. Not only had Paul suffered as Christ had suffered, but his experience in the Roman province of Asia took him to the brink of death. The "sentence of death" (v. 9) could indicate some type of imprisonment, or it could be used figuratively to indicate the severity of Paul's suffering. Yet it was precisely at this point that he experienced God's resurrection power (v. 9). It's no coincidence that Paul's words here remind us of Jesus' suffering on the cross and the power of God who raised Him. The status-conscious Corinthians might have equated power with wealth and success. Instead, Paul showed that God's power was revealed to those who desperately depended upon Him.

Scholars aren't really sure which hardship Paul had in mind in this passage. There are several possibilities, although perhaps the most likely is the riot against Paul in Ephesus, led by the silversmith Demetrius (see Acts 19:23-41). Some have suggested an imprisonment not mentioned in Acts, but alluded to in 2 Corinthians 11:23. Others have suggested some severe illness that nearly took Paul's life. Whatever may have been the circumstance, it taught Paul the utter futility of relying upon oneself and the need to rely on God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY : Corinth was filled with self-made people. Among its citizens were many freed slaves who had worked hard to make a name and fortune for themselves and their families. Such an environment nurtured an independent, self-reliant mindset. For those who live in the United States, this is a familiar way of thinking.

**Many people believe that "God helps those who help themselves" is found in the Bible!
Instead, today's passage teaches us that God sometimes uses severe hardship
to show us that we must depend fully upon Him.**

AUG 10, TUESDAY

2 Co 1:12-22

Please Bear With Me

2 Co 1:20a

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God. 2 Cor 1:20

People, ourselves included, are not always lovable. Whatever our racial descent, sinful people like us can be really ugly. Sadly, even among the Lord's people, relationships often bring heartaches and deep disappointments. The apostle Paul had a lion's share of that.

The Christians in Corinth had caused him much sorrow, as their sinful nature reared its ugly head. In spite of all that, Paul maintained an attitude of 'holiness and sincerity' in his relationship with them (v 12). In that frame of mind, Paul could look beyond the struggles and failures of the Corinthians to that glorious day when he could actually be proud of them in the presence of the Lord Jesus (v 14).

How could Paul cherish such lofty hopes for a church so marred by disunity, immorality and immaturity? What could Paul possibly be proud of about them? Read verses 20-22 carefully. Paul's basis for such optimism was not dependent on the conduct of the Corinthians. Instead, his confidence rested solely on the fulfilment of all God's promises in Christ (v 20). Paul believed that God would make them stand firm in Christ. Hadn't God anointed them and set His seal of ownership upon them? Hadn't He given them the Spirit as a guarantee of the glories to come?

Thus it was not the people and their dismal performance, but Christ's perfect work on the cross and God's faithfulness that gave Paul such assurance. As we fumble and flounder in our relationships with one another in God's family, may we learn to look beyond the imperfect persons, to the hope securely ours in Christ! Let us relate in 'holiness and sincerity' too!

'Please bear with me, the best is yet to be.'
Is there someone in your church family who rubs everyone up the wrong way?
Pray for this person and reach out to him/her.

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

AUG 10, TUESDAY

2 Co 1:12–22

For Your Sake

2 Co 1:20a

Should I or shouldn't I?' Has this question ever popped into your head in the process of decision-making? On what basis do you decide? We make hundreds of decisions daily - some only after careful deliberation, others without much conscious thought.

However, because every decision results in a series of consequences, careful thought should accompany any issue or action pondered. The first concern in this process is that the decision must not go against the principles of God as revealed in the Word. Another vital factor to consider is the effect the decision will have on the lives of those with whom we live or work.

It appears from this passage that Paul had indicated to the Corinthians that he was planning to visit them but seemed to have changed his mind. This decision displeased some in the church and the trustworthiness of Paul's promises was called into question. In response to this, Paul declared that no decision of his was ever made on human wisdom alone. Decisions were made only after considering God's character, perception and grace.

Just as God always keeps His promises, Paul himself had always determined to be a man of his word. Because God is gracious, Paul examined every decision he made to ensure it reflected this graciousness. He spoke of how his conscience was clear before God because he had demonstrated holiness and sincerity in his relationship with them. His motives towards them were pure and only for their good.

**The next time you have to make a decision, remember:
A good decision is right in God's sight and brings good to God's people.**

According to a 1991 poll, 32 percent of Americans believe that their pastor has lied to them. Moral weakness among religious leaders has become fairly widespread. In fact, there's a perception among many that clergy are untrustworthy and after people's money. According to Paul's opponents, such a perception perfectly described him. His frequent change in travel plans showed that he was fickle. Even worse, philosophers and religious leaders were supposed to show the way to the good, virtuous life—Paul's sufferings and his apparent change of mind were major strikes against his credibility in Corinth. This may explain why Paul began speaking, somewhat abruptly, about boasting. This would have hit home in Corinth, where people boasted in their status, wealth, and power. Yet notice how Paul redefined boasting. First, he boasted about his holiness and sincerity. Second, God's grace, not worldly wisdom, was the basis of his boast. Such transparency was unheard of, yet it showed Paul's conviction that he had nothing to hide. Paul was confident that when the Corinthians understood his motives, they too would boast, or have confidence, in him as well.

Paul then began to defend his changed plans. He had originally planned to visit Corinth twice, once on his way to Macedonia, and then again on his return. In this way, the Corinthian church might benefit, or be blessed, two times.

These plans were made with all integrity before the Lord. In fact, Paul's plans were consistent with the Lord's own faithfulness (v. 18). Everything that God promised in the Old Testament is fulfilled, or is "yes," in Christ. This same God was preached among the Corinthians and made them stand firm. This God anointed and sealed them (as a sign of ownership). He also gave them the Spirit, as a deposit guaranteeing what's to come. This focus on God's promises reminded the Corinthians that God could be trusted completely and implied that Paul's changed plans were in line with God's faithfulness.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: Paul's confidence was rooted in his integrity. His conscience was clear when it came to his conduct among the Corinthians. This is a powerful statement. Little compromises chip away at our confidence. Although we may be misunderstood or falsely accused as Paul was, we still need to do all that we can to ensure that our consciences are clear.

**As you prepare for another week in the office, at school, or in the home,
pray that you conduct yourself in such a way that your conscience remains clear.**

AUG 11, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 1:23-2:17

Love Outside The Box

2 Co 2:15-16

For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. 2 Cor 2:4

Being involved in people's lives can be very troublesome. It is far easier to just live our own lives and steer clear of the problems of other people. Yet Christ's disciples cannot be islands, isolated and self-existing. The Lord's command is that if we are His, then we must love one another as He has loved us (Jn 13:34-35). To love, as the Lord loves, demands total involvement, sacrifice, and even death.

The apostle Paul obviously took the Lord's command to heart. In spite of all their faults and failures, Paul loved the Christians in Corinth dearly and paid a high price for that love. Just as his Master paid with His blood, Paul's love cost him 'great distress, anguish of heart, many tears and grief' (vs 4-5).

No wonder many shy away from such love for the brethren! A glib profession of love is much easier by far. Christ's kind of love makes us vulnerable, for when we truly love, we inevitably suffer anguish of heart and soul when the loved one does wrong. The one who does not love does not care. Whether others stand or fall is of no concern to him. In closing his heart to the well-being of other believers, he remains uninvolved and unaffected. Incidentally, he also fails miserably in the Lord's litmus test for those who say they love Him (Jn 21:15-17).

I wonder if our hearts are scarred with hurts and wounds like Paul's? If they are, then we can count ourselves among those who are truly blessed, for we follow in the footsteps of the great apostle and his (and our) greater Master.

Memorise John 13:34-35:

A new command I give you: Love one another.

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

List three ways Christians can demonstrate Christ's kind of love towards one another.

P.R.A.Y

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

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AUG 11, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 1:23-2:17

Administered With Love

2 Co 2:15-16

Hun Vin looked sadly at his son. The boy had been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the door to the chicken pen would be securely shut after the daily collection of eggs. On two previous occasions he had forgotten to do so but fortunately they were able to recapture the few hens that strayed out. This time, however, a dog had gotten in and killed twelve of the chickens. The fourteen-year-old boy knew that he would be punished.

Most of us dislike administering punishment. However God's Word clearly states that all wrongdoing should be confronted and dealt with, Jesus did not hesitate to correct wrong attitudes and behavior when His disciples demonstrated them in His presence.

The purpose of His correction was always right understanding and spiritual growth. The need for loving correction is also reflected in many of Paul's letters to the early church. Paul believed that all wrong behavior needed to be corrected. Turning a blind eye when someone we care about is not living right before God, is never correct. We must remember that the end result of uncorrected sinful behavior is far more detrimental and painful than the temporary pain inflicted through chastisement.

Paul also believed that all punishment was to be administered with a right motive and attitude. The purpose of all correction should be positive character development and spiritual maturity. It must be motivated by love for the wrongdoer. Discipline is most effective when the reason and purpose of the exercise are clearly understood. No wonder Paul said that those who understood God's purposes saw the redemptive work of correction as 'an aroma of life'.

Christian love is not blind to the faults of others but seeks to help them overcome them in a loving and encouraging way.

In a 2005 interview in Christianity Today, Ken Sande of Peacemaker Ministries describes an effective example of church discipline. A man was persuading elderly members to invest in a risky business venture. After receiving thousands of dollars, the man failed to deliver the promised investment return. Church leaders began to confront the man, and eventually persuaded him to return the money or face formal discipline. The man did return the money, but the greater outcome was his eventual repentance from a lifestyle of financially defrauding others. He himself requested to confess his sin publicly before the congregation.

Church discipline can be controversial, but it's intended to bring about repentance and restoration. The Corinthians had responded to Paul's painful letter requesting that a certain individual be disciplined (v. 6). Some commentators have suggested that this was the man who had committed incest (see 1 Cor. 5:1-13). It seems more likely that this is the one who had been slandering Paul and disregarding his authority. Although the Corinthians had complied with Paul's request, they were apparently having a hard time restoring the person who had been disciplined. Discipline is only one half of the coin; the other half must include forgiveness and love.

Paul's example here is powerful. It's clear that Paul wasn't demanding this individual's discipline to be spiteful. He knew that this person's actions were ultimately destructive to the entire church. That is why obedience in everything (v. 9) was so essential.

Paul's goal all along had been redemptive. Although he had been the one wronged, he took the lead in forgiveness. Knowing the human tendency to hold grudges or to shun those who have sinned, Paul also stressed the necessity of loving forgiveness on the part of the Corinthians toward this individual. Paul's mention of Satan in verse 11 reminds us that far beyond personal offenses and sins against one another is another much more serious threat to the unity of the church.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: C. S. Lewis once said, "We all agree that forgiveness is a beautiful idea until we have to practice it." It's so easy not to forgive those who have been caught in sin. Yet we must never forget that the body of Christ is under constant spiritual attack. Even though "the gates of Hades will not overcome" the church, we need to make every effort to extend forgiveness to the repentant and to seek their full restoration. Failure to do so leaves an open door for an all-too-ready adversary.

AUG 12, THURSDAY 2 Co 3:1-18

Must I Go Empty-handed ?

2 Co 3:3

You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. 2 Cor 3:3

Every one of us is entrusted with 168 hours each week. Whether it is the char kuey teow (noodles) hawker by the roadside or the CEO in his plush office, no one gets more hours and none gets less either. How we use the hours given to us, week by week, will yield results accordingly. For the apostle Paul, the time he spent preaching the Gospel resulted in the establishment of the church at Corinth. They were the fruits of his labor (v 3).

So often, our constant complaint is that we just do not have enough time. Yet Paul worked harder than most people. In 2 Thes 3:8, we read that Paul worked night and day so that he would not have to depend on others financially. His end purpose in life was clear and focused: he was a ‘minister of the new covenant’. He lived to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. Do we? What kind of fruits are we laboring for? What do we invest our time in?

No doubt, the seeming mundane things of earthly life occupy much of our time. We need to sleep and work and discharge our social responsibilities. However, the crux of the matter is not the allocation of how many hours to each activity. Rather, it is our whole outlook towards life. What is the end purpose in all our undertakings? Like Paul, will what we invest our time and energies in, be fruits that last for eternity? Let us be careful what we live for, lest at the end of our earthly life, we leave to meet our Creator, empty-handed and with nothing that is of eternal value.

**‘Let me hold lightly things of this earth,
Transient treasures, what are they worth?’**

**What are some ‘robbers’ of time,
and how can we ensure that we are not robbed of precious time each day?**

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

AUG 12, THURSDAY

2 Co 3:1-18

The Best Type Of Advertising

2 Co 3:3

It has been often said that the best promotional material for a school is the quality of her graduates. While colorful brochures and carefully selected testimonials have their place, personal encounters with graduates of the school go much further in authenticating and validating the claims of the institution.

In countering accusations that Paul's ministry was of little use or consequence, Paul appealed to the Corinthian believers to ponder on how their lives had changed since they had sat under his teaching. The change in their attitudes and behavior was the best evidence of the effectiveness of his work among them. Paul was, however, quick to point out that this transformation was not a result of his own ability but was the work of the Spirit of God.

This brief but very important passage reminds us of the nature of ministry. The goal of Christian ministry is changed lives - lives that reflect the character and attitudes of Jesus, not only in the church but also in our homes and the marketplace. It is a change of value systems exemplified by considering people more important than possessions and eternal consequences above temporary thrills.

It is also a good reminder to us all that genuine Christian growth comes not merely from an amassing of religious knowledge but also from being taught how to recognize and yield to the work of the Spirit of God. 'Head knowledge' alone seldom brings the desired Christian maturity but when this is transformed into 'heart knowledge' by the Spirit, Christ-likeness is the result.

Do we desire to nurture others in the Kingdom? Then we must ensure that we ourselves seek the continual work of the Spirit in our lives and that we have a Spirit-empowered ministry.

Moses had a great experience with God on Mount Sinai. He heard God's voice and saw the miraculous engraving of the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets.

This encounter with God caused a change to his countenance. The radiance on his face was evidence of a supernatural encounter and the Israelites stood in fear and in awe of him. As time passed however, this radiance faded and soon Moses looked just like he used to. The Bible records that Moses wore a veil so that the people observing him would not see this glory fading away.

In some ways, this reflects a form of short-term religious experience that many, even professing believers, go through. An awe-inspiring religious phenomenon or event brings a spiritual fervor and enthusiasm that leads to a dramatic change of priorities and lifestyle. This change however, wanes with time, as the conviction generated by the event is not accompanied by an inner spiritual transformation.

Paul contrasts this to the work of the Spirit within the life of a believer. Unlike the 'fading' external glory of Moses, the believer takes on 'ever-increasing' glory as he walks in fellowship with the Spirit. This is reflected in an increasing desire to do right in the sight of God as the Spirit brings about a conviction of right and wrong and empowers the believer to do right. This is unlike the Law (and religious experience as a whole), which only shows the inability of man to be good and thus, often results in feelings of condemnation. Paul declares that the ministry of the Spirit brings 'freedom' to the believer. This is the liberty to say 'No!' to attitudes and activities that do not glorify God.

**We must seek more than excitement in our spiritual walk
- we must seek transformation!**

AUG 13, FRIDAY 2 Co 4:1-15

Pass It On

2 Co 4:5

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 2 Cor 4:5

We know that awful, sinking feeling when we suddenly remember that we have forgotten to pass a message. It is always a grave responsibility to be entrusted with important messages. Solemn indeed is our responsibility, as Christians, entrusted with the message of the Gospel. It is a matter of life or death, of forgiveness or condemnation, of heaven or hell.

The apostle Paul understood clearly that no human resource was adequate for such a task. Therefore, he resolved:

- not to be discouraged (v 1).
- not to be deceptive (v 2).
- not to distort the word of God (v 2).

Instead, his dependence was on the 'all surpassing power that is from God, and not from us' (v 7). Spiritual work requires spiritual resources. It is God who causes the light to shine in people's hearts so that they can understand and believe. It is also divine strength that sustains when the going gets really tough, as Paul found out (vs 8-9).

Today, there is much emphasis on information technology and multimedia presentations. These can be excellent tools for communicating the Gospel. However, at best, technology and methods only communicate. They cannot bring about conviction of sin or conversion. It is the Holy Spirit who convinces people of sin and turns their hearts to repentance and belief (Jn 16:7-9).

By all means, employ new approaches and tap on the rich resources available today, but never neglect to pray. Let us not harbor sin in our lives so that we may be clean channels for God to use. Unless God works through us, the audience may be impressed, yet remain unconvinced and unconverted. All efforts would be in vain.

Pray for members of the family who have not heard the message of the Gospel and also for those who have heard but have not believed.

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

AUG 13, FRIDAY

2 Co 4:1-15

Living Purposefully

2 Co 4:5

Paul's life was 'purpose-driven', to use a term currently popular in church circles. He saw his ministry as a privilege from God and never took it for granted. This understanding defined for him the value and importance of his work. This same understanding was also a source of great encouragement in times of trials and difficulty, as he undoubtedly believed that if God had ordained this path for his life, He would also surely provide all that was necessary for him to succeed.

Nothing was more important to Paul than to preach Jesus to those whose lives were in darkness and to urge them to respond to His gift of salvation. Paul was determined to guard the manner in which he lived. He vowed never to resort to deception or manipulation in his dealings with others and to be accurate in the way in which he used the Word.

While we may not be called to the same work as the apostle Paul, the principles he adopted are equally important to us in the way we approach our own work and ministry involvement. We too must learn to see all our daily assignments and tasks as God-given privileges and always seek to do our best, being thankful for the opportunity to be a blessing to Him and His world. Because God's work must always be done His way. We must also ensure that every decision we make is in line with biblical principles, never resorting to deceit or psychological manipulation. Finally, we should learn to persevere regardless of whether we encounter praise or blame, knowing that our labor for Him will never be in vain.

**Therefore in all we do, let us always consider His purpose, His Word and His ways.
Only then can we accomplish anything of eternal value.**

In a basketball or netball game, attempts to throw the ball into the 'basket' are not always successful. Oftentimes, the one who attempts to score misses and the ball bounces off the rim. There is no time for the team to moan and wallow in regrets, in split seconds someone else on the team lunges towards the stray ball and makes another attempt. A successful second attempt brings applause but if this try fails too, there will be yet another effort made to score.

Our lives are often like these ball games. We aim for success but are sometimes failed in our attempts to be good and righteous. We are sorely tempted to give up but Paul reminds us not to throw up our hands in despair in the face of opposition. Believers can find themselves hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down but these tests are opportunities to experience the strength of the Lord in their lives.

Paul likens us to clay jars - fragile in the face of the storms of life. But the resilience of believers lies in the power that is theirs because of the death of Jesus on the cross and in the treasure of His abiding presence in their lives. It is paradoxical that for a Christian, moments of greatest human weakness are also moments when God's power is most gloriously expressed. This is a theme that Paul returns to in 2 Corinthians 12. He further suggests that this God-given strength can also bring much encouragement and blessing to the lives of other believers undergoing similar circumstances.

**Are you currently facing challenges and trials that seem beyond your ability to endure?
Resist the temptation to be overwhelmed.**

Remember the treasure within you - God's abiding and empowering Presence.

AUG 14, SATURDAY

2 Co 4:16-5:10

Afraid Of Going Home?

2 Co 5:7

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 2 Cor 5:9

'Death' or any word related to it was considered taboo during my growing up years in a Chinese home. The very word evoked much fear of the unknown. In spite of scientific/technological advances today, death remains a feared eventuality.

In sharp contrast, the apostle Paul spoke positively of death. To him, death was the gateway to 'eternal glory' (v 17). It was merely a leaving behind of the physical body and going home to be with the Lord. So sure was Paul of the 'the eternal house in heaven' (v 1) that he categorically stated that death was to be preferred to life (vs 6-8). Try telling some people that!

Interestingly, Paul did not even use the word 'death'. Instead, he viewed death as 'the earthly tent being destroyed' (v 1), as 'being clothed in our heavenly dwelling' (v 2) and as being 'away from the body and at home with the Lord' (v 8). What an absolutely triumphant description of an event so feared by the human race!

Which child would dread going home if he knew that elaborate preparations have been made to welcome him (1 Cor 2:9, 1 Pet 1:4), and that his loving Father waits to receive him? This is what awaits us! Unless, of course, the child is estranged from the Father and does not love Him. Perhaps he loves his earthly home better. How grieved the Father's heart must be when, in spite of all the love lavished upon them, His children dread going home to Him!

If we love the Father, why should we dread returning home to Him?

Pray for a right attitude towards death, especially if there are older members in the family.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 14, SATURDAY

2 Co 4:16–5:10

Provided For All Eternity

2 Co 5:7

When the grandfather of Julie's closest friend passed away, Julie came to offer her condolences and to be with her friend during this time of bereavement. Family members were burning what appeared to be a near-to-life-sized Mercedes Benz, a 29-inch TV set and a mobile phone, all fashioned out of paper. Noticing the perplexed look on Julie's face, her friend explained that this was the family's way of providing for their grandfather's needs in the world of the dead.

How different it is for those who have acknowledged Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Believers look forward to a future that is not merely an extension of the type of life lived here on earth. They are not in any way dependent on those who are still alive to provide for their needs. Paul acknowledges that life on earth is often challenging but sees this life as merely a preparation for the glory God has in store for those who love Him. In contrast to transient earthly things which for now might seem beautiful, what awaits the believer will far eclipse these. There is no need for human provision for God has everything all prepared.

This is why a believer should not be discouraged even when life's situations are trying and difficult. Yet, while we look forward to this wonderful future experience, we are reminded that on that day we will also be required to give an account of the way we have lived our lives in this world.

So let us not lose heart even in tough times.

Be always determined to live in a way that will glorify our heavenly Father.

For the past four years, TV viewers have watched Ty Pennington and his design team transform run-down dumps into dream homes. Each Sunday, Extreme Makeover: Home Edition features a family chosen for a home renovation. The next hour chronicles a suspenseful race against the clock as walls are moved, exteriors are redone, and yards are landscaped within the given week. At the show's end, the family returns to its new home, hidden from sight by the large "Extreme Makeover" bus. Then the design team, volunteers, neighbors, and the family all cry out, "Move that bus!" At last, the family sees its new home for the first time.

Sometimes it's nearly impossible to imagine how Pennington and his team will make something desirable out of the dilapidated challenge they're facing! Similarly, it can be hard to imagine the eternal house in heaven that God has for us. In today's passage, the contrast between our mortal, "outer" and our eternal, "inner" existence is further developed. Here we have the contrast between earthly and heavenly. Paul used the common ancient metaphor of a house to speak of human bodies to assure the Corinthians—and us—that, at death, our earthly bodies are clothed with our resurrection bodies. The normal human fear of dying is reflected in Paul's statement that "we do not wish to be unclothed" (v. 4). And yet, we groan, or sigh, for our heavenly dwelling. This idea was also expressed by the writer of Ecclesiastes, when he said that God has put eternity in human hearts (Eccl. 3:11). Just like a monetary down payment on a home, God gives us the Spirit as a deposit, making absolutely certain the reality of our resurrection bodies.

If we're in our earthly bodies, then we are not "at home" with the Lord, which is where we long to be. Although the difference between earth and heaven is more than we can imagine, one thing remains the same: our desire to please the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: Rom 8:1 makes it clear that faith in the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross clears us from condemnation. So the judgment in today's passage is about evaluation, not condemnation. The idea of accounting for our lives isn't popular these days. Yet what we do now with our bodies matters. On the other hand, obedience doesn't earn our salvation. Obedience and good works show our trust and delight in God.

As John Piper writes, "Sin is what you do when your heart is not satisfied with God."

AUG 15, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 16, MONDAY 2 Co 5:11-6:13

Don't Drop The Baton!

2 Co 5:15

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Cor 5:20

A popular game in Sunday School and youth groups is one where the teacher or leader whispers a message in the ears of the first player. The child, in turn, whispers the same message to the person next to him. In hushed tones, the same message is passed on from child to child until it is finally relayed back to the teacher. It is most amusing to discover how the message gets distorted along the way!

However, when it comes to the message of reconciliation passed on to us, it is no laughing matter. That message must never be allowed to become distorted. From the apostles the baton was passed on to disciples like Barnabas, Silas and Timothy in the early churches (Acts 13, 16). Through the passage of time, godly men and women like Jim Elliot, Hudson Taylor, and Amy Carmichael went into all the world as bearers of the same message. Thanks be to God that the message of reconciliation has come to us with such Conviction and clarity!

It definitely was no easy route for the apostle Paul and the scores of missionaries after him who sought to deliver the message. If not for their unswerving conviction, obedience and sacrifice we would not have received God's grace nor even heard of such a salvation plan. Christ's love compelled them and in full conviction, they came, bearing the message of reconciliation. Christians in many countries today continue to be faithful messengers and are prepared to lay down their lives that others may hear the Gospel and be saved.

Today the baton has been passed on to us. Compelled by the love of Christ, let us pass on the baton so that the message of reconciliation will continue to be heard in our time and after us!

2 Tim 2:2: All the things you have heard me say... entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

**Christianity is caught rather than taught.
Pray that your family may have a living faith that is evident in everyday life and
that this living faith may be passed on to the generations to come.**

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

AUG 16, MONDAY

2 Co 5:11-6:13

Jesus Is Always In The Picture

2 Co 5:15

How do you respond to unjust criticism, especially when it comes from people you have sacrificed time and effort to help? It is difficult to remain upbeat and positive when your integrity and motives are called into question and your abilities mocked at. How should we respond? Well, we can learn from Paul's response to the Corinthians when they did exactly that to him.

Respond lovingly. Paul says he is compelled by Christ's love to love regardless of how he has been spoken of or treated. We love because Christ first loved us. Implicit within this understanding is forgiveness for those who criticize us. There is no room for revenge or self-pity in the life of one who has truly experienced Jesus.

Those who have wronged you are also people whom Jesus loves and has died for. Whether or not they are believers, they are precious to Him. Disappointment and anger must not lead us to react in a manner that undermines their value before God.

Reach out and make every attempt to bring about reconciliation - on human and spiritual levels. Paul says that we have been given this ministry and it is only in making peace that we really fulfil our God-assigned role as an ambassador for Christ. From a purely human perspective this may seem impossible but be reminded that God is able to transform persons - both you and the seemingly difficult-to-accept people. He is able to make the 'old' pass away and bring in the 'new' if we trust Him.

**Let us remember that Jesus is always in the picture.
He is actively at work to bring about reconciliation
regardless of how dark and painful a situation may seem to be.**

Kim and her course-mates were planning a holiday to an island resort. She smiled at the thought. Suddenly her face creased into a frown. Many of her friends would want to spend the evenings 'clubbing' in one of the party spots on the island. Kim loved the Lord and was actively involved in the Campus Christian Fellowship. She knew that there was a group of fairly young Christians who looked to her for direction in their spiritual walk. They would take the cue from her when the decision had to be made whether or not to go to the 'party'.

One of the most difficult tasks of the Christian walk comes from understanding that believers do not live only for themselves. Decisions made are not just based on how the individual believer feels or what he wants but also on how others will be affected. Paul speaks of the importance of not being 'stumbling blocks'.

Four general areas are addressed.

- Firstly, how do we respond to hardships? Can others see our faith in the Lord - that He is in total control and has the ability to see us through?
- Secondly, are we guided by purity, and consistently showing understanding and patience?
- Thirdly, are we motivated spiritually or by our 'fleshly desires'? Paul speaks of the need to be led by the Holy Spirit and to show sincere love.
- Fourthly, do we believe in the power of prayer and the truth of the Word? Or do we resort to the quick fixes of the world such as lying, emotional manipulation and brute force?

**Be aware of how you live your life.
You can either draw people closer to the Lord
or be a hindrance to God's work in their lives.**

AUG 17, TUESDAY 2 Co 6:14-7:1

Guard Your Heart

2 Co 6:16b

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 2 Cor 6:14

The older folk in our society have this ammunition ready whenever the clash of opinion with a younger person heats up. 'Look,' they say, 'we have eaten more salt than you have eaten rice.' That supposedly settles the issue at hand. Experience over naivete. Yet, many honest parents would readily admit that they have made many mistakes. They are not infallible. How wonderful, then, to know that God, our Heavenly Father, is all-wise, perfect and never errs. Therefore, when God gives a command, it is always for our ultimate good.

God commands that no child of His must ever marry one who does not belong to Christ. He graciously explains the reasons (vs 14-16). As Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:4-6), casting doubts in her mind about God's intent, today he uses the same ploy. He even comes as an angel of light, seemingly on God's side (11:14). How many promising young Christian men and women have fallen into his snare! His subtle lies:

'Does God really forbid a Christian from marrying a non-Christian?'

'But this relationship is so special! It will work out, I know.'

'Who knows? Perhaps God has brought him into my life so that he can come to know Christ through me.'

Tragically, like Eve, in seeking their own desires, many have been ensnared. No matter what the circumstances, God's command stands unchanged. It is a sin, a deliberate act of defiance and disobedience, to enter into marriage with one (no matter how upright and good) who does not belong to Christ. Obey the command for your own good. Defy it and you reap the consequences.

Read 1 Kings 11. Pray and resolve to obey God in this all-important matter.

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

AUG 17, TUESDAY

2 Co 6:14-7:1

Relationships That Build

2 Co 6:16b

The sight of two cattle yoked together is still a common sight in many parts of rural Asia. The yoke ensures that both animals are united in a common purpose, that is, to move in tandem with each other and head in the same direction. The slightest resistance on the part of either one is felt by the other and impedes the progress and productivity of the pair.

Understanding the above helps us to appreciate Paul's warning that it is inappropriate for believers to 'be yoked' with those who do not share their values, priorities and faith. When we form strong social and emotional bonds with another person, any decisions made by one will inevitably have an effect on the other.

Yet this is not a command for us to be isolated from those who do not share our faith. We need to be in contact with them if we are to be the 'salt' and 'light' to them, as Jesus desires us to be. It is instead a call to be mindful when we decide on the type of inter-personal commitment we will establish as we interact with them intellectually, socially and as business associates. Are we able to live and conduct ourselves in a manner that reflects and honors God's presence in our lives as we relate with them on a regular basis?

Our friends, our business partners and, above all, our spouses, will either enhance or be a hindrance to the most vital and precious relationship in our lives - our relationship with our Lord and Savior.

Who are your closest friends and associates?

Are you more determined than ever to love and serve Him when you are around them?

The most beneficial relationships are those which promote holiness and a reverence for God.

George Washington once said: "Associate with men of good quality, if you esteem your reputation; for it is better to be alone than in bad company."

This insight from our nation's first President is a mirror image of today's verse (1 Cor. 15:33; cf. Prov. 22:24-25). If we associate ourselves with "bad company," our lives will reflect the negative influence they have on us. The opposite is also true: godly friends can have a positive influence on our character and actions.

In friendships as in other areas of life, our enemy's goal in spiritual warfare is to outwit us as believers (2 Cor. 2:11). In all our relationships, we need to be on guard against his schemes.

If we fail to be alert or discerning about people, we will be drawn into the wrong kind of relationships, with the destructive or sinful effects described in today's verse.

For example, we usually think of being "unequally yoked" (2 Cor. 6:14) as applying to marriage to unbelievers, and it certainly can have that meaning. But as many Bible teachers have pointed out, this principle also applies to any relationship that brings believers and unbelievers into close proximity and sharing of life or resources.

For example, what's so bad about a business partnership between a Christian and a non-Christian? According to Paul, it mixes two worlds that have nothing in common. It attempts to merge two ways of life, two allegiances, that are diametrically opposed to each other. The Bible says flatly, "Friendship with the world is hatred toward God" (James 4:4).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: Sometimes it's hard for us to evaluate our friendships and our interaction with those who don't know Christ.

How can we know when it may be time to pull the plug on a relationship with an unbeliever? If sin of some sort is being committed, Paul answers the question for us: "Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit" (2 Cor. 7:1).

AUG 18, WEDNESDAY 2 Co 7:2-16

Speak That Word Of Encouragement

2 Co 7:10

Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have exploited no one. 2 Cor 7:2

It can get pretty lonely at the top. Whether it is the corporate world, the academic fraternity or the local church, those in positions of greater responsibility can be very lonely. They may mingle well and get on famously with those they work with, but they carry certain burdens on their shoulders that they cannot share with others. In our local churches, pastoral workers constantly walk a lonely road. Much is shared in strict confidence and their only solace is at the Throne of Grace.

Church leaders often suffer a sense of loneliness. Sometimes, decisions have to be made that are not popular with the congregation at large. A contentious flock can cause leaders to feel rejected and isolated.

Catch the depths of emotion in today's Bible passage. The apostle Paul was often lonely. In his heart, he carried much love for the people he had worked with. He writes of his 'great confidence', his 'great pride', of being 'greatly encouraged' and of 'joy that knows no bounds' (v 4). He had had to correct the Corinthians and must have felt alienated from them for a while. Then Titus had come and brought the glad news that they had repented of their wrongdoing and had expressed such deep concern and longing for Paul. That was the shot in the arm the embattled soldier of the cross needed! What balm to his lonely heart!

Many in the front line in the Lord's work, specifically the leaders, pastors, evangelists and teachers, need reaffirmation of love and concern from those they minister to. Beneath the surface of strength and a reservoir of knowledge, there are tender human hearts that need words of affirmation and encouragement.

**Front liners are the first to get hit by the enemy.
Don't stab them in the back as well!
Pray for your church leaders. Is there some way to encourage them?**

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

AUG 18, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 7:2-16

The Marks Of Godly Repentance

2 Co 7:10

When I was young, my primary schoolmates would respond to an apology by retorting, 'Sorry (is) no cure!' Recently I had cause to reflect on this cryptic response. An acquaintance of mine had admitted to marital infidelity. His wife had chanced upon him in a restaurant behaving in a way unbecoming of a married man. He later admitted that he had been seeing another woman and attributed it to his perception that his wife had little time for him, choosing instead to care for their four children. He declared to his wife that he was sorry. However, he continued to justify his behavior. There was no evidence of regret or remorse. Indeed this was a case of 'sorry no cure'.

How different it was in the case involving the Corinthian believers. They apparently realized the grief they had brought to Paul through their criticism and lack of gratitude. They genuinely regretted their behavior. Their repentance was accompanied by a tangible change in their attitude and behavior. They expressed a desire for a restored relationship. Paul acknowledged this turn of events with joy.

Their sorrow and their concern for the one whom they had hurt was evidence that they were indeed repentant. They were convicted of their sin and sought to make amends with the person they had wronged and with God. How different it is to merely say 'Sorry'. As Paul notes, 'Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.' The first response leads to spiritual growth, maturity and blessings while the latter results in anger and bitterness leading to pain and shame.

True repentance is always accompanied by a determination to make restitution for wrongdoing with both God and man.

In his own words, John Newton "sinned with a high hand" before he met the Lord. After deserting from the British Navy, he was caught and severely disciplined. In lieu of further punishment, Newton persuaded his superiors to assign him to a slave ship. He eventually captained several slave ships, even after his conversion, although he tried to prevent the worst abuses of slavery. Finally, however, Newton became completely disgusted and quit the trade. To his dying day, he shuddered over his former involvement in slavery and fought the cruel trade in every way that he could, including assisting William Wilberforce.

When God convicts someone of sin, there will always be some positive outcome. In John Newton's case, godly sorrow spurred him on to fight injustice. In the case of the Corinthians, godly sorrow led them to repentance and godly growth. This is the second mention we've had of the "tearful" letter that Paul had written to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor. 2:4). Although that letter achieved its purpose, it's clear from 2 Corinthians that Paul still had to fight wrong perceptions.

This first part of today's passage indicates that some had accused Paul of wrongdoing, perhaps suggesting that he had ulterior motives for the collection to help Jewish believers in Jerusalem. This explains the great care that Paul took in writing this letter and his overwhelming expression of love for the Corinthians. It also explains the tremendous joy that he felt finally to receive a good report back from Titus.

Although difficult, Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church is a powerful example of love in the body of Christ. Paul would have laid down his life for the Corinthians. At the same time, he didn't hesitate to speak painful truth when necessary. He knew that godly sorrow, although painful, ultimately benefited them. If he hadn't confronted them, they would have grown more hardened and persisted in sin. But painful yet faithful words led to repentance and restoration.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: To the Philippians, Paul wrote, "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Phil. 1:6). **Our expectations of other believers will always disappoint us unless we base our confidence on the Lord's work in them.** Ultimately Paul's confidence wasn't in Corinthians themselves, but in the Lord in them. This is another way in which "we regard no one from a worldly point of view" but as new creations in Christ (2 Cor. 5:16-17).

AUG 19, THURSDAY

2 Co 8:1-15

Give Till It Hurts

2 Co 8:5

Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 2 Cor 8:2

Do you find it hard to give? Not necessarily money, but possessions as well? It is easy enough to give away what we do not need and even easier to give what we do not want. However, it is pretty tough when it comes to parting with hard-earned money. Many of us probably feel that we could do with a little more ourselves, let alone give away some!

Yet, it is precisely this kind of giving for which the Lord Jesus commended the widow. She gave out of her poverty and parted with all that she had (Mk 12:44). Now that is a tough act to follow!

Giving is not an option. It is, in fact, the test of our sincerity of love for others (v 8). If we love, we cannot be indifferent to the needs of those we love. Like the Macedonian churches, we will count it a privilege to be able to share in the meeting of others' needs.

Giving is also not a privilege to be enjoyed only by the rich. The Macedonian churches gave generously out of their 'extreme poverty' (v 2).

Giving is not to be neglected. It is as important to the Christian character as the other hallmarks of faith and love (v 7).

If we give without feeling the pinch, then we are guilty of giving out of our excess. If we give and it costs us something, then we are on the right track. However, if we give to the extent of denying ourselves basic necessities, then we fall in line behind the widow to receive the Lord's commendation. Have we learnt to give like that? Incidentally, that is the only kind of giving the Lord commends!

It is not how much we give, but rather, how much we are keeping back for ourselves.

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 19, THURSDAY

2 Co 8:1-15

The Joy Of Giving

2 Cor 8:5

How I loved Christmas as a little boy! Being the eldest grandson on both sides of the family. I could expect heaps of presents from indulgent grandparents and numerous aunts and uncles. But I had wise parents who taught me the joy of giving. They brought me to the shops and had me choose gifts (for Ah Kong (Grandpa) and PorPor (Grandma)). The gifts I chose were probably far more appropriate for me than for them but they treasured the gifts because I had chosen them. How grateful I am for having been taught that giving is a privilege and a joy.

In today's passage Paul speaks of this 'joy of giving', making reference to the manner in which the Macedonian church gave. He notes that this church gave not because they had enough for themselves or because they were compelled to do so. They did it joyfully out of grateful obedience to God knowing that He desires His people to provide for those in need, just as their salvation was a gift from God, unmerited and unearned, so they too determined to emulate this in their giving.

How important this message is for us today. Our times are characterized by self-centeredness and, sadly, many of our prayers and activities have become more and more self-indulgent. We need to be reminded that the early missionaries to Asia made a tremendous impact on our people because they sought to bless the people God had called them to. Today, in many parts of Asia, schools, hospitals, orphanages and old-folks homes stand as living testimonies of their effort to share God's abundant love.

**Those who really know God and grow in godliness are 'givers'.
They cannot help but give because He is a God who gives generously.**

First-century Corinth was known for its wealth, luxury, and multicultural life. Paul visited Corinth twice, staying 21 months (Acts 18:11, 20:3). He also wrote two letters to the Corinthian church recorded in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul instructed the church regarding the love offering for the poor believers in Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:25). In today's reading, Paul raised the topic again.

He began by praising the generosity of the Macedonian churches of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (vv. 1-5). Their offering was a response to God's grace. Like Christians in Jerusalem, the Macedonian believers faced persecution resulting in social and economic ostracism. Though they were persecuted and impoverished, Paul described them as overflowing with joy and their gift as abundant. They even begged for the privilege of giving toward the offering. The Corinthian church had also committed to contributing to the collection (vv. 6, 10-11). Paul wrote to encourage them to fulfill their promise—and to test their sincerity (v. 8).

Do not only emulate the Macedonian churches, Paul urged. Imitate Christ's grace of giving (v. 9). Christ left the rich glory with the Father and became poor human flesh so that we might one day share in God's glory. Christ gave Himself sacrificially and voluntarily. Paul wanted the Corinthians to do the same.

Verses 10 through 12 portray three characteristics of the grace of giving: willingness, follow-through, and giving according to one's means. As Christianity grew beyond Jerusalem, Paul urged the same kind of sharing and caring for one another's needs exemplified in the early Jerusalem church (Acts 2:42-47) and among God's people in the wilderness (Ex. 16:18). Throughout the discussion of grace and giving that pervade today's passage, ultimately, it is God's grace that gives way to the church's act of grace in giving toward fellow believers.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: Often we are uncomfortable when Christian workers talk about money, perhaps because we think about money and giving in ways incongruent with God's grace. Paul teaches that we can give generously precisely because God gives generously (vv. 1, 9) and He provides abundantly for all our needs (2 Cor. 9:8; Phil. 4:20).

When we see giving as an opportunity to join God's ministry locally and globally (2 Cor. 8:4; cf. Phil. 1:5, 4:15), we will beg for this privilege like the Macedonian Christians did.

AUG 20, FRIDAY 2 Co 8:16-24

Be On Your Toes

2 Co 8:21

For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men. 2 Cor 8:21

No Christian, however mature, is above temptation. As long as we are in our bodies of flesh, we can be tempted and can fall into sin. Hence, the need to be vigilant, especially in areas where we are more vulnerable to temptation. One such danger zone is the handling of money. Note the apostle's desire to be totally transparent and accountable in the administration of the money collected for the needy Christians (vs 20-21). He sought to be above reproach before God and man in this matter. We do well to heed some pointers from Paul in this area.

First, he made sure that it was a shared responsibility. No one person was to handle the money all by himself. That would leave him open to temptation. We, too, need to learn to discern potential dangers and seek to protect one another. There is always safety in numbers when it comes to handling money.

Second, note the selected representatives. Titus was Paul's own trusted partner and fellow worker (v 23). Another was a brother 'who is praised by all the churches for his service to the Gospel' (v 18). The third was a 'brother who has proved to us in many ways that he is zealous' (v 22). These were all men of caliber, who had served well and proven themselves to be 'an honor to Christ' (v 23). These men were entrusted with the task of carrying the money and administering it.

Aside from money, there are other areas of vulnerability. Temptation lurks as the enemy seeks our downfall (1 Pet 5:8). Let us keep a sharp lookout for ourselves and for others in God's family.

Take time to talk with a trusted friend about personal weaknesses or your areas of vulnerability. Pray together for strength and protection.

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

AUG 20, FRIDAY

2 Co 8:16–24

Can You Be Trusted With Money?

2 Co 8:20

At Paul's encouragement, the Corinthian church had been setting aside offerings in aid of their poor and needy brethren in Jerusalem. It was now time to collect this from them for disbursement and Paul was well aware of the need to send men who could be trusted to handle money. He confidently commended Titus and two other men, who are unnamed, to the church to carry out this responsibility. What was the basis of Paul's trust in them? A look at the character traits of these chosen ones will also benefit us today, as the church in the 21st century has not been spared the pain of mismanaged or misappropriated funds.

These men loved God and were reaching out to others with the gospel. Those who sincerely seek to glorify God will take much care not to tarnish His Name by being irresponsible with resources entrusted to them.

These men also sensed a God-given responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the church at Corinth. The edification of the church was uppermost in their minds. Those who love the Church and have a yearning to see God bless His people will demonstrate integrity in the manner in which they will handle the finances of the assembly.

Finally, these were men who desired above all to do what was right both in the sight of God and in the sight of men. They were responsible people, understanding that they were accountable both to God and to their brethren. Any decisions they made would not be because of their own personal preferences and ambitions but would be for the good of the people and to the glory of God.

Pray for all who handle money in your church.

In an effort to protect public trust, the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA) was founded in 1979. This accreditation council requires adherence to strict standards, including independent financial auditing and fundraising integrity. Thus donors are protected from unscrupulous groups, and organizations are protected from succumbing to methods that might bring dishonor to the cause of Christ. Currently over 2,000 evangelical organizations comprise the council.

Like other wise leaders, Paul knew that special care was needed when it came to money. For several years, he had been collecting funds for famine-stricken believers in Jerusalem from Gentile churches. He knew he would be the object of suspicions given the large sum of money involved. In fact, some in Corinth apparently suggested that Paul used collection funds to line his own pockets. They may have used this to justify their own failure to give.

This explains the great care that Paul took in pursuing the Corinthians' contribution to the collection. If the ECFA had been around, Paul would have met and exceeded their stringent standards! He began by appealing to faithful Titus, who had just returned from Corinth with the "tearful" letter. We get a glimpse of Titus's own deep love for the Corinthians in his enthusiasm to turn around and undertake the arduous trip back to Corinth. Although asked by Paul, it's clear that he acted of his own initiative and desire.

In addition to Titus, Paul saw the wisdom of sending several respected brothers. First, there is an unnamed brother, who had been chosen by other churches, probably in Macedonia and Greece, to ensure the propriety of the collection. There have been many suggestions concerning this individual's identity, including Luke, but what's clear from the text is that this person was highly regarded. Additionally, another brother completed the group. The designation "our brother" indicates someone close to Paul. Such an individual could vouch that Paul's hands were completely clean regarding the collection.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: In addition to the need for integrity when it comes to finances, today's passage offers two other lessons for giving. First, notice the eagerness of those involved with this major fundraising drive. They understood they weren't "just asking for money," but that they were participating in God's glorious work. Second, notice how this collection crossed cultural and ethnic boundaries.

Charity begins at home, but it can never stop there.

The church must extend beyond itself to minister to its brothers and sisters throughout the world.

AUG 21, SATURDAY 2 Co 9:1-15

Stagnant Water or Wide Ripples?

2 Co 9:7

You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. 2 Cor 9:11

A pebble cast into the lake will cause ripples in the water. The harder the impact, the wider the ripples. Likewise, our actions have an impact on others, creating favorable responses or otherwise. Most times, the ones affected are those closest to us. Sometimes the ripples caused are far-reaching, extending way beyond our little circle.

The Corinthian church was one such example. So eager were they in their desire to help the needy Christians that their enthusiasm caused a ripple that reached up north to the Macedonian church. The impact was that it 'stirred most of them to action' (v 2). That was a terrific effect! One generous church inspiring another to give!

Besides, Paul exhorts that when they give generously, they themselves will reap a harvest of blessings, for God is no man's debtor. When His people learn to hold their earthly wealth in open palms, sharing freely with others in need, God ensures that they would be 'made rich in every way' (v 11).

Still, the ripples did not stop there. Those who received the generous gift and had their needs met, would in turn overflow with thanksgiving to God. They would praise God for the obedience shown by His people in supplying their needs (v 12).

To cap it all, they would bear up the generous givers before the Throne of Grace, praying for them ardently (v 14). With such heartfelt prayer support, surely the Corinthian church would go on from strength to strength, doing what is right and creating further ripples along the way. What a glorious picture of the blessings and praises that can abound when we take simple steps of obedience!

**Don't live in stagnant waters; create ripples that spread wide to God's glory.
Reflect and thank the Lord for those who have left a strong impact on your life.
If possible, send them a word of grateful acknowledgement.**

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

AUG 21, SATURDAY

2 Co 9:1–15

The Blessings Of Giving

2 Co 9:7

Are you good at handling your personal finances? Do you make out a budget based on your anticipated income and spend accordingly? Or are you more likely to just declare that you will spend more when you have more, and spend less when you have less without systematic financial planning? Do you set aside a portion of your income to help those in need?

Paul cites many reasons for being involved in showing care through giving financial assistance. He notes that giving is a form of serving the saints and is a praiseworthy endeavor. This echoes his thought in his earlier letter to the Galatians where he encouraged the church to seize every opportunity to do good, especially to fellow believers (Gal 6: 10). Through giving, we also become channels through which God answers the prayers of those in need. God Is thus honored and glorified.

Generous giving is also contagious especially so when it is observed to be done voluntarily, willingly, and above all, enthusiastically! This manner of giving delights God and Paul declares that those who give this way will themselves reap bountifully from their generous giving.

Furthermore, to those who give, even more will be provided to them by God so they can give even more - what a great way to live! It is no wonder that Paul says that the way we handle our finances can cause much thanksgiving to be offered to God.

**Determine today that you will be more sensitive to the need of those around you.
Seek to be a blessing to them materially without them having to ask you for help.
Do this generously and enthusiastically and you will yourself be blessed!**

The prophet Elijah saw God's promise of famine come true in judgment for the sins of Ahab and Israel. In obedience to God, Elijah went to Zarephath and asked a widow to provide him with food. She responded that she had no bread, and only a little flour and oil. She was preparing a final meal for herself and her son. Elijah promised that if she would feed him, God would provide continuous food. She trusted God's promise, and He ensured that miraculously the "jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD" (see 1 Kings 17).

God's principles of godly generosity have not changed. When people offer what they have—whether much or little—to Him, He promises to bless them. One way that we grow in extending grace is by extending generosity to others as a ministry to God.

The context of our passage is Paul's request for the Corinthian church to contribute financially to the impoverished and persecuted church in Jerusalem. The poor churches in Macedonia had already sent an offering, but the wealthy church in Corinth had been rather stingy (see Acts 8; Phil. 4:14–19). Paul didn't want to coerce or manipulate the Corinthians, but he did want them to understand God's principles of generosity. God wanted voluntary, joyful giving (v. 7). Sometimes a lack of generosity stems from a fear of not having enough left over; believers cling to financial resources for security. But God promises to extend the grace and resources necessary in response to our giving (v. 8).

This passage is often used by prosperity gospel preachers to assert that God has a mathematical formula—give a dollar and get \$100 in return!—or that God wants all Christians to be rich. In contrast, notice what Paul emphasized: our money is not what enables us to live for God. Our money is a tool to serve God, and His grace enables us to pursue good works of service. The emphasis is not on getting rich, but on seeking "every good work," "righteousness," and "thanksgiving to God" (vv. 8, 10, 11, 13). Generosity exhibits obedience consistent with our confession of the gospel. God has extended His grace to us so that we can extend generosity to others (v. 14).

Apply the Word : This text connects our willingness to release our financial resources to serve God with our ability to grow spiritually. There's no formula or percentage demanded; God cares about the state of our hearts. Are you willing to give financially to support your church, missionaries, or other ministries doing the work of God?

**Are you giving joyfully? Do you give the bare minimum, desiring to hold tightly to your money?
Our security is in Christ, not our bank account. He promises to bless our generosity.**

AUG 22, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 23, MONDAY **2 Co 10:1-18**

Down, But Not Out!

2 Co 10:18

For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends. 2 Cor 10:18

The ones we love most are also the ones who can hurt us most. It is acceptable, to an extent, when other people misunderstand us. However, our expectations of our loved ones are different. They, of all people, should know us so well that they would not think unkindly of us. How very hurtful when let down by the ones dearest to us! Already persecuted and hard-pressed from without, Paul had to contend with accusations and criticisms from within.

Some accused Paul of living 'by the standards of this world' (v 2). Others criticized his person as being 'unimpressive' and his speech as 'amounting to nothing' (v 10). Others added to the vendetta against Paul.

Just how does one cope with a volley of unkind criticism, and that from the very ones he loves? Paul stood his ground and rebutted each allegation. He reaffirmed the authority given to him by Christ Himself (v 8). He called as witness the effectiveness of his ministry by the power of God (vs 4-5). He reminded them that it was he who had first come to them with the Gospel (v 14, Acts 18:1-17).

Like the apostle, we, the Lord's servants, must be prepared for accusations and criticism from within the ranks of those we love and minister to. Much as it hurts, we need to stand our ground and be able to affirm the mandate given by the Lord Jesus. The fruit of our labor should also bear testimony that God's power is at work through us. As Paul reminded the Corinthians of his dealings with them in bringing the Gospel, we too, should be able to remind our strongest critics only of the good we have done towards them. How do you respond to criticism and accusations?

Don't bite the hand that feeds you!
Pray that we may repay love with love, and not with hostility.

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

AUG 23, MONDAY

2 Co 10:1-18

Identify Your Real Enemy

2 Co 10:4-5

Have you ever had days when you were completely misread and misunderstood by family or colleagues or co-workers in the ministry? Remember how disappointed, despondent and discouraged you became because you were unfairly appraised? It must have been tempting to respond in anger and lash back at those who hurt you.

In the passage today Paul finds himself in this predicament and opted not to retaliate, choosing instead to demonstrate the 'meekness and gentleness of Christ'. His critics expected him to fight back and when Paul did not respond, he was branded a 'coward'. They did not know that Paul did indeed take retaliatory steps in response to their behavior.

The steps taken were however, not what they expected. Paul did not see these critics as the actual enemy and so did not see any purpose in striking out against them. Paul understood that the real enemy was the devil who wanted to weaken and destroy the spiritual work that Paul was doing among the Corinthians. Retaliating against these 'spiritual strongholds' required spiritual weapons such as prayer and other spiritual disciplines. Disputing with people who were against him would not deal with the heart of the matter.

The devil today continues in his attempt to sabotage our relationship with God and our service to Him by causing inter-personal strife, especially within the church and our immediate families. He sows discord, doubt and every manner of negative thought. Our victory does not lie in defensive arguments with people but in utilizing spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:10-17) to confront the real enemy.

The next time you are faced with inter-personal strife, and you know you have not done wrong, pray against the unseen enemy who seeks to hinder the plans and purposes of God in your life.

Night markets in many Asian cities abound with 'copies' of designer watches, handbags and the like. Some weeks ago I was amused to hear a trader proudly proclaim to a group of tourists that he was selling 'genuine fakes'! Only a person who is acquainted with the genuine item would be able to discern the difference.

Corinth, like other churches of that era, hosted many travelling teachers. Some were genuine while others were merely skilled orators with little knowledge of the Word. Yet others attracted crowds through imaginative interpretations of scripture. Some incited groups in the church to become highly critical of Paul's ministry to them.

Paul's decision not to defend himself against false accusations was seen as timidity. Paul's presentation skills were said to be deficient and unimpressive. Furthermore, they insinuated that Paul's letters were of little consequence, as he would not translate his threats into action when he visited them.

The Corinthians were being misled by 'genuine fakes' - teachers who appeared and sounded real but were not. Paul urged them to 'look beneath the surface'. He exposed them by identifying various characteristics of genuine ministers of the Word. According to Paul, true teachers did not seek to be compared favorably against other teachers but established their credibility through comparing their work against that which God had called them to do. They sought to build up the church and not their own credibility or ministry. They were not afraid to be unpopular when ministering truth under the authority of God. True teachers raised up people who were fervent in the sharing of their faith.

Let us welcome those who will build us up in our faith and jealously guard God's people from those who may destroy the good God has done in our midst.

AUG 24, TUESDAY 2 Co 11:1-15

Who Will Mind The Babies?

2 Co 11:3

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 2 Cor 11:2

The birth of a baby sets off a flurry in any household! The baby needs to be constantly cleaned, fed and cared for. It is but the beginning of a long journey of tremendous responsibility. Similarly, when someone is born into God's family, it is also the beginning of a lifetime journey of following Christ. The babe in Christ needs to be nourished and nurtured by the word of God (1 Pet 2:2) and to be cared for in so many ways. Who is responsible to care for these babes in Christ?

The apostle Paul brought the Gospel to Corinth and he took it upon himself to watch over the flock there. The Corinthian Christians had faced many challenges as they sought to obey Christ. This time round, however, the false teachers had come among them and discredited Paul and his teachings. The Christians were swayed by what they heard and apparently, were quite ready to cast aside what they had learned from Paul.

The apostle came on strong, staking his claim on them and affirming his love for them. He had won them for Christ and they belonged to the Lord (v 2). Paul was not going to give them up and lose them to the false preachers without a fight! They were his 'babies' and they needed protection from the counterfeit apostles. Do we help to shoulder the responsibility of caring for younger believers? Today, as never before, there is much to distract the believers from a 'sincere and pure devotion to Christ'. Let us stake our claim and be jealous for Christ and watch over the babes among us (1 Thes 2:12).

Abandoned or neglected babies in God's family?

Unthinkable, when the Father's resources are in such abundance.

Pray for the babes in Christ in your church and especially for those who are caring for them.

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

AUG 24, TUESDAY

2 Co 11:1-15

The Heart Of A Parent

2 Co 11:3

Mrs. Maniam wiped a tear from the corner of her eye. It was 2.00 am and she was by the bedside of her three-year-old son who lay flushed, gasping for breath. It grieved her to see him in this state. She looked up to see her husband Robert standing by her side. They began to pray that the Lord would bring healing to their young son. How their hearts ached as they stood by their son.

Parents long for their children to have the best in life and react with anger and indignation to any person or situation that would thwart this goal. Paul, too, was very concerned that his 'spiritual children' receive the blessings that should be rightfully theirs. He desired that nothing would come between the church and the Lord. Their spiritual relationship with Jesus was of paramount importance to Paul and he would oppose anyone or anything that would rob them of the best the Lord had for them. He therefore, urged them to watch against deceptive teachings. Any teaching that opposed what Paul had taught about the Person and work of Jesus was not acceptable. Nor were they to allow themselves to be deceived by counterfeit spirits. He may not be an 'impressive speaker' and did not demand or accept large honorariums but in no way was his teaching inferior to those who accepted large gifts from them. How this turn of events must have caused hurt and pain to Paul.

What are your priorities for your children's lives?

Remember, even more important than providing for their earthly needs is the paramount responsibility of building and nurturing their relationship with Jesus.

Last October a church janitor opened fire on the Atlanta congregation where he was once employed, killing the man who was leading the prayer service. In December, a gunman killed Kimberly Scott as she decorated for a children's Christmas party at her church near Altoona, Pennsylvania.

We don't usually suspect the motives or intentions of those sitting right next to us in the pew. The place where we worship feels like it should be the safest place. It's where we can let our guard down—or can we? The apostle Paul talks today about the subtle maneuvering of the "false apostles" in Corinth in the very context of "church."

In the book of 2 Corinthians, which was probably the third or fourth letter Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, Paul was on the defensive. A strong, vocal group of dissenters publicly criticized Paul's apostolic qualifications and the methods of his ministry. They commended themselves as superior to Paul and sought to win the loyal following of the Corinthian church.

Paul makes clear that it is not only his ministry that is at stake: it's the faith and devotion of the Corinthian church. Paul is bold and unequivocal, branding the false apostles as servants of Satan. He exposes their game as a charade: they've sought not to replace the gospel but to counterfeit it. They haven't done away with Jesus, but the Jesus they proclaim is not the Jesus of Nazareth whom Paul met on the road to Damascus.

Paul warns the Corinthians of Satan's deceptive tactics. He reminds them how Eve fell prey to this same subtle strategy of distorting God's Word.

Apply the Word: There are enemies within the church, and they aren't usually as easy to recognize as someone waving a loaded gun. Satan does not want anyone devoted to Jesus and the gospel.

Our charge is to be like the Bereans, who studied the Scriptures diligently and tested the truthfulness of every teaching against God's revelation (Acts 17).

AUG 25, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 11:16-33

Are You For Real?

2 Co 11:30

If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 2 Cor 11:30

Talk about transparency! The apostle Paul had to bare all, so to speak, to seek to bring the Corinthians back to their senses. Obviously, they had fallen prey to the deceit and lies of those who professed to be from Christ but in truth, were not. In the tough tussle to win them back, Paul had to 'impress' them with his own credentials. Against his better judgment, Paul revealed to them all that he had suffered for the sake of the Gospel. He contended that if anyone was qualified to represent Christ, he certainly was.

Paul was not afraid to put his life under scrutiny. He had nothing to hide. Whatever the claims of the false teachers, Paul could match them one by one (vs 22-23). In fact, he had been so obedient to the cause of Christ that none could even come close to what he had suffered. His disclosures only served to stamp the mark of authenticity on his apostleship. Clearly, Paul was in a class of his own, a true servant of Christ.

Today, there are so many who bear the name of Christ but live in total disregard of Him. Many have strayed from the word of God and have subscribed to the world's value system. What sets us apart from the rest of the pack? What is our mark of authenticity as disciples of Christ? The Lord Jesus Himself warned that it is not enough to profess to have faith in Him or even to be found doing things in His name (Matt 7:21-23). The bottom line is a life of obedience to the Father's will. Paul had no problem with authenticity. Under scrutiny, his life stood the test. Would yours and mine?

It's not what we profess, but what we practice that matters.

**In your small group, take turns to share about your faith
and how you know you are the genuine stuff.**

**If you are concerned that someone is merely a professing Christian,
how would you go about sharing the truths of discipleship with this person?**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 25, WEDNESDAY

2 Co 11:16-33

By Their Behavior You Will Know Them

2 Co 11:30

A young man in love claimed he would 'swim the deepest ocean and climb the highest hill' for his beloved. He called later that night to say he was unable to keep their appointment because of a heavy drizzle. The shallowness of his commitment has caused many to shake their heads in disbelief. Use the above story to check your personal dedication to Jesus and you may just find yourself weeping over the shallowness of your commitment.

We sing songs and hymns expressing our commitment and surrender to 'give Him our lives'. We declare, 'I'll go where You want me to go, dear Lord' only to live as we have always done after the worship service is over. The true test of discipleship continues to be in the marketplace and not within the walls of the church. To declare one's love for Jesus and to express faith in Him is easy in the midst of believers but to do the same in the midst of unbelieving family members and friends is not quite as easy. But this is where it really matters.

James says 'faith without works is dead' and here Paul seems to indicate that the genuineness of his faith and teaching is authenticated by his life's choices. Paul was totally sold out to Jesus and His work. He was willing to endure hardship, pain, suffering and shame for the sake of the gospel.

Today we hesitate to give a tract to a friend for fear of embarrassment. We constantly pray that God will provide opportunities to share His love with those we care for but when opportunities arise, we shy away because of a fear of rejection. Read Acts 1:8.

Are you living out at home and in the office what you professed while you were in church this past Sunday?

According to a University of Michigan survey, overall customer satisfaction with air travel continued to decline in 2007. Travelers cited lost or damaged luggage, long delays or flight cancellations, and unhelpful airline personnel among their major grievances. For many frequent flyers, travel has become more difficult and less pleasant. Even with all these hassles, modern travelers can barely imagine what Paul endured in his day. Travel in the ancient world was difficult and dangerous, so many people never traveled. This makes Paul's extensive travels all the more remarkable. Yet traveling was only one hardship that Paul willingly endured for the gospel.

We noted yesterday that, out of love for the Corinthians, Paul answered their false accusations. Today we see that Paul also countered the arrogant boasting of his opponents with some "foolish boasting" of his own. By doing so, he exposed their true foolishness. The Corinthians willingly endured quite a bit from these "fools," including enslaving and degrading treatment. Paul uses irony (v. 21) to show that a true apostle would never exploit them.

Apparently these false apostles boasted in their Jewish heritage. Philippians 3:3-6 indicates that Paul's Jewish heritage was impeccable. These "super-apostles" also boasted about what they had suffered for Christ. They picked the wrong opponent, because Paul could "out boast" every one of them. For example, the Jewish punishment of "forty lashes minus one" could kill a person. The fact that Paul survived this five times revealed both his love for his own people and God's sustaining power for his body. Despite numerous tangible hardships, nothing compared with the pressing concern that he felt for all the churches. If the Corinthian church is an indication, Paul must have paid a high price in this regard.

Finally, Paul referenced the humiliating way that he fled Damascus soon after his conversion. Although he wanted to crush Christianity, he was humbled by the risen Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: The "super-apostles" must have seemed imposing. Yet often, true servants of Christ aren't all that impressive. It can be tempting to look for leaders who have a powerful personality or a certain charisma. To be sure, some godly leaders also have these characteristics. Yet we must be careful that we're not using worldly standards to evaluate our Christian leaders.

A faithful, trustworthy pastor or elder is far more valuable than the polish or dynamism of one whose arrogance ultimately enslaves and leads away from the gospel.

AUG 26, THURSDAY 2 Co 12:1-10

The Best Time Is Now

2 Co 12:9

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Cor 12:9

When she was in her forties, a lady in church was approached to help out in the Sunday School. Her answer was an immediate 'No'. Her children were all in school and she felt she had too much on her hands. 'Later,' she said, 'when the children are grown.' Into her sixties, she was asked again if she could lend a helping hand. Her reply was again an immediate 'No'. She had grandchildren to visit now. 'Perhaps later on,' she mumbled.

How many of the Lord's people are deceived into thinking that someday, there will be the ideal circumstances in life to serve the Lord. Meanwhile, there are just too many things to attend to right now. How familiar the refrain. 'Not now, but later.' The present circumstances that seemingly are not conducive for service could be job pressures, aging parents, young children, examinations or any kind of demand or uncertainty. The irony is that as soon as the particular situation eases up, some other urgent matter will crop up.

We can go through life immersed in our inconvenient circumstances and wait in vain for the perfect circumstances before we embark on service for the Lord. Believe me, this is a delusion. The enemy will ensure that precious opportunities will pass us by.

Had the apostle Paul waited for the right circumstances, he would never have started out! The odds were always stacked high against him: 'weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties' (v 10). Instead, his sufficiency was grace from the Lord and His power made perfect in weaknesses (v 9).

**Be in time!
Memorize Ephesians 5:16. Read Luke 9:59-62.**

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

AUG 26, THURSDAY

2 Co 12:1-10

Strength In Weakness

2 Co 12:9

'Dependence on God is not a sign of weakness but is only the way to see more achieved through you than you will ever hope to accomplish on your own.' After more than 20 years of involvement in the Lord's work, I can confidently say that the statement I heard many years ago is absolutely true.

Yesterday we read about the many physical hardships Paul endured as he served Jesus. These appeared to have been presented to his readers as indicators of his deep commitment to the Lord's work. Today's reading finds him 'boasting' about an extraordinary spiritual experience. This spiritual experience was so awesome that Paul could have continually called attention to it to prove to everyone that he had indeed been appointed and anointed by God.

However, unlike the many teachers who pointed to either personal sacrifice or great personal revelations as indications of genuine ministry, Paul considered his continual dependence on God to be that which best authenticated his ministry. To Paul, the best measure of a teacher's worth was how much of God one could see in the teacher's life. Because of this, he gladly boasted of his own personal weaknesses as this would reveal the extent of God's work in and through him.

While there continues to be much speculation over the nature of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', we will not be wrong to conclude that whatever it might have been, it was allowed by God to remain in Paul's life as a constant reminder of his need to depend on God for every area of his life and service.

**Our human inability is an excellent opportunity
for those around us to see the strength of God shining through our weaknesses.**

A phenomenon is occurring throughout the Muslim world. A growing number of Muslims report having dreams in which Jesus appears to them. Frequently, these dreams concern Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection—events either not acknowledged or denied in Islamic teaching. As the result, thousands are coming to Christ and new converts often boldly proclaim the gospel, even at risk of death. Although some are skeptical of dreams and visions, the Bible and church history record numerous examples of God speaking in this way. Unfortunately, unscrupulous individuals have also exploited the power of visionary experiences. This is apparently what was happening in Corinth. Paul's opponents probably used visions to authenticate their apostolic claims. Paul had to set the record straight. It's a bit curious that Paul used the third person to refer to his own vision of the third heaven, a popular Jewish expression for Paradise. This probably indicates his conviction that this was an issue between God and him. The fact that Paul had spent so much time with the Corinthians without ever mentioning this event implies this conclusion as well. In other words, visions weren't used as the basis of his apostolic authority. Moreover, Paul's language of being "caught up" indicates that he hadn't sought this vision, rather it was completely God's doing.

What a contrast to the false apostles' boasting. In fact, to keep Paul from boasting about this surpassingly great revelation, the Lord allowed a messenger of Satan to inflict Paul with a "thorn" in his flesh, most likely some type of medical ailment. This account also shows God's complete control over the demonic realm.

We might think that the prayers of the apostle Paul would be effective enough to take away this ailment. But the issue isn't about praying "enough," but submitting to God's sovereign will. In this way, the Lord's all-sufficient grace could be manifest through Paul's weakness. Paul could boast in his weaknesses, because through them, God was glorified.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY : While we should rejoice over the reports of those in the Muslim world who have come to Christ through remarkable means, it is important to recognize that the spread of the gospel through dreams and visions is the exception rather than the rule. Visions from God aren't available "on-demand."

God's revelation to Paul was an unsolicited gift. Paul was very hesitant even to mention his experience. Believers with similar experience should take care that if they share it with others, it glorifies God and leads people to Christ.

AUG 27, FRIDAY 2 Co 12:11-21

Make It A Joyful Reunion!

2 Co 12:12

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 2 Cor 12:20

Reunions are such happy occasions. After a period of separation, how the heart looks forward to meeting up again with loved ones who have been dearly missed! Yet, when Paul was preparing for a reunion with the Corinthian church, he was full of apprehension and misgivings. The church had been so embroiled in problems and especially now with the so-called 'super apostles'. Paul sought to straighten the situation somewhat before he actually met them face-to-face. He was anxious lest 'when I come, I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be' (v 20).

How these words challenge our hearts as we anticipate Christ's return! Will the Lord find us as He wants us to be? Paul's list of fears about the Corinthians could well serve as our checklist too. If we want the Lord to find us as He wants us to be, we need to keep these sins out of our lives:

- | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|
| Quarrelling | Slander | Impurity | Jealousy | Gossip |
| Sexual sin | Arrogance | Debauchery | Factions | Disorder |
| Outbursts of anger | | | | |

Where the Lord is concerned, there is nothing about Him that will disappoint us. We will only marvel that He exceeds all our highest expectations. The only letdown would be not hearing His words of commendation because we have lived carelessly.

Paul tried to prepare the Corinthians for a glad reunion. Likewise, in preparation for His coming, the Lord Jesus has equipped us with the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:26), the word of God (Jn 20:31) and the body of believers (Eph 4:16). Let us not be found wanting.

'We have waited for His advent, and have listened for His feet.'

- Sankey's 'Sacred Songs and Solos' Hymnbook-

Talk about the Rapture. Pray that each member of the family will be ready for this great event.

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

AUG 27, FRIDAY

2 Co 12:11-21

When We See Him Face To Face

2 Co 12:12

Mei stood outside the closed bedroom door of her daughter, Wai Leng, and hesitated before knocking. Wai Leng's teacher had informed Mei that her daughter had been missing from school on numerous occasions and had been found loitering with a group of friends at a shopping mall. Some had been previously caught shoplifting and the teacher suspected that Wai Leng was also involved. Mei had confronted her daughter and there was a heated exchange of words. This was the morning after... how would her daughter receive her?

Paul's thoughts must have been much like those of Mei's as he contemplated a third visit to Corinth. In his words, '...I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be.' Paul had corrected them on various matters related to unacceptable Christian behavior as well as their misconceptions of him as an apostle. A personal visit from Paul would reveal if they had taken steps to make things right. This in turn would determine his reaction towards them. In short, whether they would find Paul's visit a pleasant one or not was really theirs to decide.

Have you thought about the day when Jesus will return? Will you hear Him say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'? Or will you be stunned at His sudden appearing because the lack of commitment to His purposes will be revealed? Some of us will joyfully welcome Him as the 'rewarder of those who seek Him' but sadly many will find we have accomplished little of eternal consequence.

**We determine through our current decisions and actions
how our future meeting with Jesus will be like.**

Japanese culture values politeness and formality. This is especially true when it comes to giving gifts. Once a gift is received, it's expected that a gift will be given in return. This gift must be chosen carefully. A gift is an expression of status, so an inappropriate gift could bring shame upon an individual. Giving the same gift to different individuals could be insulting.

Every culture has its own set of rules for proper behavior. As we've noted before, patron-client relationships in Paul's day were prevalent. In general, these formal rules would have been inappropriate in a parent-child relationship. Parents generally saw themselves as protectors who helped their children succeed in life. We can imagine the pain Paul felt when his Corinthian "children" treated him according to formal patronage rules. In the first part of today's passage, Paul concluded his "boasting" by stressing that the true marks of an apostle had been repeatedly manifest to the Corinthians. They had seen all that they needed to know that Paul, not the super-apostles, was the real thing.

Just a few remaining issues needed to be cleared up before Paul could undertake another visit to Corinth. First, Paul underscored that the basis of their relationship was family, not patrons or clients. Love and integrity, not obligation and debt, drove Paul. The same was true for Titus and the other brothers sent by Paul.

Second, Paul clarified that his words shouldn't be construed as a defense. This probably surprised the Corinthians! But a defense would have given credibility to their charges and implied that Paul had been wrong. Paul's concern was for the gospel. To refute false charges was to prevent false apostles from gaining a foothold. Third, Paul turned the tables by suggesting a few charges of his own. He worried that the Corinthians' past ungodliness hadn't been fully renounced. If so, he would have been humiliated for having labored in vain.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY: Christians aren't expected to be perfect, and both confession and repentance are important parts of the Christian life. At the same time, expecting godliness within a Christian community is entirely appropriate. Given that the Corinthians weren't new believers, Paul was right to expect repentance, sexual purity, and spiritual maturity from those who had "sinned earlier."

The same is true for believers today. True spiritual maturity is reflected in true godliness.

AUG 28, SATURDAY

2 Co 13:1-14

Don't Misrepresent God

2 Co 13:11b

I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others. 2 Cor 13:2

A church member was horrified to discover that a child had been disciplined during Sunday School. Her grounds of protest: children should experience only love and kindness in the house of God, and not sternness and discipline. I beg to differ, and I believe many of you would too.

Paul's closing words to the Corinthian Christians were stern and threatening. Paul was not going to tolerate any misbehavior among them. They had better set their house in order before his visit! With the authority given to him by Christ, he was ready to take harsh measures, if necessary, to uphold the honor of that same sacred Name. He warned that he would not spare any who bore the name of Christ, yet persisted in sin and refused to repent. While he loved the Christians dearly, he could not ignore nor make light of their wrongdoing and sin. That would be in total conflict with the very character of the holy God he served (Rom 11:22).

Likewise, the church, being God's representative on earth, must reflect the attributes of God. While God is love. He is also righteous and holy. He loves and forgives but also judges with sternness and wrath (Heb 10:31). We, too, show love and compassion, but where there is defiance and wrongdoing, we need to mete out proper discipline. The child needs to know the consequence of disobedience. Failure to discipline him is to allow him to continue to do wrong.

If you are in a position of authority, whether as a Sunday School teacher or as an elder, do not take it lightly. Be careful to uphold order and holiness in the house of God and among His people (Heb 12:7-11).

**Pray that we may always have a reverent attitude
towards our loving and holy Heavenly Father.
'At the cross of Calvary, love and justice meet'.
How would you explain this to a non-Christian friend?**

P.R.A.Y

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

AUG 28, SATURDAY

2 Co 13:1-14

Don't Misrepresent God

2 Co 13:11b

As we come to the end of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, let us consider his final remarks. He reminded the Corinthian believers that they must live rightly before God. Verbal confession of faith, intensive pursuit of knowledge about God, generous charitable giving and exuberant forms of praise can never be substitutes for holy and righteous living.

While it seemed for the moment to the Corinthians that they could get away with their unscriptural behavior and attitudes, Paul reminded them that those who sin would be punished.

Paul reminded them that what they perceived as 'weakness' in Paul's ministry would one day be shown to be actually an expression of God's powerful work among them. The ways of God are not always apparent to us. The truth is that God is always powerfully at work behind the scenes to bring about His best for us.

We must periodically examine our own personal faith. Is there evidence of our surrender to Him so that His Presence 'spills over' to touch other lives because we are so full of Him? My senior pastor once told a story that illustrates this beautifully: A young boy came home from Sunday School very perplexed. The teacher had told him that God is so big that He is everywhere in the universe at the same time. Yet, this little boy said, the teacher also claimed that God was living in his little heart. 'So,' asked the little boy, 'shouldn't He be sticking out of me in every direction?' Yes, God should be sticking out of our lives in every direction if we really have given all of ourselves to Him.

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.**

Every parent knows the importance of follow-through. Once children figure out that words have no meaning and that no consequences follow misbehavior, they usually push the limits to see just how far they can go and still get away with more disobedience. Unfortunately, not much changes from children to adults.

Apparently the Corinthians had persuaded themselves, helped by the false apostles, that Paul wasn't much of a threat. Sure, he wrote difficult letters, but when confrontations arose, he backed off quickly enough. A quick recap of Paul's visits to Corinth will be helpful. Paul's first stay in Corinth is recorded in Acts 18:1-17. Second Corinthians indicates that he made a short, painful visit sometime later, and had intended to visit again, but held off for fear of causing more pain (2 Cor. 2:1). This had been misinterpreted to mean that Paul didn't carry through with his warnings. Thus Paul made sure that the Corinthians understood that the admonitions contained in his current letter (2 Corinthians) weren't idle. He was fully prepared to carry out his warnings on this third visit.

This intent is evident in Paul's abrupt quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15. Some suggest that this refers to Paul's three visits, but another interpretation explains the Deuteronomy text better. Whereas Paul had previously dealt with individuals privately, this time he would judge unrepentant sinners publicly, on the testimony of two other witnesses, probably Titus and Timothy. If the Corinthians wanted proof of Paul's apostolic authority, they would find it in God's power working through his "weakness." Even so, Paul still hoped these Corinthians would repent and not fail the test of their faith.

It's probable that this occurred. According to Acts 20:2-3, Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. The brevity of the account and the likelihood that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans during this stay in Corinth indicate that this third trip was peaceful.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY : Our study has covered difficult territory. But the final benediction offers a helpful summary. First, aiming for perfection includes the restoration that comes from repentance and spiritual maturity. Second, it is important to heed the authority of all Scripture. Third, being of one mind, living in peace, and greeting one another with holy affection negates preoccupation with worldly standards and status.

**Finally, the grace, love, and fellowship stressed in this letter are only possible
through God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

AUG 29, SUNDAY

Sunday Worship Celebration

SCRIPTURE PASSAGE

PREACHER

AUG 30, MONDAY

Overview Of Romans Chapters 1 to 8

The letter to the Romans is one of the most important letters written by the apostle Paul. It presents a helpful introduction to the rest of his teaching and addresses some of the great themes found in other parts of the Bible, such as sin, justification, faith, and election.

In this letter we also find Paul presenting an extended explanation of the Gospel that he was so eager to proclaim. As someone has said, Romans is the 'fullest, plainest and grandest statement of the Gospel in the New Testament.' In fact, it might be argued that the theme of this letter is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, Romans is far from being just an academic treatise. This Gospel is the good news of how people are liberated from their slavery to sin and death and given new lives by the grace of God through faith in Christ. Thus, it is not surprising that generations of Christians have acknowledged the importance of this letter. The great reformer, Martin Luther, was struggling with how his sinfulness made it impossible to face a holy God when he discovered in Romans, God's grace and forgiveness through faith in Christ. Luther writes that the Gospel message in Romans had become to him 'a gateway to heaven.'

Years later, Luther's own understanding of Romans would profoundly affect John Wesley. As he heard the preface of Luther's works on Romans read out, Wesley recounts, 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine.'

God in His great mercy has continued to grant us access to this letter. Let us pray that He will work in our hearts and minds through His Spirit as we study this part of Romans.

We pray that we too may find, as Luther and Wesley before us had found, that the great message of the Gospel serves to assure us that the way to heaven has been decidedly opened for us through Christ.

AUG 30, MONDAY

Act 20:2-3a, Rom 1:1-17

The Power Of God

Rom 1:16

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Rom 1:16-17

Sharing the Gospel of the Lord Jesus with others is a scary task for many of us for various reasons. One major reason is the fear of rejection or ridicule. This is understandable. After all, is the Gospel not considered irrelevant, foolish, confrontational or even repulsive by many non-Christians? Understandably, we might be ashamed to confess we believe, leave alone try to convince them to believe in it.

The apostle Paul had his fair share of ridicule and persecution. Yet he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel because he has experienced for himself that this very Gospel is God's powerful means to save people. For in the Gospel God's righteousness is revealed (v 17). In the Gospel we are shown how the righteous God will declare sinful (unrighteous) people righteous. Paul will explain how this happens later in his letter. However, in this passage, he gives us a hint that this acquittal of guilty sinners is made possible because of the Son of God (vs 2-4).

The word Gospel means Good News. It is the good news of how people are made right with God through His Son. We are told that this is available through faith in Him (and as we shall see in a later chapter, only through faith in Him). Salvation is for all who would hear this Gospel and trust in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. In the Gospel, Paul finds the solution to humanity's most dire need. This is great news that he could not be ashamed of.

In the milieu of religious tolerance, insistence on absolutes in religion is often frowned upon. This may cause us to shy away from proclaiming the Gospel. Christians must indeed be sensitive and loving to their neighbors. However, the highest expression of love must be a desire to see people reconciled to their God and Judge.

Let us not be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is God's power for their salvation.

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

AUG 30, MONDAY

Act 20:2–3a; Rom 1:1–17

Indebted

Rom 1:14

The film *Saving Private Ryan*, though disturbingly graphic, tells the gripping story of a World War II rescue squad sent to bring a soldier out of harm's way. One by one the squad members are killed—sacrificed for the life of Private James Ryan. Finally, mortally wounded and near death, the squad leader calls young James close and simply says, “Earn this.” Men had given their lives to save Private Ryan, and he needed to embrace the sense of indebtedness such sacrifice should engender. Ryan owed his life to those who had rescued him.

Paul likewise felt indebted. Christ had sacrificed Himself to pay for Paul's sins and set him free from judgment and death. Paul's response? “I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise” (Rom. 1:14). Why was he indebted to them? The Greeks and barbarians hadn't died for him, nor had the wise or the unwise. But Christ had. The sacrifice of the Son of God on his behalf was so overwhelming to Paul that he felt he owed it to everyone to make sure they heard of God's redeeming love. His sense of indebtedness to Christ made him a debtor to all who needed the Savior.

We can't earn God's gift of love, but we have an obligation to share it with others who need Him.

By: Bill Crowder

**Keep me faithful, keep me grateful, This my earnest plea each day!
Keep me serving, keep me telling, Of His love while yet I may! —Thiesen**

We can never sacrifice too much for Him who sacrificed His all for us.

God has limitless ways of reaching people. So if you feel that you don't have the ability to reach others for Christ, think about 76-year-old Ethel Hatfield. Desiring to serve her Lord, she asked her pastor if she could teach a Sunday school class. He informed her that he thought she was too old! She went home heavy-hearted and disappointed.

Then one day as Ethel was tending her rose garden, a Chinese student from the nearby university stopped to comment on the beauty of her flowers. She invited him in for a cup of tea. As they talked together, she had the opportunity to tell him about Jesus and His love. He returned the next day with another student, and that was the beginning of Ethel's ministry.

Ethel was delighted to share the gospel of Christ with these students, because she knew He has the power to change lives. His gospel “is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

Precisely because of Ethel's age, Chinese students listened to her with respect and appreciation. When she died, a group of 70 Chinese believers sat together at her funeral. They had been won to Christ by a woman who was thought to be too old to teach a Sunday school class!

By: Vernon Grounds

**In the strength of the Lord let me labor and pray,
Let me watch as a winner of souls,
That bright stars may be mine in the glorious day
When His praise like the sea-billow rolls. —Hewitt**

No one is too old to be a witness for Christ.

AUG 31, TUESDAY Rom 1:18-2:16

The Wrath Of God

Rom 1:20

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Rom 1:18

Yesterday we read how Paul was eager to proclaim the Gospel - the great news of how God would make unrighteous people righteous. However, instead of developing this, we find, quite unexpectedly, the apostle writing at length about how hopelessly lost in sin humanity is and about God's wrath against sin. Paul realizes that the Gospel would only be desired by those who understood how badly they need it. Thus, before continuing to tell them the great news about righteousness by faith, he will begin with the bad news of human sin and God's wrath.

Humanity is under a damning indictment. They think it is unnecessary to know God appropriately (v 28) and have exchanged the proper worship of God with the worship of man-made images (vs 23, 25). They have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and consequently worship His creation rather than the Creator (v 25). This has led them to engage in unnatural relationships and indecent behavior (vs 24- 32). Ignorance of God is an inadmissible plea to this atrocity, for the invisible God has clearly revealed Himself to them in His creation (vs 19-20). Therefore, because of this inexcusable wickedness and godlessness, God's wrath is on humanity. God is not ambivalent towards evil, He abhors it. And His wrath is not capricious. It is the righteous judgment of a holy God on sinful people.

Sinners persist in their sin. So in punishment, God gave them up to their wicked ways. The consequence, as someone has written, is that they 'enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded and are therefore self-enslaved.' The list in 1:21-32 may not be a politically correct list. But it is God's list of what is unnatural and godless. Paul has good news for us. But before getting there, he needs to make us understand the state that we are in so that the Gospel will truly be good news to our ears.

**Pray for a recognition and acknowledgement of what is evil in our lives
and for God's strength to confess and repent.**

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

AUG 31, TUESDAY

Rom 1:18-2:16

Stirring The Wrath Of God

Rom 1:20

The Apostle Paul speaks the truth, just as the goodness of God was manifested (Acts 14:15-17). so now the wrath of God is revealed (v 18). The 'wrath of God' is God's inevitable response to godlessness and wickedness.

Man is created 'that [he] should seek God, in the hope that [he] might feel after Him and find Him' (Acts 17:27). However, in his quest, something went awry. In arrogance and self-wilfulness, we have organized our lives without any reference to this living God and have committed hideous sins of sexual immorality, idolatry and all forms of wickedness. Such detestable sins are not things of the past written in the pages of the Bible. They remain with us today.

Idolatry is everywhere. Instead of worshipping our Creator, we have lost sight of God and worship man-made images (v 23). We see them in our streets and market places: even our homes are often not free from idols. The wrath of God is upon these sins, which will result in our death.

But God in His love sent Jesus to appease that wrath, Jesus came to save human beings from the consequences of sin and from eternal death. To respond to His love means to turn away from our sinful desires and shameful practices and to give our lives over to Him. If we choose to be entertained by the ungodliness and wickedness of this age, we must be ready to face the consequences (vs 24-32).

**O Lord, in a permissive society that has little regard for Your law,
help us to be strong in faith, determined in our commitment and urgent in our evangelism.**

There are nine occurrences of the words 'judge' and 'judgement' in today's passage. They certainly form a strong theme.

Paul begins by exposing the hypocrisy of those who judge others even though they are no different themselves. Such hypocrisy violates Jesus' command, 'Judge not' (Matt 7:3-5). We need to be aware of the arrogance and self-righteousness in judging others. Even if we think we are right, we need to remember that our preferences and prejudices often color our judgement. Even legal history has revealed that the best of courts can err in their judgement. Man is therefore an imperfect judge.

In contrast, God is a perfect judge, and His judgement is fair (v 6) and impartial (vs 9- 11). He is not concerned about our ethnic origin, our church standing or our position in society. He weighs each action with full knowledge of every thought and intent of the heart. No motive is hidden from Him. Therefore He alone can judge. We should not think God is unruffled by the many wrongs and evil that have taken place.

Today's passage describes a future day of judgement as 'the day of God's wrath' (v 5). God will render to every man according to his works (v 6). Therefore, we should persist in doing good (v 7): we should not just hear but also obey and act. Then we will be declared righteous (v 13) in the day of judgement and He will stand with us in the dock as our Advocate.

Hannah's prayer will be most appropriate to wrap up our meditation today: 'Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance, for the Lord is a God who knows, and by Him deeds are weighed' (1 Sam 2:3).

"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

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