July to September 2014

(1) "Heaven" (Jul 1 to Aug 3) *(adapted from "Heaven" by E.M. Bounds)*
(2) "The Christian In The Home" (Aug 4 to 30)
(3) "Philippians" (Aug 31 to Sept 30)

by

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About the Author

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Those who are acquainted with God and Christ are already in the suburbs of life eternal. – Matthew Henry

WHO CAN TELL US OF HEAVEN?

Paul was caught up into paradise, the third heaven. There he heard unspeakable words, which were not lawful for a man to utter. We believe he also saw the unspeakable glories of Heaven which he was not permitted to disclose.

The dying martyr Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, saw Heaven open and Jesus standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55). One glimpse, then sweet sleep transported his soul into His glorious presence.

The mysteries of Heaven are fully revealed only to those who arrive there. On this side of eternity we see only dimly and know only in part. As it is written, *"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him"* (1 Cor 2:9). No man can tell us the things of Heaven. Many there be who claim to have seen and heard astounding things, following a close encounter with death, or on returning to life after "death." In these fascinating stories we have no confidence.

For us, we have a *"more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts"* (2 Pet 1:19). Only our Lord Jesus can tell us of Heaven.

To Nicodemus, Jesus said, *"If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven"* (John 3:12-13).

Seek, then, the Son of man, Jesus Christ the Lord. Seek Him as you would seek for hidden treasure; seek Him as men seek for the elixir of life; or as scientific researchers diligently seek a "cancer cure." Seek ye Him who alone can tell you of heavenly things, for He alone came down from Heaven.

THOUGHT: Only the Man from Heaven can tell me about Heaven.
PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes to behold wondrous things out of Thy law.

JESUS' TEACHING ON HEAVEN

Our Lord came from Heaven to preach the message of Heaven and to draw men to Heaven. From the time He began to preach, His message was, *"Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt 4:17). Heaven does not admit all and sundry. Entry is only by one door and one way: *"repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Acts 20:21). Jesus only is *"the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6).

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus began with Heaven: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 5:3). Only those who turn to God in utter poverty of spirit will gain admittance. Our Lord will fill their spiritual poverty and make them fit for Heaven. In Matthew 5:10, He said, "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* This leads on to verses 11 and 12: *"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

Our Lord left us in no doubt. He was not primarily concerned about men's social and material needs. He told His followers in plain terms: Heaven comes first, before anything else. Heaven is the focus of Jesus' teaching and ministry. It is the ultimate goal of discipleship. The righteousness of His followers must exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, if they hope for Heaven and its glories (Matt 5:20).

Reader, do you aspire to Heaven? Come to the Lord Jesus and learn from Him. Learn to be like Him in character and conduct. *"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"* (Matt 5:48).

THOUGHT: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matt 6:33)

PRAYER: Lord, may I be sure of my place in Heaven according to Thy Word.

HEAVEN IS A PLACE

"If you should see a man shut up in a closed room, idolizing a set of oil lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wished to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps; and then throw open the windows and let in the light of heaven" (Samuel Rutherford).

The need of the world, and the need of every man, is Heaven's light. Without that light, men grope in darkness. They can never find the way to God, and Heaven. They may gain the whole world and lose their souls, and what a great loss it is!

Heaven is a place. It is a place prepared by God for prepared people. The question is: are you prepared? Some do not think it matters, Heaven or no Heaven. They tell themselves: death ends it all. That is wishful thinking. Death does not, cannot, end it all. At death, the body ends in the grave, but not the soul. There is more, much more!

At death, the soul prepared for Heaven arrives in Heaven, instantly. It is the place prepared by God for those who trust in His Son. Heaven is not imagination; it is not thin air, floating around. No, Heaven does not float around. It is God's country for God's people. It has a climate of its own, a population of its own, a government of God.

Yes, Heaven is a place, a reality, a location. Unlike Earth, it is permanent, indestructible, eternal. We know this from divine assurance. The One who came from Heaven said so. The man Jesus who once walked among men is now there. He is there preparing a place for believers (John 14:2). He is waiting to welcome you, if you believe. Come to Jesus today!

THOUGHT: *"... I go to prepare a place for you."* (John 14:2)
PRAYER: Lord, open my heart that I may believe.

Nothing is more foolish than a security built upon the world and its promises. – Matthew Henry

HEAVEN IS A SECURE PLACE

Unlike Earth, Heaven is stable, secure, permanent. It is not subject to change and decay. Abraham saw it. By faith *"he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb 11:10). Heaven is also called *"a better country"* (Heb 11:16), better than Earth, far, far better! Indeed, there is no comparison.

Earth is a "pilgrim country," a desert land, a wilderness through which we must pass. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we sojourn here *"as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles."* Shortly, we strike tent and end our earthly days. Then we bid farewell to family and friends, leaving behind the lumber and luggage accumulated along the way. Our time on Earth has passed away. *"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come"* (Heb 13:14).

Hope then in Heaven, not in Earth! Heaven is for ever, for keeps. It is permanent, God-planned, God-built, God-prepared. Its foundation is stable, as stable as God's throne. This City has dimensions, with appointed metes and bounds. It has a wall to keep out undesirables. *"For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie"* (Rev 22:15). Heaven admits only heavenly people.

Heaven's builder is God Himself. There He sits enthroned, in supreme control. His government is absolutely irresistible. Nothing that defiles or disrupts can ever enter in. There the redeemed of God may dwell in safety and security together with our Lord Jesus, who has *"all power ... in heaven and in earth"* (Matt 28:18). If you hope in Him, He will give you a place in Heaven. Will you?

THOUGHT: *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."* (John 14:1)
PRAYER: Lord I believe; help thou my unbelief.

HEAVEN IS THE PARADISE OF GOD

Today the glory and mystery of paradise remains hidden to human gaze. Only the Apostle Paul was allowed a glimpse when he was caught up to the third heaven. In paradise, he heard *"unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter"* (2 Cor 12:4). But that fleeting visit to God's House was sufficient consolation to ease his earthly burdens. Nevertheless, for him and every true saint of God, *"to be with Christ ... is far better"* (Phil 1:23). I long for Heaven daily, don't you?

Paradise is Heaven, a place of eminent distinction and unsurpassed beauty, the abode of God and the holy angels, and the place where our Lord Jesus was returning to, as He spoke His last words on the cross. While the mob jeered at the Son of God, hanging in agony between two thieves, *"one of the malefactors ... railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us"* (Luke 23:39).

But the other thief rebuked him, and said to Jesus, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"* (Luke 23:42). In his dying moments, this man found repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and put his hope in the Saviour. By a look of faith he found grace in the sight of God, and Jesus said unto him, *"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). Amazing salvation!

Paradise admits all who come to God by faith in Jesus Christ His Son. Robbers and thieves, sinners of foulest stain, find pardon and forgiveness in the soul-cleansing blood of Calvary's Lamb. Come, then, every sin-oppressed sinner. Be washed and made fit for Paradise. By faith in Jesus you too may enter, today!

THOUGHT: *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us ..."* (Titus 3:5)
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for making it possible for me to enter Heaven.

HEAVEN IS A CITY

"If contentment were here, heaven were not heaven. I wonder that ever a child of God should have a sad heart, considering what his Lord is preparing for him. I know not a thing worth buying but heaven" (Samuel Rutherford).

John the Apostle saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, designed by God and built by God. Only God's people will be allowed in. Why should this be? Because only those who have received the heavenly life from God will be able to live there. Only those who have been washed and cleansed by the blood of the Lamb may enter in.

"There is a City bright,
Closed are its gates to sin;
Naught that defileth,
Naught that defileth,
Can ever enter in.

Saviour, I come to Thee!
O Lamb of God I pray,
Cleanse me and save me,
Cleanse me and save me,
Wash all my sins away."

— Mary Ann Deck (1813 - 1902)

In God's city, He will dwell with the redeemed. They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. In God's city, the sorrows and corruptions of earth shall be no more: for the former things are passed away. But the unbelievers, and the Christ-rejectors, and unrepentant sinners, shall be cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Rev 20:15).

THOUGHT: God's city will be pure unending delight.
PRAYER: Lord, equip me for life in Thy city.

"Ever" is a short word, but it has no end. – Thomas Watson

HEAVEN IS A CONTINUING CITY

The ideal city is a symbol of communal life with its joys, perfections and fulfilments. Families and societies of people dwell together in goodwill, harmony, fellowship and love. Above all the ideal city is blessed with peace and prosperity. Does such a city exist on earth? Sadly, the answer is no. Nothing endures on earth since the curse fell in Eden's Garden (Gen 3). The only thing that endures is "change and decay." The happiest of family relationships, the best of youthful health and vigour, the peace and prosperity of the ideal country, all these, sooner or later, like all good things, come to an end. Earth's fairest flowers fade away, its brightest blooms wither in all too short a day. Why then do you hope in earth?

Earth under God's curse cannot satisfy man's deepest desires. No matter what he does, no matter where he goes, his steps are pursued by change and decay, disease and death. Should he be blessed with long life of *"fourscore years"* his experience is merely one of *"labour and sorrow"* (Ps 90:10).

Wisdom therefore demands that we look beyond earth for the ultimate and lasting satisfaction. To pin one's hopes and aspirations on earth is sheer folly. Like faithful Abraham, see ourselves *"as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles… strangers and pilgrims…"* (Heb 11:9, 13). *"For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"* (Heb 11:10). Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. The Negro spiritual says: "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through." How true!

Heaven is different. Heaven has foundations; it is designed and built by God, prepared for those who trust in His Son. It is a continuing city, in which our inheritance is reserved, *"... incorruptible ... undefiled ... fadeth not away ..."* (1 Pet 1:4).

THOUGHT: In Heaven, all good things continue, for ever. Will I be there?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for the Eternal City that you have prepared for me.

Heaven begins where sin ends.
– Thomas Adams

HEAVEN IS THE HOLY CITY

No city on earth is holy, for the whole world is under the power and dominion of Satan, the prince of this world. Only God's city is holy.

Isaiah was given a vision of the Lord of Heaven, sitting upon His throne, high and lifted up. And the seraphims which serve Him cried one to another, *"Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory"* (Isa 6:3).

In Heaven, God reigns in absolute holiness. Heaven reflects His purity and holiness: hence it is the holy city. Nothing which defiles or corrupts can gain an entrance there. Only those who are holy and righteous may enter in. The angel of the Apocalypse said to John the Apostle, *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city"* (Rev 22:14). These are they who have obeyed the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have been washed in His blood (Rev 7:14).

Many churches today preach another gospel. As early as February 1991, the World Council of Churches, at its 7th World Assembly in Canberra, declared that all faiths are acceptable with God. Such false teaching will lead many astray. We must believe only what God tells us in His Word. Not all faiths will lead to God and Heaven. Only those who come to Jesus for cleansing, and are made holy, will gain admission to the holy city. These have their names written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev 21:27). But the fearful, and the unbelieving (Rev 21:8), and any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie shall be allowed into the holy city (Rev 21:27).

And whosoever is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15).

THOUGHT: The holy city is for holy people.
PRAYER: Lord, purify me, and make me holy.

HEAVEN IS A CITY OF LIFE

Heaven is a city of life, life of a different kind, life which knows no ending, life beyond the reach of death. It is life from God, the source and giver of life. It is life beyond the reach of age and decay, of sickness and ill health. It is eternal life. Eternal life is unrestricted by time and circumstances, untouched by the corruption of earth.

Heaven's scenery is absolutely unblemished; the landscape is not marred by tombstones and cemeteries. The songs of Heaven are ever joyous and delightful. Requiems and mournful dirges are never heard, and graves have never been dug there. Life in Heaven is glorious beyond imagination. It is unspoilt by sorrow, pain and tears: God has wiped these away.

Life in Heaven is one unbroken harmony of unity and togetherness. Earth is plagued by discord, and separation. Heaven knows no parting. It is the *"beloved city"* (Rev 20:9), the city of lovely and loving people in whose hearts is no ill will or hatred. In Heaven, friends and loved ones find sweet reunion in a permanent home. Centuries have come and gone since weary pilgrims of earth found welcome rest in the beloved city.

Heaven is a city of love: it is filled with God's love — pure, selfless, divine love. None ever departs to go out of the city: God's love binds all in one. This love makes life in the city pleasant beyond words, for God Himself is the life. In Heaven, we live life in its fullness, with unbounded vigour and supreme joy. This is God's plan and intention for His people. He conceived its matchless design; His Son paid the price for us; the Spirit effects the transaction of this amazing gift, that the redeemed of God may enter into the city.

THOUGHT: In Heaven we have life unending at its abundant best.
PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful and fit for the city of life.

Those who have the new Jerusalem in their eye must have the ways that lead to it in their heart. – Matthew Henry

HEAVEN IS THE NEW JERUSALEM

On earth, no city is quite like Jerusalem, the holy city to Jews, Muslims and Christians. Jerusalem is the centre of Jewish hopes. Over the centuries, the hearts of the Jews were there. Over nearly 2,000 years of the diaspora (worldwide dispersion), they never forgot their beloved city. In exile, they sang no songs but dirges and mournful psalms. At prayer, their windows were opened toward Jerusalem. *"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning ... if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy" (*Ps 137:5).

As the earthly Jerusalem is to the Jews, so is the heavenly Jerusalem to the people of God, only more! Heaven ought to be far, far more precious to us who are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. With intense desire may we long for Heaven. *"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"* (2 Cor 5:2). *"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come"* (Heb 13:14). As strangers and pilgrims on earth, we look for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:13, 10).

By faith, our looking and seeking will not be in vain. God is even now making ready the New Jerusalem, *"prepared as a bride adorned for her husband"* (Rev 21:2). It will be a city which hath foundations, steadfast, secure, and firmly established, our everlasting city. It will be the capital of the King. All power and authority, majesty and dominion, magnificence and splendour, will be concentrated in the New Jerusalem. There will be the throne of God, the twenty-four elders, and the angelic hosts, *"and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"* (Rev 5:11). There shall we gather in holy worship: worship of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in the New Jerusalem.

THOUGHT: Will I be there? If not, where?
PRAYER: Lord, may I be ever ready for the New Jerusalem.

HEAVEN HAS MANY MANSIONS

On the eve of His death, our Lord Jesus had a last, most important conversation with His disciples. They were sorrowful, deeply troubled, depressed by the fact of His leaving them. Jesus, the God of all comfort, spoke comforting words*: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you"* (John 14:1-2).

Mansions in God's Heaven surpass and excel the best on earth. For the disciples' comfort and consolation, our Lord revealed the promise of a place, a home, prepared for them. This was the solace to the sorrowing disciples. Every parting of friends is painful. But our Lord's parting had a purpose that soothed the pain. His going away was for their good: *"I go to prepare a place."* Not just any sort of place, but heavenly mansions, superior God-designed, custom-built princely palaces!

Nothing can be simpler, more plain, more downright honest and "matter of fact" than this revelation of Christ's purpose and plan. In effect He was saying, "Earth is a temporary place where we have been abiding. We can abide here no longer, but we must be on our way. Good-bye, perishing earth! Welcome, Heaven's glory! Up there with God are many abiding places. I go to prepare a place for you. When it is ready, I will come and take you there, that where I am, there ye may be also. And once re-united, we shall never part again!"

And how can we know that Heaven's mansions are for real? Simply because He who promised always spoke the truth, and only the truth. His promise began to be fulfilled in His resurrection, and His ascension. As He said He would die and rise again, so He did. As He said, *"I will come again,"* so we look for His return! He will gather us to His Father's house, and His many mansions!

THOUGHT: All His promises are yea and amen.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for including me.

Nothing is more contrary to a heavenly hope, than an earthly heart. – William Gurnall

HEAVEN IS OUR HOME (1)

Heaven is home to *"…a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues…"* (Rev 7:9). Home is where every family loves to be, together in peace and harmony. But homes on earth come and go: sooner or later, its happiness is shattered by sickness, accident, parting and death. Our home in Heaven is different: it is beyond the reach of earth's corruption and change. It is one perfect, blissful, complete, happy family, never to be diminished or disrupted.

In Heaven, we shall be singing songs of salvation to our God, who sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb. In Heaven, our travelling days will be over. The glorified saints will not be pilgrims and sojourners, visitors or tenants, but settled, permanently titled and established in mansion abodes. There will not be renters or lessees in Heaven; only property-holders and home-owners. And you need pay nothing, for it comes by an inheritance!

Even more wonderful, our home in Heaven is ours even before we get there! How do we know? God says so, of course! 1 Peter 1:4 tells us clearly that our inheritance is *"reserved in heaven for you,"* and for me! God has inscribed our names of ownership, engraved on our heavenly homes. Knowing this must change our whole outlook on life and our attitude toward the world. Indeed, such knowledge is too wonderful for me! Our broken "dream homes" on earth must make us yearn and long for our home in Heaven. If so, death holds no terror for the believer, but becomes a gateway to the home beyond.

Can you echo the words of Paul? *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"* (2 Cor 5:8).

THOUGHT: Am I sure that my name is written in heaven?
PRAYER: Lord, make me to long for Heaven, my home.

We are like little children strayed from home, and God is now fetching us home. – Richard Baxter

HEAVEN IS OUR HOME (2)

The Christian is bound to Heaven by seven golden links.

1. Our Father: He is there, seated on His "glory-circled throne" surrounded by twenty-four elders clothed in white, and the angelic spirits saying, *"Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come"* (Rev 4:8).
2. Our Saviour: He is there to appear in the presence of God for us (Heb 9:24). *"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"* (Heb 7:25).
3. Our name: Our name is there. Our Lord said, *"…rejoice, because your names are written in heaven"* (Luke 10:20). None whose name is not written in Heaven shall enter therein: *"but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Rev 21:27).
4. Our life: Our life is there. The Apostle Paul exhorted us to set our affection on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, for *"…your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ ... shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Col 3:3-4).
5. Our heart: Our heart is there (Matt 6:19-21). The true child of God lays up treasures in Heaven, beyond the reach of moth, rust and thieves, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."*
6. Our inheritance: Our inheritance is there (1 Pet 1:3-5). The Christian is begotten *"…unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven…"*
7. Our citizenship: Our citizenship is there (Phil 3:20-21). *"For our conversation* (citizenship) *is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile* (mortal) *body…"* like unto His glorious body, and thus be fitted for Heaven.

THOUGHT: Am I sure of my place in Heaven?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for reserving a place in Heaven for me.

Whenever thou meetest a Christian, he is going to heaven. – William Gurnall

LONGING FOR HOME

A dying man wrote this letter to his pastor:

"Next Sunday you are speaking about Heaven. I long for Heaven because I have held a title to a property there for over fifty-five years. It was given to me by the Donor who purchased it for me at great cost. For more than half a century I have been sending materials to my future home.

The great Architect and Builder of the Universe has been preparing a place for me (John 14:1-3) which will never run down or grow old and out of date. No termites or fire or flood can ever touch it. It has no locks upon its doors, for no thieves can ever enter Heaven. I believe my house in Heaven is now almost ready, and shortly I expect to settle in permanently, rent-free, and no rates to pay.

There is a valley of deep shadow between my present home and Heaven. I cannot reach my home in God's City without passing through that dark valley. But my Friend who gave me my future home went through the same valley, and drove away the gloom. He assures me that He will never leave me or forsake me. He will be my companion to guide me all the way.

I hope to hear your sermon on Heaven on the radio next Sunday from my home in Los Angeles, but I have no assurance that I shall be able to do so. My ticket to Heaven is open-dated, one-way, and no baggage allowed. Yes, I am all ready to go, any time the call should come. While you prepare your sermon, be assured I shall be praying for you. Of course there is no telling whether I shall be here next Sunday. But one thing is sure: I shall meet you in Heaven - one day. God bless you."

THOUGHT: In Heaven - no parting!
PRAYER: Lord, make me always ready for Heaven.

Heaven must be in thee before thou canst be in heaven.
– George Swinnock

WHERE JESUS IS 'TIS HEAVEN

Samuel Rutherford, the great saint of God of the 16th century, magnified his Saviour from his prison cell with these words: "I never believed till now that there was so much to be found in Christ on this side of heaven. O the delights of heavenly joy which may be had here, in the small tokens and comforts that fall from Christ!"

If Jesus meant so much to the gifted and holy Samuel Rutherford, languishing in banishment, what must He be to those in Heaven? What unspeakable joy and overwhelming delight are in store for His redeemed people on that glad day when they shall be ushered into His presence, to behold Him "*face to face.*" Then shall all tears be wiped away and all of earth's sorrows be erased.

What material blessings accompany the heavenly life we cannot tell, but whatever they be, they will be of the purest and most exquisite nature. But these and other comforts are not the essence of Heaven. The focus of life and joy in Heaven will be the person and presence of the exalted Christ, our ascended Lord and Redeemer. He who gave Himself a ransom to buy us back to God will be the centre of delight in Heaven. Without Him, no Heaven!

There in the magnificence and splendour of Heaven, Jesus the Great Shepherd of the sheep will be with us, to lead and to feed us in a way we cannot now even begin to appreciate. But we are sure that He will show us new and living fountains of bliss and knowledge which earth knows nothing of. To live with Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us, will be the crowning glory and happiness of all eternity. In Heaven, we shall see the beauty of the King.

THOUGHT: "Where Jesus is, 'Tis Heaven there!" (Charles Butler)
PRAYER: Lord, lead me onward and upward day by day.

The wicked have a never-dying worm and the godly a never-fading crown.
– Thomas Watson

AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN

Paul the Apostle compared the Christian experience to the self-denial and extreme efforts of competitors in the Isthmian games, forerunner of our modern Olympics. How greatly were those athletes of ancient Greece excited and motivated by the floral crown. To win those perishable crowns no toils were deemed too hard, no efforts too demanding. Those men, women and youths had noble ambition and high purpose. They were followers of the cult of physical fitness and excellence.

Now we are followers of the Lord of life and the King of the everlasting kingdom. How goes our discipleship in comparison? For us is promised a better crown, an incorruptible crown, a crown of lasting glory. The Apostle, having that imperishable crown in view said, *"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection..."* (1 Cor 9:26-27).

We are entered into the same race. Do we also see the promised crown and press forward to obtain it? The race is uphill and long. It is not won in a day, or by half-hearted effort. But the prize makes it worthwhile. The Apostles saw it that way, and after them countless others have completed the race with honour. They are our best encouragement. *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith ..."* (Heb 12:1-2). For Jesus, it was the way of the cross. For us, can it be anything less? Let us press on!

THOUGHT: Following Jesus means "cross before crown."
PRAYER: Lord, help me to deny self and take up my cross daily, and follow Thee.

There is nothing but heaven worth setting our hearts upon. – Richard Baxter

HEAVEN IS "THE LIFE"

Life in all its fulness is unknown this side of Heaven. On earth we speak of the "good life" and "quality of life" in earthling terms, under the shadow of approaching death. We are reminded by the words of wisdom: *"Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away"* (James 4:14). Moses, the man of God, summed up life as *"labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away"* (Ps 90:10). How true!

In all thy quest for life, then, seek ardently and urgently the life above! Be wise, and *"seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth ... When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Col 3:1-4). This "life" is the central theme of Heaven, its fundamental concept. It promises untiring enjoyments, ever-satisfying employments and unspeakable blessings in the presence of God.

Today we declare the Gospel message, urging men and women to come to Jesus, *"the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6). The Saviour makes this incomparable offer: *"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10). What it shall be is not revealed today. But God's Word gives assurance and comfort: *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2). In that day, we shall be changed to be like Him, to have a share in His life, "the life."

THOUGHT: "Quality life" is only in Heaven. Do I have it?
PRAYER: Lord, help me to set my sight on Heaven and not on things of this world.

If God lights the candle, none can blow it out. – C.H. Spurgeon

THE EARNEST OF HEAVEN

But for the blessed Holy Spirit, we would have no desire or longing for Heaven, let alone a place in Heaven. It is only by the kindness and love of God, and by the washing of regeneration of the Holy Spirit that we are made heirs of God and given the hope of Heaven (Titus 3:4-5). This is part of God's salvation plan. Ponder the words of the Apostle Paul: *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory"* (Eph 1:13-14).

The Holy Spirit in us is said to be the earnest of Heaven our inheritance. What do we understand by this? The *"earnest"* is the security and assurance of something yet future. The Holy Spirit now indwelling and working in us is the certainty of the Heaven to come. It is the Holy Spirit who seals us, implants in our hearts the taste of Heaven, raises in us the ambition for Heaven, and empowers us to toil for Heaven in the midst of earth's distractions, disappointments and discouragements. It is the Holy Spirit who kept Abraham faithful and steadfast in following Christ to the end without wavering.

Pray, dear reader, for Holy Spirit anointing and enlightenment. Then we too shall be given faith to sojourn on earth *"as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles"* (Heb 11:9), then we shall see the Heavenly City afar off, and be fully persuaded of God's promises (Heb 11:13), never to return to the perishing world. Praise be unto God the Father, and to Jesus Christ His Son, for giving us the best gift, the Holy Spirit Comforter! He is the surety and certainty of our everlasting inheritance in Heaven.

THOUGHT: (Read Luke 11:13 and act on it!)
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, fill me with Thy Holy Spirit.

The road is not to be complained of, as it leads to such a home. – John Newton

CHILDREN AND HEIRS

Coming into the family of God is the blessing that exceeds all blessings. This is by no merit or effort of our own, but it is all of God's mercy. Let us give thanks with the Apostle Peter: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy bath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Pet 1:3-4).

Inasmuch as no one can give birth to himself, a Christian is begotten only by God, through the working of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul says, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God ... ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ ..."* (Rom 8:14-17).

As *"joint-heirs with Christ"* we are admitted to the heavenly inheritance, even the glory which He has with God the Father at whose right hand He sits, *"*(f)*ar above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion ... And hath put all things under his feet ..."* (Eph 1:21-22). What our share as children and heirs will be cannot now be imagined, but it will be something far beyond our most ambitious dreams.

Children and heirs are called to labour for the King today. *"For we are labourers together with God..."* (1 Cor 3:9). As filial sons and daughters of the Heavenly King, let us give Him our very best!

THOUGHT: Children are also servants.
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, make me a filial child.

Heaven is not a lease which soon expires, but an inheritance. – Thomas Watson

HEAVEN IS OUR INHERITANCE

In Matthew 19:27 and 29, Peter asked the Lord, *"Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?"* In reply, our Lord said, *"And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."*

Peter had doubts and anxious fears. The Spirit of God gave him words of assurance for the flock committed to him. Following Jesus was not in vain.

Then, Peter could write: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"* (1 Pet 1:3-4). Now Peter appreciated what Jesus meant by *"everlasting life."*

In God's abundant mercy, we are born again into God's family to become children, with the glorious prospect of an inheritance in the future.

The Apostle Paul had similar instruction for us: *"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ…"* (Rom 8:17). In Christ, we have obtained an inheritance (Eph 1:11), and are sealed with the Holy Spirit, the earnest of our inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

Dear reader, fellow believer in Christ, do you sometimes wonder like the early disciple Peter, *"What shall we have therefore?"* Pray, and not doubt! Pray that *"the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation… that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints"* (Eph 1:17-18).

Now we understand why Heaven cannot be earned or bought. It is an inheritance! It is only for children and heirs.

THOUGHT: How can I become an heir of God?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for my inheritance.

"OUR FATHER WHICH ART IN HEAVEN"

Heaven is the Father's dwelling place; the very place itself receives its glory from the Father. The Father's name and dwelling place are to be hallowed. Heaven is not only the home of God, it is to be the pattern after which earth is to be fashioned. Earth ought to constantly look to Heaven – its harmony, its beauty, its purity – and learn from it. But earth finds pleasure in its own fashions, and forgets the higher and better place above. Earth, divorced from Heaven and estranged, is doomed.

Jesus keeps the perspective of Heaven ever before us. *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Col 3:2). Earth is unsafe! Thieves flourish, treasures are lost. Moths are here: finest silks and costliest robes are eaten up. Rust is here: metals corrode and rot away. Have no confidence on earth! It is a very insecure place. Heaven is different: it is a place of absolute safety. There the Father is in supreme control. Thieves are never there. Robberies never happen there. Moths cannot enter Heaven, neither corroding rust. In God's heaven, all is securely kept by His almighty power, forever secure. There the Father's good will is perfectly obeyed.

How well do you know the Father in Heaven? Do you know Him as <u>your</u> Father, through His only begotten Son? If you know Him, do you love Him as <u>your</u> Father? Do you love Him as a little child? Our Lord says, *"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt 18:3-4). Be converted, therefore, and become as a little child. Then love the Father with all filial love, seeking the smile of His face daily in prayer: *"Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name"* (Matt 6:9).

THOUGHT: God is still on the throne, and remembers His own.
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, have mercy and compassion on me.

Heaven's number of glorified saints is made up of justified saints. – William Gurnall

"THE FORMER THINGS ARE PASSED AWAY"

The Apostle Paul, labouring under the burdens of this life, wrote in his letter to the Philippian Christians, *"to be with Christ; which is far better"* (Phil 1:23). He had seen through the futility and deception of this passing world, with its empty pleasures, and allurements. Today we are inevitably exposed to the material and sensual, the physical and carnal things around us. We are gripped, captivated, enamoured by them - naturally. To continue and remain captive is fatal. We need to be set free, to say no to all this, for shortly the child of God will see in Heaven that all these *"former things"* will have *"passed away."*

But we must free ourselves from the bondage of these *"former things"* now! And this comes only by the aid of the Holy Spirit. We can only be set free from the hold of earthly things with God's help - supernaturally. Forget the glitter of the material and physical. Pray for Holy Spirit eye-sight to see through their transient, fleeting character. See yourself with "time-added change" — counting your days in some retirement home. Consider the intensive care unit in the most modern hospital filled with heart by-pass or cancer patients, each one hopefully wishing for more healthful days.

See the vigour of youth, the pleasures of life, the pride of possessions, as deadly snares of earth. Once arrived in the Heavenly realm, we shall look back and thank God for delivering us from those *"former things."* But the genius is to see the present things as *"former things"* — NOW! This is only possible with Holy Spirit illumination. Pray therefore, "O Holy Spirit, my Teacher and Comforter, show me Heaven's glory now, and deliver me from the world's seductive snare."

THOUGHT: *"... to be with Christ; which is far better."* (Phil 1:23)
PRAYER: Father in Heaven, open my eyes to see the futility of *"former things"* now.

"I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW"

Heaven will be a new and unimaginable experience. The redeemed will enter as new people into a new world. The sadness and corruptions of earth will be forever left behind: for the former things are passed away. *"Behold, I make all things new"* (Rev 21:5). We shall have new thinking, new perception, and new orientation. Earthly experiences of age and change, of labour and sorrow, of sickness and death, and a host of other earthly things shall be no more: they have become things of the past.

"Behold, I make all things new," says our Creator God. He who once created will create a second time, and the new creation will never be tarnished by sin again, for ever! Pause awhile and ponder its implications. God's eternal realm is beyond the ravages of time and age! Heaven knows no ageing and decay, no "wear and tear." Words such as repair, repaint, recycle, renew, rejuvenate, will not be in the vocabulary of Heaven. All things will be made new, and remain new, perfectly, forever!

God's Heaven will abound with surprises without end. It will be a new, new world, prepared by God for new people (2 Cor 5:17). It will be a new life, a new environment, new employments, new language, new ways of communication, new relationships. We shall be in the presence of God, to serve Him with new and pure worship. We shall sing a new song, saying, *"Thou art worthy ... for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation"* (Rev 5:9). Our everlasting song will be: *"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessings"* (Rev 5:12), for He has made all things new!

THOUGHT: Christ is the only way to Heaven. Have I been redeemed to God by the blood of the Lamb?
PRAYER: Lord, lift my eyes heavenward even when I sojourn on earth.

HEAVEN HAS NO NIGHT

What it will be in Heaven we cannot now imagine or comprehend, but we know it will be *"joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (1 Pet 1:8), for we shall be in the very company and presence of the Lord. And what does the Psalmist David say? *"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore"* (Ps 16:11).

Heaven, we are told, has no night. Why is this so? We can think of two reasons.

1. If God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5), and we are always in His presence (Rev 22:4), how can there be the darkness of night in Heaven?

2. Night is an accompaniment of earth, a feature of the old creation. As part of the 24-hour day/night cycle, night was designed by our all-wise Maker for daily rest: the day's work is followed by the night's rest. In Heaven, earth's toil and travail are forever over, and night has for ever lost its usefulness.

No night with its dark shadow hangs as a pall over the Heavenly City. It will be the City of Light, forever free from the shades of night. In Heaven, we need *"…no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light…"* (Rev 22:5). Try and visualize a city without lamp-posts or flood-lights, and houses devoid of any lighting appliance, and for that matter, devoid of bedrooms and beds!

In our present mortal state, we find all this bewildering and hard to grasp. But God's Word helps to clarify: *"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"* (1 John 3:2). We shall all be changed!

THOUGHT: The City of Light is the City of Delight.
PRAYER: Lord, equip me now for the City above.

Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset. – Thomas Watson

THERE SHALL BE NO MORE CURSE

The whole creation is under curse, the judicial sentence of the Almighty Creator in Eden's Garden. In the Genesis 3 record, we have the explanation for the present chaotic and unsettled state of the world, the social and medical problems which defy solution, and the occurrence of natural disasters around the globe. All these are the manifestations of "death" and "curse" in its many facets.

The Apostle Paul refers to this curse as the cause of the world's problems in Romans 5:12: *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* He amplifies: *"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now ... waiting for the adoption, to wit* (that is), *the redemption of our body"* (Rom 8:22-23). Left to himself, man has no cure for the ills of the world.

It was for this reason that Christ came. The Creator Himself came to pay the price of our redemption, and the redemption of the whole creation. *"For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"* (Rom 5:19). On the cross, Jesus Christ the righteous became *"the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). By His death *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us ..."* (Gal 3:13). He took the curse away.

While the price of sin has been paid at Calvary, the work of redemption having been *"finished"* (John 19:30), nevertheless the curse will not be fully and finally removed until we arrive in Heaven. The cursed and corrupted earth is destined for destruction (2 Pet 3:10; Rev 21:1). In the new creation (*"Behold, I make all things new,"* Rev 21:5), there shall be no more curse. Righteousness, goodness, joy and peace shall reign for ever and ever.

THOUGHT: Have I too been delivered from the curse?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy salvation so great and free.

KINGS AND PRIESTS OF GOD

Earth has no insight into the exalted glories which await the redeemed in Heaven, no conception of the grandeur of salvation won by Jesus on the cross. Today's readings from Revelation tell one story: all who come in faith to Jesus for salvation shall be made kings and priests unto God the Father, admitted into the service of the Most High. This is the everlasting employment of the saints of God.

"... and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev 22:3-4). Service of the most exalted kind will be our lot in Heaven. It will be one unending harmony of praise, with never a discordant note. *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth"* (Rev 5:9-10). Our service for God will be both on earth and in heaven.

For those who have followed the Lord faithfully to the end, *"…God is not ashamed to be called their God…"* (Heb 11:16), but owns them by sealing them with His name on their foreheads. Thus shall we forever bear the sign of His ownership, the distinctive mark of loyalty and consecration to God. God Himself, without the help of any priest or bishop, without any man-made ritual or ceremony, shall confer on each one the honour of royal appointment as kings and priests. May the Apostle Paul's words encourage today's suffering saints: *"... the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* (Rom 8:18).

THOUGHT: Think of our royal appointment: OHMS (On His Majesty's Service)!
PRAYER: Lord, keep me serving Thee joyfully and faithfully on earth till I reach my heavenly Home.

We must be saints on earth if we ever mean to be saints in heaven. – J.C. Ryle

"A PILLAR IN THE TEMPLE"

Following Jesus as a faithful Christian and true believer, enduring to the end, has its reward. In His message to the church in Philadelphia, the Lord Jesus says, *"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out…"* (Rev 3:11-12).

Savour the meaning of those words! Here is a promise from our Lord.

A glorious reward awaits the believer:

1. The Lord Jesus will make the believer a pillar in the temple of God, meaning to say, the victorious Christian will be accorded a place of honour in Heaven as a stately pillar, a memorial to the saving grace of God, an everlasting testimony that he belongs to that vast assembly of those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation (Rev 5:9).

2. On this monumental pillar will be added an honourable inscription of the name of God and the new name of Christ (Rev 3:12). Because the believer has overcome the seductions and temptations of the world, and has steadfastly looked for the heavenly city, God is not ashamed to be called his God (Heb 11:16), and to own him as His child. On him, God will write His name to acknowledge his discipleship, his labours in the church, his steadfastness in tribulation, his earnest contending.

Also inscribed will be the new name of Christ, the Risen One, the Captain of our salvation, the Firstborn among many brethren (Rom 8:29). This new name acknowledges the Christian's devotion to his Saviour, *"whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls"* (1 Pet 1:8-9).

THOUGHT: Following Jesus today is not in vain. I must keep on following!
PRAYER: Lord, help me not to give up in the face of adversities, but to be faithful to Thee to the end.

A THRONE, A RIVER, A TREE

In this vision, the Apostle John sees a pure river of water of life, flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, and on either side of the river the tree of life. Here we see God's final answer and solution to man's problem, even the curse of Adam's fall, which has plagued the human race down through the millennia of time. Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. A Throne. On the throne sits the Father and the Son, reigning together over the universe. Out of the throne proceed power, rule and authority. Out of the same throne, once came forth the Son from the Father's bosom, to implement salvation's plan. The ever-victorious Son, now returned to the Father, sits exalted at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3). Out of the throne issues God's complete and perfect provision for man's eternal happiness and well-being.

2. A River. God's river flows out of the throne with life-giving water: clear as crystal, beautiful, sparkling, pure. God's water is refreshing, inviting, invigorating. *"... let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely"* (Rev 22:17). This same offer was given once by our Lord to the Samaritan woman: *"But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:14).

3. A Tree. This tree of life was lost in the garden (Gen 3:24). But Christ our Lord has won back Paradise for us, and with it the tree of life, with its unique life-giving fruits, twelve manner of fruits, one for each month. And the leaves are for the healing of the nations: God's cure for the serpent's curse. At last, Adam's fall is recovered. Praise be unto our God!

Alleluia! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!

THOUGHT: Here we see the final fulfilment of Genesis 3:15.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy great salvation plan.

And walls of salvation surround
the soul He delights to defend.
– Augustus M. Toplady

THE WALLS AND GATES OF HEAVEN

Walls and gates speak of safety and security. Walls surround and protect; gates are vital check-points. The Heavenly City has strong walls and gates: our God ordered it to be so, so that the citizens of Heaven may dwell in safety. We are bought at a great price (1 Cor 6:20), redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19). Our Redeemer has saved us and we belong to Him. He will never allow us to come to any harm. Remember His promise? *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand"* (John 10:28). His salvation is strong and sure. Isaiah the prophet wrote of it: *"We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks"* (Isa 26:1). Heaven's walls are great and high, made of jasper, precious and strong.

Heaven has twelve gates, each of one pearl, of unrivalled beauty, excellence, and strength. Through these gates, Heaven's inhabitants may go in and out with complete safety. These gates are securely guarded by angels: not anyone may enter at will. Only those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, who do His commandments may enter in through the gates into the City (Rev 22:14). But excluded and forever kept out are *"dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie"* (Rev 22:15). Only those whose names *"are written in the Lamb's book of life"* (Rev 21:27) may enter in. Within the City, the redeemed of God shall find perfect and complete bliss. Our Lord says, *"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out ..."* (Rev 3:12).

Isaiah saw it when he wrote: *"Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise"* (Isa 60:18).

THOUGHT: "With salvation's wall surrounded, thou mayst smile at all thy foes." (John Newton)
PRAYER: May I daily see Thee and my heavenly Home with my mind's eyes as I live unto Thee on earth.

Without God, heaven would be no heaven. – William S. Plumer

IN HEAVEN JESUS REIGNS

In Heaven our Lord Jesus sits enthroned *"on the right hand of the Majesty on high"* (Heb 1:3). For thus saith the Lord, *"The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ..."* (Isa 66:1). There our Lord, the second Adam, bearing the body He had acquired on earth sits glorified as our forerunner, *"the firstborn among many brethren"* (Rom 8:29). *"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead ..."* (Col 1:18).

In Heaven our Lord occupies the highest place of honour, *"angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him"* (1 Pet 3:22). We see Jesus receiving the highest glory, not in our imagination, but in Heaven. And Heaven is a place. There our Lord has gone on before us, to prepare us a place. This is an amazing prospect, that Heaven has room for you and me who come to Jesus, who follow in His steps. He, the second Adam, has triumphed over the adversary of our souls and by His victory has opened a way for Adam's race to have a part in His glory.

Jesus is our leader and forerunner, our "trail-blazer." He wants us with Him, to see and share His glory. Listen to His prayer: *"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me ..."* (John 17:24). His business is not to receive honour merely for Himself. He is in Heaven to prepare a place for you and me, if we belong to Him.

The question is: do you belong to Jesus? Have you been to Him for cleansing in His precious blood? If so, your place in Heaven is assured. There, as the Lord has promised, we shall reign with Him. But while on earth, we must be prepared to suffer for Him. *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him ..."* (2 Tim 2:12). Are you surprised? There are more surprises in Heaven!

THOUGHT: *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him ..."* (2 Tim 2:12)
PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to bear my cross of suffering with patience.

Grace shall always lead to glory.
– J.C. Ryle

HEAVEN SHINES WITH GOD'S GLORY

No splendour on earth approaches Heaven's. John the Apostle on the Isle of Patmos was given a glimpse of it. Borne on angel wings, *"in the spirit,"* John was carried to a great and high mountain, and shown *"that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal"* (Rev 21:10-11).

From his mountain top perspective, John saw the dazzling beauty and unspeakable glories of the holy city. Words cannot fully describe the grandeur of that view, the ecstasy of the experience, and the magnificence of God's Heaven. Now we savour the words, and visualize faintly in our mind's eye, but one day we shall see in person for ourselves what makes Heaven glorious.

John saw the great city, holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven from God, having the glory of God. *"The glory of God"*? What do we understand by this? Who can tell? None on this side of eternity can say more than a few feeble words with "earthling language." God's glory cannot be described. Our vocabulary fails us. Now we see dimly as through a glass, then we shall see Him, face to face (1 Cor 13:12). Then it shall be revealed, not now.

But now, we yearn and long for God with holy desire. David, the man after God's own heart, had this high ambition: *"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple"* (Ps 27:4). It is the *"beauty of the LORD"* that makes Heaven glorious, that makes Heaven dazzle and outshine the sun.

THOUGHT: One day, we shall share in His glory (2 Cor 3:18).
PRAYER: Lord, help me to glorify Thee now, in my earthly life.

Heaven is large, but the way to heaven must be narrow. – Henry Smith

THE ROAD TO HEAVEN IS NARROW

A lady of means and very gifted in worldly business disdained the narrow way of Heaven. She made light of the Gospel, scoffed at the reality of hell, saying, "If there are few who take the narrow way, there must be few in Heaven. It must be very lonely there! In hell I shall have many friends and no lack of company. No Heaven for me, please!" How far removed from the truth was this lady.

If only men and women would see what the Apostle John saw, perhaps they would think again. What did John see? In the Apocalypse (Revelation), John was given a sight of Heaven: *"...a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb"* (Rev 7:9-10).

Praise be unto our great Triune God, by whose salvation grace we shall gain a place in Heaven, together with the multitude of the redeemed which no man could number. Thank God that He included us. Thank God that He enabled us to walk the narrow way, together with others, the "few that find it." But the "few" from each situation, each society, each age and generation, over the millennia will become in Heaven a very great company of believers which no man can number.

Tell it, then, to those who are seeking. Gather them in from the highways, tell it on the mountain, give them the Gospel offer. *"Enter ye in at the strait gate ... Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life..."* (Matt 7:13-14). Encourage them! Woo them! Tell them of Heaven and the great multitude which will be there. Enter in at the strait gate, and escape the wrath to come.

THOUGHT: *"…broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction..."* (Matt 7:13)
PRAYER: Lord, keep me ever in Thy narrow path.

O God, stamp eternity on my eyeballs. – Jonathan Edwards

AN EVERLASTING KINGDOM

"Jesus, still lead on,
Till our rest be won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow, calm and fearless;
Guide us by Thy hand
To our fatherland."
— Count Zinzendorf (1700-1760)

Following the Lord today may be through many trials and temptations, sometimes with tears and fears. Nevertheless our Lord Himself goes with us, as He promised (Matt 28:20), and the end is never in doubt. Daniel was shown in an amazing vision that *"the kingdom and dominion ... shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"* (Dan 7:27).

Today, the final outcome of discipleship is not yet manifest, but *"when the Son of man shall come in his glory ... before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them ...* (the) *sheep from the goats"* (Matt 25:31-32). To those who have faithfully followed, the King shall say, *"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"* (Matt 25:34).

But a kingdom does not come easily. Entrance into it must be accompanied by steadfast, earnest and diligent effort. Self must be denied, sufferings must be endured. We must run, wrestle, fight and strive manfully onward to inherit the glorious prize: God's everlasting kingdom prepared for them who love His appearing.

THOUGHT: *"... the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."* (Matt 11:12)
PRAYER: Lord, fix my eyes on Thy heavenly Kingdom.

"TILL WE MEET, GOOD-NIGHT!"

For forty years Jim had followed the Saviour. He lived each day with a steadfast hope in God's promise of a home in Heaven. He firmly believed, *"To be absent in the body is to be present with the Lord."* One day sickness struck and soon the time came for him to depart. To his family he said, "I'm going to be with the Lord. Sorrow not, my beloved."

To his dear wife he said, "Dearest, Good-night. We shall meet again ... in the morning!" To his daughters he said, "Dearest, Good-night. Our separation is only for a while. In the morning we'll meet again. Good-night!" Then the dying man turned to his son and with tears in his eyes said, "Good-bye, my son! Good-bye!" At this the son was astonished, and asked, "Dad, why did you say Good-bye to me and Good-night to Mum and my sisters?" "Well, son, through the years you have rejected Christ. Believers and unbelievers go their separate ways after death. Unbelievers are eternally separated from God and from their loved ones who die in the Lord." The dying father's words pierced the son's heart. God's Spiirt brought deep conviction of sin and the young man repented. In tears he said, "Dad, here and now I receive Christ as my personal Saviour. I believe He died for me and forgives my sins. So, till we meet in heaven, Dad, Good-night!"

Dear reader, Heaven is not just a hope. It is a place, a city, a country. How do we know? We have the promise of the One who reigns there. Its beauty, peace and splendour are beyond description. But not all may go there. God's Word says, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death"* (Rev 21:8).

Heaven is for those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Is your name written there?

THOUGHT: There shall be no night there.
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for writing my name in the Lamb's book of life.

DOES CHRIST LIVE HERE?

One of the best loved Easter hymns is "He Lives" by Alfred H Ackley. Most of us can sing the chorus from memory:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, Salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!

If Christ truly lives in our hearts, He must also show in our lives. Our old, selfish, ugly ways should give way to the Christ-life, for *"I am crucified with Christ"* (Gal 2:20). The old nature, the old Adam, is no longer in control. Then I can truly say: Christ liveth in me! The proof of our faith (our conversion) is the changed life, the Christ-life. Is this seen in you?

The new pastor of a village church in France called at the home of one of his members. When the husband came home from work, his wife said, "The new pastor called." "What did he say?" asked the man. "Oh, he asked me, Does Christ live here? I didn't know what to say." The man's face flushed. "Why didn't you tell him that we are respectable members of the congregation?" "Well, that wasn't what he asked." "Then why didn't you tell him that we say our prayers regularly, and read our Bible too?" "But he didn't ask that either."

The man grew more vexed. His wife could not honestly say yes to the pastor's question, and neither could he. This set them both thinking. That night, they turned the question over in their mind. "Does the Lord Jesus Christ live in our home? Does He live in us?" As they searched their hearts, the Holy Spirit convicted them of their sins and their need. They confessed their sins and received Christ as Saviour and Lord. From that night on, their lives were changed, and little by little, Christ became Lord of their lives, thanks to the pastor's searching question. Does Christ live in you also?

THOUGHT: Christ in my heart must show in my life.
PRAYER: Out of my life may Jesus shine!

Read Galatians 2:20.

MANY MEMBERS, ONE BODY

The binding principle for a happy family is love. A Christian home makes a good testing ground, for *"the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us"* (Rom 5:5). Loving one another in the home is not an option, but a command from our Lord. We are His children, and the home belongs to the Lord. We are under His jurisdiction and control.

Our Lord says, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another"* (John 13:34). Jesus loves us, and He gave Himself for us. The Good Shepherd laid down His life for the sheep. Our love ought to be the same kind of sacrificial love. This applies to brothers and sisters in the physical family, as well as to brethren within the larger Church Family. How shall we express our love for one another? Paul gives us the spiritual guidelines in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13.

1 Appreciate one another. No one must think himself superior and another inferior. Hands are not superior to feet. Both are equally needful. The Chinese expression "hands-feet" means "brothers-sisters," and aptly reflects what is being taught by the Apostle. If we are all "hands-feet," how affectionate and loving we must be!

2 Honour one another. This is more than mere appreciation. Within the family, whether physical or spiritual, there should be active expression to show honour one to another. Cliques and exclusive groupings must be discouraged. Let us reach out to everyone, rich or poor, high or low, regardless of education, etc.

3 Sympathise with one another. Words are important. Comforting and caring concern work wonders at the right time. A visit, a card, a prayer together, or a little useful gift. Our love and concern must go beyond mere words to positive actions. The motive always being this: The Lord loved us all. He wants me to act for Him. Why not? For His sake, for His great love, I will go, I will do!

THOUGHT: God's love keeps the family together.
PRAYER: Lord, may I love others as Thou loveth me.

A JOB CALLED FATHER

The father of a believing household is God's appointed head over that family, and on him rests the authority and responsibility to see that the family be nurtured, instructed, guided and led in the ways of God. We have not forgotten the role of the pastor, but the man on the spot to administer the rule of God from day to day is the father.

The family is a God-ordained unit of society and belongs to a theocracy of believers. Over this unit is our Lord God Creator who has vested His authority in the father. How can the believing father live up to the expectation assigned to him? Naturally, he must have the necessary knowledge to perform the many roles thrust on him:

1 Father is pastor. He must be equipped with sufficient elementary knowledge of Bible doctrines. As John the Apostle puts it: *"ye have known him that is from the beginning"* (1 John 2:13). He must be able to impart such knowledge simply to his family. He must assume responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his family members, and lead them in worship both in the home as well as in church.

2 Father is example. He must be what he aspires to see in his children. He cannot adopt the attitude of "Do as I say but don't do as I do." His best assurance of success is to strive his uttermost to be like the Master: just, impartial, kind, compassionate, pure, honest, loving, wise, self-sacrificial, forgiving, merciful.

3 Father is provider. Count the cost and make wise provision for the family. Naturally, this calls for diligence and honest hard work.

4 Father is protector. He is responsible for the safety of the family: safety from physical harm and threats from outside, as well as safety from spiritual attacks and subversion by false Christian sects, etc.

Only a Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled, Spirit-led man can successfully undertake the job called father.

THOUGHT: Should the church conduct a course for fathers?
PRAYER: Grant us good fathers that we may have good children.

THE WORLD'S HARDEST JOB

Many a young man plunges into the matrimonial sea on the crest of a romantic wave with hardly a care as to what fatherhood involves. With the arrival of babies, he gradually awakes to the fact that he was never quite prepared for that sort of undertaking. If someone had given him a job description early, he could have been better prepared. Here then is a sample job description for prospective fathers:

Wanted: Christian man to be father of a family.

Qualifications: Must be a truly born-again believer with knowledge of basic Bible doctrines, able to instruct future children. A man of vision, moral strength and character, able to direct training programme to produce effective future parents like himself. Must conduct his training at all age levels, in cooperation with a female co-director of his choice, and together to give advice and counsel, and solve interpersonal disputes. Must cope with all problems within the organization, including odd jobs around the house, and domestic emergencies. Be available on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Prospects: Good for right man. In time may well rise to be a grandfather.

Past Experience: Not necessary.

Salary: Payment will be in terms of children's love, affection, loyalty, gratitude, with liberal amounts of frustrations, domestic conflicts, childish rebellions and other periodic surprise upheavals.

Now, that is some job description! Young man, ponder before you plunge! Surely no other calling is as demanding, as challenging and as heavy in responsibility. But the godly young man who seriously commits himself with his young lady need fear no ill. The prospects of success in raising a godly family are assured, with God's help.

THOUGHT: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* (Phil 4:13)
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that with Thee the future is assured.

A DELINQUENT FATHER

"When a young person falls foul of the law, look for a delinquent father." Not always true, but this axiom must cause all fathers to think. In the home of Eli (the high priest, holding the top position of judge among the people), there was a breakdown of parental discipline. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were profligates (immersed in vice and immorality) of the worst type. Their actions betrayed their total depravity and defiance of parents, society and God. They had lost all common decency. Their conscience was dead.

Now, our chief interest is in Eli's response to his sons' sins. As father, he should have taken swift and drastic disciplinary action. As high priest and judge, such action should have been doubly quick and even more decisive. The Lord's name and His honour were at stake. When the son of an ordinary church member sins, he injures the good name of Jesus, but with the pastor's son the damage will be doubly magnified. What did Eli do when he learnt of his sons' sins?

Sadly, he did almost nothing. Read his weak and almost apologetic protest in verses 23 to 25. Reading between the lines, it is evident that here was a father who was afraid of offending his sons. Eli was more concerned with pleasing his evil sons than pleasing God. The material gains of the priesthood (from the people's tithes and offerings) and the physical comforts over the years had lulled Eli into a spiritual stupor and dulled his perception. He had fallen into self-deception.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal 6:7). Retribution from God will come. Eli honoured his sons above God. He had failed in his parental duty. In one day all three met their deaths: the sons slain by the Philistines; and Eli, on hearing the news (including the capture of the Ark of the Covenant), fell back and broke his neck.

A stick in time saves nine. Discipline when young. Parents, know your responsibilities. Know God's Word. Apply the truth and discipline in love, but start young. The sooner the better.

THOUGHT: Above all, I must be a good example to my children.
PRAYER: Grant wisdom to know the right and courage to do it.

BOUQUETS FOR GODLY MOTHERS

The role of godly mothers in shaping their children's character and future careers cannot be over-estimated. Timothy could look back and thank God for a faithful mother and grandmother. President Ronald Reagan said this of his mother: "Nelle Reagan, my mother, God rest her soul, had an unshakable faith in God's goodness. And while I may not have realized it in my youth, I know now that she planted that faith very deeply in me. She made the most difficult Christian message seem very easy."

Here are a few other testimonies to encourage our mothers:

Abraham Lincoln: "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."
D.L. Moody: "All that I have ever accomplished in life, I owe to my mother."
Napoleon Bonaparte: "Let France have good mothers and she will have good sons."
Susanna Wesley had seventeen children. One would think that she would have little time left for prayer. Yet she spent an hour each day shut up with God alone in her room, praying for her children. Her two sons, John and Charles, under God, brought revival to England and laid the foundation of the Methodist Church.

Ezekiel said, *"As is the mother, so is her daughter"* (Ezek 16:44). Like father like son, like mother like daughter. We cannot escape this inviolable law. Our children will grow up to reflect us like a mirror, warts and all. Bringing up children is a challenge that takes all the manhood and womanhood there is in us. But God's grace enables!

To bring an immortal being into this perilous world, neglect it, allow it to drift without direction, to go where it will, do what it chooses, and one day to see it reap an awesome harvest of delinquency and crime is surely something no one in his right mind will want to do. And yet thousands in our progressive, permissive society are doing just that. Godly mothers, godly fathers, may you do your duties well!

THOUGHT: Who is the greater influence: mother or father?
PRAYER: Lord, bless our mothers. Make them good and godly.

CHILDREN FOR CHRIST

Theodore Roosevelt said, "If you are ever going to do anything permanent for the average man, you must begin before he is a man. The chance of success lies in working with the boy — not with the man. That applies peculiarly to those boys who tend to drift off into courses which mean that unless they are checked they will be formidable additions to the criminal population when they grow older." How true! The child is father of the man! What are we doing to equip our children to stand on their own — or fall?

Parents should plan for their children. Most do. Some plan far ahead even into the distant future of higher education and career prospects. All this is well and good. Most parents need little coaxing or encouragement in these areas. They have a good eye on the future.

But our concern is our children's eternal security which, sad to say, many Christian parents treat with little real interest. This is to a large extent a reflection of their spiritual lukewarmness and complacency. To assume that making the routine trip to church each Sunday will suffice for the family's spiritual nourishment is certainly the height of folly. We are facing issues and challenges so massive and overpowering that a casual encounter with "religion" on a weekly basis is the surest way to unbelief.

Heed our Lord's words: *"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea"* (Matt 18:6). Your little ones are most precious in God's sight, not just in your sight alone! The effect of sending our children ten to twelve hours daily, five to six days a week into the unbelieving world to be soaked in society's filth and anti-christian philosophy cannot be neutralized and cleansed by an hour in church. We need to do more! What are you doing about your child's salvation?

THOUGHT: Every believing child needs to grow, not by feeding on trash but on God's Word.
PRAYER: Lord, help me to be mindful of my children's spiritual welfare.

ARE YOUR CHILDREN SAVED?

Whose business is it to see that your children are saved: yours or the pastor's? Answer: Both are responsible, but the role of parents comes first! At home, parents, you are in the place of pastors to your children. How soon should parents begin to impart the knowledge of God and salvation to their children? My answer is: Begin as soon as you begin to communicate to them about other things. Which parent has come to consult a doctor, asking, "How old should my child be for us to talk to him?" Is it not a fact that we speak to our newborn babies as though they understood? Of course they did not at first, but gradually they began to take it in, bit by bit.

Now do you see the point? Just as you coax the child to take her food, to go to sleep, to smile, so you speak to him about praying to Jesus, loving Jesus, etc. Which mother ever ran to the pastor to say, "Please come and sing a lullaby to my child?" Every mother does it naturally, happily and readily. Then, the next time you do, sing hymns and gospel choruses for lullaby to your child.

Pray for your child. Sing to him the songs of salvation. The earliest songs that I can remember are the hymns my mother used to sing me to sleep by. Even to this day I can recall this one:

God is always near me, hearing what I say;
Knowing all my thoughts and deeds,
All my work and play.

Mothers and fathers can play a crucial role in their children's salvation. Start today. Tell them of Jesus' love. Tell them Bible stories. Tell them simply every day, and with fervent prayer. What a blessed ministry you can have, just where you are, in your home.

Then one day your children will call you blessed!

THOUGHT: *"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."* (Mark 10:14)
PRAYER: Make me a blessing to my home, Lord.

CHEATING YOUR CHILD

What parent will ever dream of cheating his child? And yet many well-meaning parents are doing just that. What am I driving at? That parents ought to give their children the best in life none will dispute. What is in question is: What is "the best"?

Many well-intentioned parents believe (and sincerely too) that the best way to love children is to give them whatever they demand and to give in to their every whim and fancy. Nothing is further from the truth. This sort of parental indulgence is the surest way of producing self-willed, self-centred and self-conceited offspring, who will grow up into social misfits and be a disgrace to the parents.

This story comes from China. Loo Ting was being sent to the gallows for armed robbery and murder. For years he had been terrorising the countryside by his crimes and assaults on helpless people, old women and children. Finally the law caught up with him. As the judge passed sentence, he asked Loo Ting if he had a request. "Let me speak to my mother." Mother came with tears in her eyes. As she approached, he said, "Mother, what I have to say is only between you and me. Let me whisper it in your ears." Loo Ting then held her close and before she realized what he was doing, he had bitten off part of her ear. Then to the startled judge and audience in the courthouse, Loo Ting made his last speech. "I am what I am because of my mother. She brought me up to be a thief and robber, to steal and to hurt others. When I was a child, she allowed me to do as I pleased. She never corrected or beat me. Whatever I wanted, she gave. When I grew up, it was too late. Mother did not give me the necessary discipline when I most needed it. I have been cheated."

Parents, indulgence is not love. It is cheating your child. "*He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes*" (Prov 13:24). Let every chastening be just, fair, timely, and tempered with love.

THOUGHT: A stick in time saves nine! Who should administer punishment: father or mother?
PRAYER: Lord, teach us to love our children in the right way.

NATURE AND NURTURE

The whole human race is fallen in sin, under condemnation. We were children of disobedience and by nature the children of wrath (Eph 2:2-3). Our children too from birth already manifest the same fallen nature. Every child heralds his arrival into the world with a cry and soon (without having to learn) erupts into tantrums of self-will. To new parents their newborn child is the loveliest thing in all the world, and to this we all heartily agree. Nevertheless, as enlightened believers, we will also agree with the old preacher who setting eyes on the baby exclaimed: "What a beautiful bundle of iniquity!"

We have said enough about the need to discipline a child. Now, a word about the method. Discipline must be administered with love and concern. It must be firm and never frivolous or in a fit of temper. While the intention is to correct errant behaviour or cure some bad habit, there must always be the encouragement towards the positive. Always avoid empty threats, punishments which cannot be enforced, an appearance or spirit of vindictiveness, resentment or vengeance.

Never make the punishment something which the child ought to do anyway, and should love to do, eg. "Now for being disobedient to Mother, you will read your Bible for half an hour," or "You must attend Youth Fellowship meetings for one month." These activities must never be made punitive sentences. Rather, our children and youths should be encouraged by spiritual instruction and parental example to love God's Word, to love the church and its activities.

The upbringing of children is full of difficulties. Parents have to pray for and pray with their children and spend time with them consistently from their infancy through their childhood days. Those times spent doing useful and constructive things with them are precious beyond price. Once lost, they can never be recalled, for children advancing into their teenage years are already leaving the parental nest.

THOUGHT: Childhood years are years to nurture. It is now or never!
PRAYER: Teach us, Lord, to discipline wisely with love.

WHEN PARENTS APOLOGIZE

One of the hardest lessons for parents to learn is that they are not infallible. There are times when they are unfair or unkind to their children, perhaps unintentionally or even unconsciously. Nevertheless, in the weakness of the flesh, they have wronged their son or daughter. The child has been obviously hurt. Has this ever happened in your home? If we think back honestly, many parents will discover, to their surprise, that they are not free from this fault.

God's Word admonishes Christian fathers: *"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged"* (Col 3:21). Fathers are usually the disciplinarians in the home. In the exercise of their authority, it is possible for them to exceed their bounds and become unduly rigorous or severe. It may be a hasty conclusion or a one-sided judgment based on incomplete evidence. As a result, the child has been unjustly reprimanded or unfairly punished. A wrong has been done which even a little child senses.

Children may say nothing, but deep in their hearts a reaction begins to set in. There is a feeling of hurt, possibly anger, resentment, and even rebellion. The individual psychological and emotional make-up may vary, and some children react more than others. Nevertheless, parents should recognize that children do have personalities and feelings, and hurt feelings may leave mental wounds and scars. What kind of parent-child relationships are we to build now that will make for a stable, loving and lasting bond in the years to come?

Christian parents, take stock how you treat your children. Let authority be exercised with love and fairness. Put yourself in the place of the child. Is this how I would like to be treated by my father? *"In every thing by prayer"* (Phil 4:6) is another good rule. Constant prayerful communion with God gives wisdom for every situation. But when a child has been wronged, the parent must have the courage to say, "Son, I'm sorry, my judgment was wrong. Please forgive me."

THOUGHT: Parents are human, and fallible.
PRAYER: Teach me, O God, to ask for forgiveness when I am wrong.

WHAT MEAN YE BY THIS SERVICE?

Children are by nature curious. Parents do well to always have a ready and reasonable answer to their questions. Many parents help their children in their school-work. Some even study for them. Their zeal and ambition for their children's success in worldly learning is to be commended. Can this same zeal and ambition be applied to the things of God? Indeed it can, and it should. Remember, God's plan is for every believing parent to be a spiritual guide and teacher to the children. It is therefore very essential for all parents to equip themselves adequately, at least in basic Bible knowledge concerning the main doctrines of our faith. How else can parents instruct their children?

Of course we are not asking all parents to become theologians! But parents must at least know the basics, the essential minimum. The historic event of the Exodus is one of the essentials every believer ought to know, and know well. God commanded that His great act of deliverance be observed forever by the congregation of Israel.

Today we no longer observe the Passover. Its place has been taken by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In our church we observe this once a month. In other churches more often, in some it may be less. Nevertheless, the elements are the same: bread and wine (grape juice). Only communicant members of the church participate while the others are excluded or simply sit as observers. Now the children want to know. "What is it you are eating, Mom? Why am I not allowed to eat?" And so they come with their questions.

Christian parents, are you able and ready to answer their questions? Do you know the answers? Are you quite clear in your own minds what the Lord's Supper is? What is the meaning of the bread and the wine? Do you know its difference from the Roman Mass?

"What mean ye by this service?" Be sure of your answer before your child confronts you with the question.

THOUGHT: Do I know the significance of the passover lamb?
PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to increase my own knowledge of Thee.

OF TEMPERS AND TANTRUMS

Childhood tempers and tantrums usually respond to father's firm hand. Repeated fits and outbursts require careful investigation into the cause and its removal, but generally speaking the rod (with reasonableness) will cure. What if the cause is parental tempers and tantrums? As they say in China: "Monkey see, monkey do." Can one blame a child for copying from his parents? Obviously some adult soul-searching is needful.

Adult tempers and tantrums are a serious malady and not easily cured, but no matter how resistant to treatment they are, relief must be earnestly sought. A Christian home ought not to emit angry sounds from internal commotions. Outbursts between husband and wife or parent and child are hurtful to the spirit, and a shame to God's name.

If your home is thus afflicted, pray earnestly for deliverance. Then yield yourself to the Spirit. Violent temper and unreasonable clamour are simply giving in to the carnal mind and falling into the devil's snare. The devil's chief ambition is to cause us to go back to our old ways, to quench the Spirit of God and to let our old Adam take control. The devil makes us feel self-righteous, self-important and puffed up. Then we forget our submission to God, and down we fall. Nothing delights the devil more than this. You can frustrate him by saying "No" to him.

"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov 16:32). Let the father and mother of the home set the example. Determine that your home will be a haven of peace, a house of quiet retreat, a refuge for every troubled soul. Men are not impressed by our service in church, by our witnessing everywhere, by our eloquent prayers. But when peace and harmony reign supreme and love evidently fills every heart, men will stop and take notice. Even unbelievers will give glory to our Saviour's name.

THOUGHT: Believers' homes must be havens of peace and joy. Have I found a solution to my outbursts?
PRAYER: Forgive me, Father, for my lack of control.

LIKE PARENTS LIKE CHILDREN

For their insulting behaviour toward Elisha, the forty-two children were killed by wild bears. If God were to dispense comparable justice to the juvenile offenders of today, what would happen? The age of criminal offenders creeps lower each year. God's Word warns: *"…in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves … disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good"* (2 Tim 3:1-3).

Juvenile crime reflects the state of our homes. In the home, young thugs, hooligans, thieves, gangsters, kidnappers, rapists, sex perverts, swindlers, robbers and murderers are bred. Parents must bear the major accountability for their children's anti-social performance.

Chief Justice William H. Waste of the California Supreme Court commenting on the rising tide of lawlessness among the youth of today observes that the criminal indifference of parents is largely responsible. He said, "What the youths of the country need is not more public control through governmental action, but more home control through parental action. Through indifference or because of an ill-considered belief in the dangerous doctrine of the 'new freedom,' parents have given over the reins of authority, and they now watch with horror the resulting runaway. You cannot give youth the reins and say, Drive! without inviting a smash. Youth lacks judgment. It is dominated to a large extent by the physical urge. Without a guiding hand it will run amok and smash itself."

"True religion and good citizenship are inseparable. Supplementing the work of the Church is the Sunday School. I am sorry that the Sunday School and the Church must often do, unaided, what the home should co-operate in doing." (The Wesleyan Methodist). Christian homes are failing in their duty. Parents, be warned!

THOUGHT: Christian parents, serve in church, not in clubs.
PRAYER: Lord, help our parents to save their children from the world of crime.

HEREIN IS LOVE

The superlative love of God is matchless and incomparable. Its depth can never be fully fathomed. *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We love him, because he first loved us"* (1 John 4:10, 19).

We see something of God's love in the way parents love their children. King David was under attack by his rebellious son, Absalom. In the ensuing battle, Absalom was killed by David's men. David was overwhelmed with grief at the news and wept, *"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"* (2 Sam 18:33).

The prodigal son returning from his disastrous venture received a royal welcome from his heartbroken father, who said, *"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found…"* (Luke 15:24). All of the son's past ingratitude and misdeeds were forgotten and forgiven. Both this father and David reveal to us, only faintly, the loving heart of God, our Heavenly Father.

Do you appreciate your parents better? Listen further to this account of another father's love for his child. "When I return home tired after a day's work, I am revived when I see my baby daughter. I hold her in my arms, look into her blue eyes and every little sound she makes is music to my ears. I whisper to her my tender affection although she understands not a word, and neither can she love me now. If I were troubled by some sudden illness she will not stir a finger to help. If I should die she would likely forget me in a few days. But while I live she is a constant expense to me. I earn only a little but I will not part with her for all the money in the world. How is it? Does she love me? Not really. Do I then withhold my love until I know she loves me? Do I wait for her to prove her love before I love her?"

Herein is love, not that you loved your parents, but that they first loved you, when you were little and helpless.

THOUGHT: Thank God for the love of parents.
PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to repay my parents' love.

HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER

Coming from a traditional Oriental culture, I have observed with amusement (and amazement) how some Western young people address their parents by their first names. This sort of practice, I am told, is encouraged by progressive and liberal minded parents. To conservative Easterners, such behaviour is disrespectful if not outrageous. Culture aside, it is contrary to biblical teaching.

At the heart of the Ten Commandments is the Fifth: "*Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*" (Exod 20:12). Parents deserve honour and respect from children. From parents, children receive life, loving care and nurture, education and a whole host of good things. Next to God, parents stand in the place of authority and therefore deserve the highest honour and esteem from their children.

How can children honour their parents? "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right*" (Eph 6:1). Respect and esteem your parents highly (even if they are not as well educated as you!). Love them, for they first loved you! Do all these while parents are alive. Show kindness and love before they are gone, or too old to be able to enjoy your kindness. Give them some of the comforts of life which they have lavished on you before.

This story comes from China. In the cold northern winter, houses had no heating. Ming, seven years old, lived with his widowed Mother. How he longed to repay Mother for her hard work and tender care. An idea came to him. "There is not much that I can do for Mother, but I can warm her bed for her. Then when she comes to bed it will be nice and warm." So little Ming crept into Mother's bed and with his little body he made the bed comfortable and warm. Imagine the lovely reception which Mother got at bedtime! Such a meaningful act warmed not only Mother's bed but more. It warmed her heart to know that her boy was grateful and appreciative of her love. Reader, will you honour your parents?

THOUGHT: A filial son today will have filial sons tomorrow.
PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to honour my father and my mother.

CARING FOR PARENTS

How should we treat our aged parents? In Jesus' day, there were religious hypocrites who evaded their filial duty by pretending that their money was committed to God's work and thus they neglected the care of their aged parents. The truly converted Christian would do otherwise, considering the debt he owes to his parents.

A Chinese proverb says, "When you drink water, think of the source." We owe our success to our parents. How fathers sweated and mothers sacrificed. Think of their unstinting devotion, lavish affection and unceasing concern when we were totally dependent creatures, more a nuisance than anything else. Yet they showered us with love, attention and kindness, until we left the family nest.

But now they are of no more use to us, more an inconvenience than a source of goodness. Now they are burdensome, troublesome, old and decrepit castoffs, fit to be dumped at some old folks' home. Is this how we regard our aged parents? God forbid! We see Joseph the model filial son. He had been separated from his family for almost twenty years. He had risen to become the Prime Minister of a great country. He had his own family and was comfortably settled. He could well have said, "Out of sight, out of mind!"

Not Joseph! He remained the same loving son. His father had arrived after a long trip. He greeted him with tears and kisses. The same treatment was accorded to his wicked brothers. *"And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families"* (Gen 47:12). Let our sons resolve and aspire to be like Joseph. Surely in this day of return to biblical Christianity, filial love and piety will also see a revival.

A young graduate in his first year gave half his monthly pay packet to his retired parents. In his second year, he presented them with a car. These were token repayments of their love. God sees and God repays!

THOUGHT: Be a filial child if you hope for filial children.
PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for my filial impiety. Help me as I resolve to love my parents.

MIND YOUR MUSIC!

One of the most effective ways of polluting the mind is through worldly music, and our adversary uses it to maximum advantage. Last generation it was through swing and jazz. Now, it is pop and rock. With the media explosion, cyber space is bombarded round the clock with a torrent of filth and mental garbage, available to anybody anywhere at the click of a mouse.

Believing parents and children, we go to great lengths to safeguard our physical well-being with every sort of health protective, inoculations, immunizations. Pause a moment and think: What protective measures have we taken to safeguard our mental and spiritual well-being? The famous Latin proverb says "Mens sana in corpore sano" meaning, "A sound mind in a sound body." This is so important for us to understand. An Olympic strong man or athlete can be reduced to a physical wreck by drug abuse in a matter of weeks. Similarly, sex abuse can destroy a morally healthy young person.

Music today has taken on sinister and subversive undertones. A multi-billion dollar industry is churning out red hot top tunes, charged with immoral, suggestive and seductive messages, souped-up with booming soul-stimulating decibels and big drum beats. The target: millions of unwary, pleasure-seeking young people ready for some excitement and kicks, drugs and sex. Exposed to the overwhelming barrage of sensuous sounds, many a young person is hooked, and taken as lambs to the slaughter.

It is high time for Christian young people and parents to take stern action against the wiles of the devil. Let us employ the strictest censorship of all music to exclude doubtful or harmful materials. Those in our homes, personal libraries, and private collections should be destroyed by fire, to put an end to Satanic mind-washing. Out with pop and rock! Let our homes be filled with God-honouring music and songs of the Heavenly Kingdom. A Christian's music should bring glory to God's name.

THOUGHT: Sing with grace in my heart to the Lord.
PRAYER: May I always fill my ears and mind with godly music.

SINGING IN YOUR HEART TO THE LORD

Christianity is a singing religion, but atheism is songless. It does not have any hope to sing about. For what joy is there for a departed soul bound for hell fire? Without God, without Christ and without hope, infidels, skeptics and atheists truly have no cause for song. For the Christian there is every reason to sing. Songs of praise to God uplift the believer's spirit and brighten his life. Men of the world foolishly seek solace in drink. Read Ephesians 5:18.

Our salvation joy should move us daily to praise God with our voices. In times of loneliness, depression and anxiety, it brings a soothing calm over the soul; in times of sorrow and bereavement, nothing comforts as hymns of heaven and our eternal hope in God. Every circumstance in the Christian's life is an occasion for praise.

"Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching.... Next after theology, I give to music the highest place and the greatest honour. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plagues" (Luther). A hymn a day will refresh us, and deliver us from a despondent or sharp and sour spirit.

In days of yore, Christian martyrs went to their deaths in the Roman arenas, singing psalms for courage and strength. Thus they faced savage beasts with the full assurance that to be with Christ was far better (Phil 1:23). Such a spectacle alerted the Roman rulers that a new and supernatural force was at work, so that even the blood-thirsty spectators were filled with awe.

Heaven is vibrant with the songs of saints and angels. In heaven, *"…they sing the song of Moses ... and the song of the Lamb…"* (Rev 15:3). We shall never stop singing His praises. If so, should not we begin now on earth to fill our hearts with joyous songs of praise?

THOUGHT: Songs and hymns of praise must fill my heart and lips.
PRAYER: Lord, may my spirit-filled heart overflow into songs of praise to Thee.

GUARD YOUR EYES

"O be careful little eyes what you see! O be careful little eyes what you see! For the Father up above is looking down in love, So be careful little eyes what you see!"

This children's hymn beams an equally pertinent message to adults whose roving eyes (like King David's) are still a potent pitfall. Read Matthew 6:22-23. An evil eye leads the body into a host of troubles; all avoidable if the eye had been single (i.e. of sound judgment and able to shut out the unwholesome).

Lewd and seductive advertisements, periodicals and commercials battering the eye-gates are displayed on moving vehicles, large billboards and shop windows. These are largely unavoidable sources of visual pollution. But there are others over which we can and must exercise control. Not to do so is to get onto the slippery slope of sin.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:15-16).

What preventive measures do we have to keep our eyes *"single"* and pure? *"…the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matt 26:41). Pray, therefore! After prayer, make a commitment to God. "Lord, I want to be pure for Thy service. Keep my eyes from sinning. Help me to hate sin, and to treat it like a venomous snake." Then search out all evil, pornographic, obscene books and other printed materials, and burn them. Finally, beware the TV, cinema, internet, etc. Let not any child of God invite evil and pollution right into the bedroom or living room. Choose your viewing carefully, and be strong to switch off when you sense the world creeping in. Parents, children, check on your TV-time and use of the internet!

THOUGHT: Is my use of the television and internet glorifying to God?
PRAYER: Take my eyes and let them be consecrated Lord to Thee.

A TIME-BOMB IN YOUR HOME?

A psychology professor at New York State University speaking on "Violence in the Communications Industry" stated that "the cumulative effect of violent television programming might be likened to the planting of a bomb which might explode after a period of ten to twenty years. Every murder or violent act a child witnesses on TV is like a small weight placed on the balance... eventually the balance might trigger off violent acts on the part of individuals who previously appeared normal." The television and the internet have invaded the home. The internet is a most influential force in daily life and culture today.

What are the ill effects? The ill effects are threefold: physical, intellectual and moral. TV is damaging brain cells of millions of children, so declares one of Spain's leading paediatricians, Dr Manuel Perdeguero, President of the Spanish Paediatrics Association. A child's brain cells and vision can be permanently damaged if exposed to TV at an early age. This naturally impairs the child's intellectual development. Constant viewing leaves the mind imprinted with TV pictures, which linger on in the mind so that the child is incapable of clear thought or constructive imagination.

A large proportion of TV programmes and websites glamorize sex, immorality, fast living, violence and crime. Constant exposure to these leaves its impression on the mind. Is it any surprise that crime and immorality are on the rise everywhere?

What must the Christian do about it? Our Lord says, *"…if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out…"* (Matt 5:29). What does He mean? Simply this: Stop viewing offensive TV programmes or websites! Carefully controlled and regulated, TV and the internet can serve us well and profitably. Parents can, and should, exercise judicious control on the hours of viewing, and on the type of programmes. Have courage to ban sex, immorality, crime and violence altogether. Remember, there is the long term "time-bomb effect."

THOUGHT: "O be careful, little eyes, what you see!"
PRAYER: Lord, keep my eyes from filth and lust.

SHOULD BELIEVERS SMOKE?

"Why not? Where does it say in the Bible that smoking is not allowed?" Smoking Christians naturally try to justify themselves. But in their sober and saner moments, every smoker realizes that tobacco smoking is not good. Many smokers frankly confess, "I wish I had never started."

Does the Bible forbid smoking? Apparently not, since it says nothing about smoking. Then, does the Bible forbid lotteries and gambling? It says nothing about these things either. Smokers, take no comfort in these shallow and thoughtless arguments.

Paul laid down an important principle for us. Our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. When we believe in Jesus, we yield God our lives, i.e. our bodies are now indwelt and controlled by the Holy Ghost. The question is: Will the Spirit of God say, "Smoke if you wish, and remember to glorify God in your body"? Yes? Or No? Read on.

From scientific studies in reputable centres around the world, the evidence against tobacco smoke is conclusive. Smoking is the major cause of lung cancer, and a big contributing factor in heart attacks, blood vessel narrowing, high blood pressure and upper respiratory tract infection. Smokers suffer much more than non-smokers from chronic cough and throat irritation, palpitation, chest pain, shortness of breath, heartburn and nervousness.

From the social aspect, smokers pollute the air and cause annoyance to non-smokers. Bad breath, smoky hair and clothes, stained fingers and teeth are other undesirable side effects. Smoking parents breed smoking children.

We must not defile the temple of God — our body (1 Cor 3:17). The limiting factor in stopping the habit is willpower. When a person yields to God, His power enables.

THOUGHT: Let my home be filled with God's glory, not tobacco smoke.
PRAYER: Lord, keep me burning for Thee.

Read 1 Corinthians 6:20.

"BUT SOME DO!"

A smoking Christian, and worse, a smoking pastor, becomes a stumbling block to young believers. "If he smokes, why can't I?" Many mindless youths hero-worship film stars, celebrities and pop singers, and imitate their dress style, hair style, and life style, including their immoral living and smoking.

Alas, man with his fallen nature would rather imitate the base and corrupt than the chaste and pure. For a Christian to find an excuse by saying "Because so-and-so does the same" is a sign of an immature mind. We do because it is right! Not because others do.

Charles Spurgeon, the "Prince of Preachers" in 19th century England, regularly preached to Sunday congregations of 5,000 for over thirty years. His smoking habit, however, caused others to stumble. One day, Spurgeon saw in a shophouse a display of cigarettes with the label "Spurgeon's Tobacco." This struck at his heart. His name and fame were being used to promote smoking. "Let others remember me for my preaching and not for my smoking! I cannot smoke any more to the glory of God, for that does not happen."

As the Spirit of God convicted him, Spurgeon immediately picked up his smoking paraphernalia and destroyed them in the fire. Thereafter he never smoked again. Never again would he be seen and copied, and be a cause of stumbling! But Paul was altogether worthy of our imitation, for he was a close imitator of the Lord. He says, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Cor 11:1). And do all to the glory of God, giving none offence!

Finally, believing parents and children, read Philippians 4:8-9 again. With full confidence, the Apostle said, *"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you"* (Phil 4:9).

THOUGHT: Follow the best, leave the rest!
PRAYER: Lord, keep my body holy, not smoky!

DANGER IN DRINK

After 3,000 years, Solomon's proverb has not lost any of its wisdom yet. The mocker continues to mock and strong drink rages on unabated, defying man's scientific, social and medical advancement. Wise men, foolish men, rich and poor, they are still being deceived and led to the sacrifice on the altar of Bacchus (Roman god of wine).

Alcoholism is medically classified as a disease. If so, it is the only disease on which people spend billions on advertisements to catch more victims. It is the only disease which respectable industrialists and manufacturers propagate vigorously by flooding the world with liquor enough to float a navy. It is the only disease which governments legalize by the licensing of dealers and bars.

Medical science has shown that alcohol is a potent prison to body cells, essentially to cells of vital organs such as liver, brain, kidney. As a nerve depressant, it impairs neurological responses and reactions: hence behavioural change and impairment of neuromuscular coordination and control.

Further evidence of the pathological effects of alcohol is best seen in the ruin and havoc it causes to human lives as described by the pen of Catherine Booth, wife of the founder of the Salvation Army: "I am against alcohol because I have known unborn babies to be cursed through booze, little children starve, young people stunted for life, gifted women turned into imbeciles, leaders in industry become beggars in the streets, decent girls become prostitutes, bright young boys become criminals, men and women losing their respect and honour — and lives."

Our bodies are for the Lord's use. How can we defile them with drink? We have only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what is done for Him will last! There are great and precious tasks for us ahead. Therefore, be not drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit. The spirit of Bacchus spells doom. The Spirit of Christ is life and health.

THOUGHT: God's people must keep their bodies holy and healthy.
PRAYER: Lord, raise up mighty, Spirit-filled men to serve Thee.

THE MODERATION TRAP

Lot's daughters conceived an evil scheme and a son each, with the aid of alcohol. Their father probably would not have consented, at least not to getting drunk and losing his self-control. But the crafty girls, by offering their father an initial after dinner "nightcap," softened up the old man and finally disarmed him. That is the moderation trap, an innocent, harmless "wee taste," the bait for the unwary.

Weak-willed young people in a hurry to climb the social ladder give undeserved importance to social drinking as a way of "getting on." For Christians, *"…promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another"* (Ps 75:6-7). My dear reader, look not to the boss, but to the Lord. He who promoted Joseph against all odds, can He not do the same for you?

A girl of twenty who started in a new job asked: "I'm a Christian and have made up my mind not to drink, but people make it very hard for me to refuse. At parties they keep insisting and some get annoyed when I say, I'm sorry I don't drink. What's the best way to refuse?"

Firstly, let me assure our enquirer, do not start off by saying, "I'm sorry." That makes you sound apologetic and defensive, which you need not be. What you need is a firm and polite "Thank you, I only take soft drinks." Stand your ground with dignity and your host will learn to respect you. A young lady with her head "screwed the right way up" commands much respect.

General Frederick D. Grant said, "I found out it was an impossibility to drink moderately... so I became an absolute teetotaler. I will not allow drink in my house.... The hard drinker was once a moderate drinker. The chances are all against a moderate drinker remaining as such... so I don't propose to take such chances.... If I could, by offering my body a sacrifice, free this country from the demon drink, I'd thank the Almighty for the privilege of doing it."

THOUGHT: The best way to deal with a poison is "touch not."
PRAYER: Lord may all Thy people say "No" to this demon drink.

HARD FACTS ABOUT HARD DRINKS

In case the last two readings have not fully convinced some reader of the dire dangers of drinking, we add one more, backed by facts and figures that should discourage even the diehard. Tests show that after taking three bottles of beer, there is a 13% loss of memory. Trained typists were tested and their errors shot up by 40% after only "light drinking." One ounce of alcohol retards reaction time by 17%, slows down decision time by 10%, increases errors due to impaired attention by 35%, and impairs muscular co-ordination by 60%.

When the blood stream contains 0.002 parts of alcohol, the drinker thinks that he can fight anybody in the crowd; his sense of judgment is that badly impaired. When it is up to 0.004 parts alcohol, he is in a drunken stupor; and when it is 0.006, he is not far from death's door.

Some think that "social drinking" is quite harmless. They think that as long as they do not get drunk they are all right. This is far from the truth. A recent report at the 28th International Congress on Alcoholism disclosed that even "social drinking" destroys brain cells. Dr. Knisely, Professor of Anatomy at the Medical College of South Carolina, presented evidence to show that when a drinker begins to feel a little giddy, a few brain cells are being destroyed. Repeated over a period of years, the cumulative effects of brain damage will be evident. Brain cells once damaged are not replaced. One heavy drinking bout can damage 10,000 precious brain cells.

Despite all these known ill effects, people still indulge freely with the "spirit of the vine" to keep up the "spirit of the party" (1 Pet 4:3). Solomon sounds a stern warning: At the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Now, a final word of advice to would-be drinkers: think ahead. Alcohol is habit forming and addicting. Prevention is better than cure: do not touch the bottle and there will be no regrets. Think ahead: broken homes, ruined health and careers, life-long regret all too often without remedy. The safest place for hard drinks is inside the bottle, not out!

THOUGHT: Drinkers, stop. Non-drinkers, do not start.
PRAYER: Lord, may I be determined to glorify Thee with my life.

TRAIN UP A CHILD

Parents are ever so mindful of their children's advancement in every field that they happily study with them, study for them, train them up in various skills and do a host of other things for them. In this respect Christian parents are not behind other parents. Strangely, however, believing parents not uncommonly neglect their responsibility in their children's spiritual upbringing. Some leave it to the church; others leave it to the child. Whichever it is they are failing in their God-given opportunity. The Word of God clearly lays on believing parents the holy duty of instructing their children in spiritual things. We must not shirk or shrink from this responsibilty nor should we delegate it to anyone else. God's Word says, *"And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."* Such is the zeal required of God's people in the instruction of children in God's Word. The same zeal naturally applies to the instruction of children in prayer.

Sadly, many Chrisitan parents have not been instructed by their pastors of their responsibility. Consequently their children grow up not knowing how to pray or read their Bibles. At meal times they do not thank God for the food. Morning prayers are said hastily. Bedtime prayers become a drowsy formalism and dead routine. Does this describe your children? I pray not. God's Word commands all believing parents: "Train up your child when he is young!" We are to pray with them, to teach and guide and supervise. This is God's way.

When should we start? As soon as a child begins to speak. We cannot start too early. Let us read God's Word to them and teach them to speak to God as they learn to speak to man. This is our joyous and holy assignment from God. So, be faithful!

THOUGHT: Like parent like child!
PRAYER: Make me a faithful servant for Thee, O Lord.

SAINTS, BISHOPS, DEACONS

These three words *"saints," "bishops," "deacons,"* are scriptural words and we should know their scriptural meanings.

"Saint" is a translation of a Greek word meaning "holy," the fundamental idea being that of consecration or separation for a sacred purpose. A Christian or believer is one who has been called of God and separated from the world, set apart for the Master's use (Acts 9:13, 32, 41; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). Such a person, to be useful for God, must be "free from blemish." We see, then, that *"saints"* are born-again believers received into the covenant of God by faith. They are not a select few "canonized" by any man or church (as practised by some in error). If you are truly a born-again believer, you are in biblical terms, a *"saint."*

"Bishops" are the highest officers who exercise jurisdiction in the church. Their office is synonymous with that of *"presbyters," "elders,"* and *"pastors"* (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:6; 16:4; 20:17, 28; 21:18; James 5:14). They, as well as *"deacons,"* are elected into office by the congregation of the local church. Their qualifications are given by Paul in his epistle to Timothy (1 Tim 3:1-13).

"Deacons" were first appointed by the apostles in Acts 6:1-6, although their official designation of *"deacon"* was not actually mentioned. The work of a deacon was to distribute alms to the needy members of the church, and to care for the sick and afflicted. Deacons today generally assist elders in the spiritual and temporal oversight of the church. It is from among the deacons that elders are elected. How important, then, for deacons to be spiritually equipped and thoroughly instructed in the Word of God, *"rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim 2:15).

THOUGHT: Do I pray for other *"saints"* and for my *"elders"* and *"deacons"*?
PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for the leaders in my church.

FONDLY REMEMBERED

Paul was a prisoner in Rome. The believers in Philippi were hundreds of miles away. For some, it would have been "out of sight, out of mind." Not so with the Apostle. The brethren in Philippi had a special place of affection in his heart. *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy"* (Phil 1:3-4).

What was it that Paul remembered the Philippian Christians for?

1. Their *"fellowship in the gospel"* (Phil 1:5): Nothing warms the pastor's heart more than the support of his congregation in the Gospel ministry. The Philippians stood with Paul *"from the first day until now"* (Phil 1:5), a thing neither easy nor popular, seeing that Paul was once scourged and put into the stocks by the authorities. Even so Paul remembered Philippi with joy. He looked upon these sufferings on behalf of Christ as his credit, his comfort, his crown; for out of his sufferings had grown a strong and thriving group of believers.

2. Their part in the *"defence…of the gospel"* (Phil 1:7): Whenever the Gospel is proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, there will be opposition, even violent reaction from Satan's forces. At Philippi, the masters of the fortune-telling damsel instigated the magistrates and the multitude against Paul, because *"the hope of their gains was gone"* (Acts 16:19). To them the deliverance of the damsel meant nothing.

Today, the Gospel is being perverted, watered down and compromised. The few remaining faithful preachers are opposed by a swelling chorus of ecumenical and new evangelical voices. The defence of the Gospel is getting more and more difficult. How precious it is to have congregations who, in the words of Paul, are *"in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace"* (Phil 1:7). For their loyalty, the Philippians gained the Apostle's grateful remembrance and our lasting admiration.

QUESTION: What is it that my pastor remembers me for?
PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful to the Gospel.

A GOOD WORK WILL BE PERFECTED

Believers subjected to pressures and temptations may wonder if they will be able to remain faithful to the end. The Philippian Christians had begun well and Paul was confident that they would complete their course, as he said in verse 6: *" ...he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."*

Paul's confidence in the Philippians will encourage all Christians. If you have doubted your own eternal security, doubt no more! Rather, put your confidence in the Lord, and consider:

1. It is a good work begun by God. Our salvation is not by our own effort. We could not begin it ourselves, no more than a dead man could raise himself to life. It is God who quickened us from the dead (Eph 2:1) and began a "good work" in us, setting us on a new course.

2. The good work is built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ, who said, *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand ... and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand"* (John 10:28-29).

3. God will never forsake His own. He who began the good work also undertakes to finish it. He will perfect and crown the work of His own hands. But we must persevere and let God continue to exercise His grace over us, until the day of Jesus Christ, the day of His appearing.

Every born-again believer should have this same confidence. Our assurance is based, not on speculation, but on the sure promise of God's Word.

THOUGHT: Where is my confidence? In my pastor, elder, church or self?
PRAYER: Lord, may I believe in Thy sure Word of Life.

PAUL'S PASTORAL PRAYER

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is a model for us. It was not for any earthly or personal advantage, but for things spiritual and glorifying to God. How unworthy are some Christians' prayers! Does it explain why some prayers are not answered? The Apostle James says: *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss ..."* (James 4:3). Observe what Paul prayed for.

1. *"... that your love may abound ..."* (v 9)
This is not the sentimental or romantic love that the world raves about, but pure, unselfish Calvary love, a primary Christian grace. Paul prayed that the Philippian believers might increase in such love toward God and toward one another. This love must be in knowledge and judgment, i.e. with discernment. "Misty thought, emotional conduct, and indiscriminate good nature are perilous" (Plummer).

2. *"That ye approve things that are excellent ..."* (v 10)
Christians must be knowledgeable, judicious and discerning. Not everything labelled "Christian" is to be approved. Counterfeits and imitations abound. Christians must be awake and alert to deceptions which threaten the survival of the church. Eternal vigilance is the price which Christians must pay in every generation. Without it, the peace and harmony of the church, and the very faith of the believers will be undermined.

3. *"... that ye may be sincere ..."* (v 10)
The believers' conduct and interpersonal relationships must be considered in the light of our Lord's imminent return. Our present conduct must be given an "eternal dimension." If we live in the "moment by moment" expectation of our Lord's return, then we will most gladly be sincere and without offence, i.e. "pure and spotless."

THOUGHT: I must make Paul's prayer my prayer.
PRAYER: Lord, make me more Christ-like each day.

SUFFERING ADVANCES THE GOSPEL

What good could possibly come out of His servant's imprisonment? Can God work good out of evil? The answer to these questions is an emphatic and absolute "yes," although it may not be immediately apparent.

Paul wrote from prison in Rome: *"But I would ye should understand ..."* (Phil 1:12). He wanted the Philippians to know that, far from hindering the Gospel, his imprisonment had rather promoted it. His personal suffering was of little consequence. Paul's chief concern was for the cause of Jesus Christ his Lord. His going to prison turned out to be a means of Gospel advance.

The fact of Paul's innocence from any crime worthy of imprisonment became a hot topic of conversation both in the palace and outside. It became widely known that he was no common criminal but a servant of the Lord, incarcerated on account of his faith. As a prisoner, he came into contact with soldiers of the imperial guard, some of whom appeared to have been converted (Phil 4:22). Iron bars can shut the prisoner in, but cannot shut his mouth from witnessing! Neither can they shut the Gospel out!

Paul's boldness in prison caused many believers in Rome to pluck up courage and speak for the Lord without fear. Some of these had done so out of ill-will toward Paul, supposing that their action would somehow add to his distress in prison; but there were also men who preached Christ out of pure motives. As far as Paul was concerned, the Gospel had gone forward and for this he rejoiced!

What does it matter what others think (falsely) of you, as long as you are beyond reproach and the Word of God is being proclaimed far and wide? Live pure lives, rise above circumstances and give the Lord's work first priority in our lives!

THOUGHT: Do I truly rejoice when God's Word is proclaimed?
PRAYER: Lord, may Thou always be magnified in my body.

IN CHRIST, DEATH IS GAIN

What a waste, to break a beautiful vase and to spill the precious contents on someone's feet! But if Mary had held on to the bottle, what remembrance would there have been? The broken vase and poured out ointment on the Lord have since become a lasting memorial, spoken of through all the world for 2,000 years. Thank God for Mary's sacrifice. Thank God for our Lord's supreme sacrifice. Had He refused the cross, there would be no Christians today. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit"* (John 12:24). Our Lord's death gives us life. Like a seed sown in the ground, it has brought forth an abundant harvest of souls.

Our Lord has set us the example. There must first be a giving up before there can be a gathering in. One day He said to the disciples, *"For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it"* (Matt 16:25). If we hang on to our lives, not willing to spend and be spent for the Lord, our lives will be fruitless, empty, wasted.

Ever since his conversion, Paul's view of life may be summed up in Philippians 1:21: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* Was the Apostle tired of life? Far from it! He was simply expressing his life philosophy. Paul's entire life was devoted to his Lord. Nothing else mattered, not even the loss of *"all things,"* not even the threat of death.

Fear of death? Groundless fear, begone! For Paul, and every Christian, absent in the body means present with the Lord! For him and us, death means release from present suffering and instant union with our Lord. In Christ, death is gain.

THOUGHT: Is Philippians 1:21 true for me personally?
PRAYER: Lord, let me burn out for Thee.

WITH CHRIST FAR BETTER

Paul's life was marked by a whole catalogue of sufferings, too long a list to enumerate (2 Cor 11:23-28). Balanced against these are the souls won for the Lord, the churches established, the faith of believers strengthened and the Gospel cause advanced throughout the Roman world. Toward the end he wrote, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"* (2 Tim 4:7). I am ready to meet my Lord, which is far better!

An old dying saint wrote: "For over fifty years I have held a clear title to a piece of property in Heaven. I did not buy it, but the Donor purchased it for me with His own blood. The greatest Architect of the Universe has built a mansion for me which will never need to be repaired or insured. In that Land, there are no termites to undermine its foundations, no fire, no floods, no robbers or thieves.

I long daily to be in my heavenly Home. My ticket for that last trip is signed and sealed in red by the Saviour's own hand. It is for one person - myself - and is not transferable, a one-way trip, with no baggage allowance. It is open dated. I do not know when my Saviour's call will come but I am ready. To be with Christ is far better! Dear reader, I may not be here by the time you read this, but in Christ I know we shall meet some day, up there!"

My friend, do you have that assurance? With Christ, it is far better! If you have Him as your Saviour then you may know: Your Father is there (Matt 6:9); your Saviour is there (Heb 9:24); your home is there (John 14:2); your name is there (Luke 10:20); your heart is there (Matt 6:19-21); your inheritance is there (1 Pet 1:3-5); your citizenship is there (Phil 3:20). Praise Him, praise Him!

THOUGHT: An inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven — FOR ME!
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy blessed assurance of a heavenly inheritance.

ONE SPIRIT ONE MIND

The Gospel cannot advance if a church is split by factions. Paul's chief concern is that the Philippians remain united in their stand for the truth of the Gospel. The greater fear is not the enemy without but the one within. Our adversary the devil is ever ready to sow seeds of dissension within our fellowship and church.

A certain father was burdened by his five quarrelsome sons. On his deathbed he gathered them together. Then he called a servant to bring five sticks, tied together in a bundle, and asked each son to break the bundle. Beginning with the eldest they each had a turn, but none could break the bundle. "Now," he said to the eldest, "untie the bundle, take one each and try again." The object lesson was well learnt: united they stood; divided they would fall.

In 1747, the Moravian brethren were sorely divided. Their leader, Count Zinzendorf, called a conference to settle their differences. The many representatives assembled, each prepared to contest the view he held. With godly wisdom, Count Zinzendorf proposed a period of Bible study and prayer.

The book chosen was the First Epistle of John. For three days the brethren submitted themselves to God's Word and its lesson of "love for all the brethren." On the fourth day they gathered for the breaking of bread, and they were reminded of the love of Christ which drew them together. By the time the business session opened, the ill feeling and differences were dissolved as each leader bowed under the Word of God. Thus they were restored to "one spirit and one mind."

THOUGHT: When self rules, division prevails; when Christ rules, unity and love prevail.
PRAYER: Lord, teach me to see Christ, and none of self.

FOR HIS SAKE

Many people embrace Christianity as a solution to their problems. But this is not what our Lord promised. In Luke's Gospel, He openly declared to the multitudes: *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"* (Luke 9:23). To the disciples, He said, *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"* (John 16:33). Christianity is no bed of roses.

Paul's catalogue of sufferings is unrivalled. But the Lord saw him through. To the Philippian Christians and us, he said: *"And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God"* (v 28).

Suffering for the sake of our faith is part of our Christian heritage. Our Lord said it. The apostles experienced it. We who follow in their steps, can we expect anything less? Consider the Apostle Paul's words: *"For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake"* (Phil 1:29). We should not be surprised, then, if persecution and adversity should come our way. Rather, let us be as the apostles, rejoicing after they were beaten by the Jews for preaching Jesus, *"that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:41).

Why should we suffer for His sake? Simply because He suffered for us! The Lord Creator forsook Heaven's glory, took on the form of a servant, *"endured the cross, despising the shame"* (Heb 12:2) and died — for our sakes. What suffering have we borne for His sake?

THOUGHT: If I suffer, I shall also reign with Him.
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy assurance of Thy presence in my suffering.

BE LIKEMINDED

A house divided cannot stand. A church divided cannot fulfil its God-given mission. Paul, the wise master builder of churches, wrote with godly wisdom and rich experience for the benefit and blessing of churches in future generations. He gave four good reasons why the members of the body of Jesus Christ ought to be likeminded and united.

1. Because we all have received the same *"consolation in Christ"* (Phil 2:1). Our Lord, the head of the body (the Church), has loved us with an everlasting love, and given us strong and everlasting consolation, purchased for us at the price of blood. He left us one great commandment, that we *"love one another"* (John 13:34).

2. Because we all have received the same *"comfort of love"* (Phil 2:1). The Church of Jesus Christ is a great family, with many members bonded together with cords of love flowing from the great loving heart of God. Nothing is more precious than this *"comfort of love."* Think! Let this love abound and strengthen the bonds of unity.

3. Because of the *"fellowship of the Spirit"* (Phil 2:1). In Christ we enjoy fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, even the "communion of saints." This gracious gift of the blessed Comforter must cause us not only to keep close to God, but also to one another in the body of Jesus Christ, which is the Church.

4. Because we have received from the Lord *"bowels and mercies"* (Phil 2:1), meaning the deep compassion and tender affection shown by the Saviour towards us. Having received freely these spiritual graces, they should now flow from us to others within the body of Christ, further strengthening the unity of the Church.

THOUGHT: What reasons do I have not to be likeminded?
PRAYER: Lord, evermore give me the mind of Jesus!

STRIFE AND VAINGLORY

Three kindred bulls were grazing together. As long as they kept close and united, no wild beasts dared attack them. A lion had observed them longingly but the bulls were simply unassailable. Presently, the lion thought of a cunning plan. He began to spread malicious reports of one bull against the other.

Foolishly, the bulls fell for the lion's trick and believed those rumours. Soon, the three of them grew suspicious of each other. Strife and vainglory broke up their former unity and they began to avoid each other and took to feeding alone. Thus they fell prey to the lion who made short work of them, one after the other.

Aesop's fable has a lesson for Christians. The unity of like-minded believers is the greatest frustration to Satan who prowls about like *"a roaring lion ... seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet 5:8). This unresting adversary sows seeds of discord and suspicion to undermine our unity. His favourite tactic is to engender pride and self-interest and strife. These deadly sins can easily wreck a group or church.

The Apostle Paul sounds an urgent warning: beware of strife and vainglory. Keep these out by *"lowliness of mind"* (Phil 2:3) and a high esteem of the other person. Be considerate! Do not foster your own interests at the other person's expense. Undue opinion of self may well lead to disaster down the road. Therefore, out with self-esteem and self-interest, and keep your church united!

THOUGHT: What should I do when I hear an adverse report of another church member?
PRAYER: Lord, keep Thy people united. Defend them against the wiles of the devil.

LOWLINESS OF MIND

Pride caused man's downfall in the beginning. It is still our greatest enemy. Unless pride and self-interest are kept out, it will quickly destroy the unity of any group. The cure for this deadly sin is *"lowliness of mind"* (Phil 2:3). The Apostle said to us: *"... in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"* (Phil 2:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ is our supreme example of the "lowly mind." If Christ lives in you then you must manifest His *"lowliness of mind."*

The Missionary Society in England was selecting a man to assist Dr Robert Morrison, the pioneer missionary in China. The Society's committee concluded after the interview of a young man that he was rough, "countrified" and unpromising material for a missionary. But the young man's eagerness prevailed upon the committee to offer him the post of a servant. This he accepted readily with a cheery comment, "I am willing to do anything, so long as I am in the work."

The young rustic made good in China. He went with the spirit of servanthood, in lowliness of mind, to be used in the Lord's service. He said: "To be a hewer of wood and a drawer of water is too great an honour for me when the Lord's house is a-building."

Our Lord came as a servant. *"For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:45). Should not His servants be like the Master?

THOUGHT: Is anything too small for me to do for my Lord?
PRAYER: Lord, keep me low so that I may not fall.

HE HUMBLED HIMSELF

There was only one way to exaltation and the throne: the humiliation of the cross. This was the Father's eternal plan. Jesus the Son bowed to the Father's will. He drank the bitter cup. He trod the sorrowful way. It is not enough that we accept His atonement. We must accept His example as well. He humbled Himself, *"made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant..."* (Phil 2:7).

Herein lies the secret of peace and unity in the church. It is not by socializing, flattery, mutual promotion or organization. Only by the imitation of our Lord can there be unity and harmony in the church. Our Christianity must go beyond mere words. Our theology must be translated into ethics, our doctrine into practice, right teaching into right living. Our Lord humbled Himself. He never insisted on His rights. He laid them aside in order to fulfil the Father's will. *"…he humbled himself…"* (Phil 2:8).

"This is the way the Master went;
Should not the servant tread it still?"

Let me quote from the pen of Alexander Whyte: "It is a mark of true humility to be accused, condemned without cause, unjustly and be silent. To be silent under insult and wrong is imitation of our Lord. O Lord, when I remember how Thou didst suffer how I am ashamed the times I hastened to defend myself and to excuse myself. What vainglory to desire praise when so many unkind things were heaped on Thee. What is it, to be blamed by men - if I should stand at last blameless before Thee!"

THOUGHT: "He that is down need fear no fall; he that is low no pride. He that is humble ever shall have God to be his guide." (John Bunyan)
PRAYER: Lord, forgive my pride. Grant me humility of spirit and mind, for all that I have come from Thee.

THE MYSTERY OF REDEMPTION

The mystery of redemption is seen on the cross: God dying for man, to save man. It took God's great heart of love to send us His Son, and it took the Son's submission to the Father to fulfil the Father's plan. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

The Creator On The Cross

The Maker of the universe,
As Man, for man was made a curse;
The claims of laws that He had made
Unto the uttermost He paid.
His holy fingers made the bough
That grew the thorns that crowned His brow.
The nails that pierced His hands were mined
In secret places He designed.
He made the forest whence had sprung
The tree on which His body hung:
He died upon a cross of wood,
He made the hill on which it stood.
The sky that darkened o'er His head
By Him above the earth was spread:
The sun that hid from Him its face
By His decree was poised in space.
The spear that spilled His precious -blood
Was tempered in the fires of God.
The grave in which His form was laid
Was hewn in rocks His hands had made.
The throne on which He now appears
Was His from everlasting years;
But a new glory crowns His brow
And every knee to Him shall bow.

— Author unknown

THOUGHT: On the cross Jesus paid the debt to set me free.
PRAYER: Lord, help me now to bear my cross for Thee.

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

A group of Bedouin women were listening for the first time to the preaching of the Gospel. One woman was afraid that she might forget the name which had fallen so sweetly on her ears. "Tell me the name again!" she pleaded. Then she went on her wandering with the name Jesus on her lips, her one link with eternal truth. Reader, how well do you love that name?

Tell Me The Name

Tell me the name again, lest I forget it,
The name of Him Who died to set me free.
'Tis Jesus, Saviour, ne'er wilt thou forget it
If thou wilt let His love lay hold on thee.
His name above all other names is glorious,
A place of refuge in the day of strife;
To trust Him fully is to be victorious
In every hour and circumstance of life.
"Tell me the name," then when the day is dawning,
Ere through the busy world my way I take,
'Tis "Wonderful" - He'll gild the dullest morning
If thou wilt live thy life for Jesus' sake.
Tell me the name, when noontide finds me viewing,
With anxious eyes, the problems that oppress;
'Tis "Counsellor" - thy failing strength renewing:
He'll teach thee wisdom, banish thy distress.
Tell me the name, when life's short journey ending,
My senses fail, my mortal eyes grow dim;
'Tis "Prince of Peace" - all human peace transcending,
He'll give thee rest, thou shalt abide with Him.
Tell them the name its beauty, its perfection -
Who never heard our blessed Master's fame:
Tell of His life, His death, His resurrection;
Tell of His power to save - tell them the name!

— *J D McK*

THOUGHT: Soon, at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow!
PRAYER: Lord, I bow to Thee with my heart and soul and mind.

HOLDING FORTH THE WORD OF LIFE

The *"word of life"* (Phil 2:16) has been entrusted to the followers of the Lamb. On us rests the grave responsibility to hold forth that precious life-giving word, as a light shining in the dark world.

Our Lord said, *"Let your light so shine before men ..." (*Matt 5:16). Remembering these words, one Christian recruit debated within himself: "How shall I let my light shine in this barrack? To be known as a Christian would be embarrassing." But did not Jesus say in Mark 8:38, *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words ... of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed ..."*?

At bed-time came the test. To be or not to be, that was the question. Plucking up what little courage he had, he took out his Bible, knelt by his bed for his Quiet Time. The conversation and laughter from the other soldiers continued for a while and then became muted. A few eyebrows were raised but otherwise the event passed without comment. Next night at bed-time, eight other Christian recruits took out their Bibles and had their Quiet Time. The barrack was transformed. Coarse and vulgar language was subdued. As nine little lights shone brightly, the darkness was dispelled.

Holding forth the Word of Life is not just for missionaries, evangelists, preachers and pastors. It is for every believer. It is for you, dear reader, if you are following Jesus. How? Simply invite your friend to a Gospel meeting, a Bible study group, or hand him a tract. But pray as you go, and it will surprise you how your little effort will win some soul to the Lord. God promised, *"... my word ... shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it"* (Isa 55:11).

THOUGHT: *"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light."* (Luke 11:33)
PRAYER: Lord, keep my little light shining for Thee every day.

BROTHERS AND FELLOWSOLDIERS

In business, the key to success is team-work. This is no less true in God's business. Some great servants of God may appear to be "loners." But behind them are many prayer partners. Spurgeon preached to thousands at the London Metropolitan Tabernacle. A visitor asked him his secret. Spurgeon took him to a basement room where 300 men and women bowed in prayer — the source of Spurgeon's pulpit power.

Paul had a team of faithful co-workers. Today we read of Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy, a spiritual son and fellow soldier, had proved most valuable and trustworthy. What qualities made him so useful? He was likeminded and caring (v 20). He sought not his own interests but the things of the Lord (v 21). He served Paul as a son (v 22). Besides that, Timothy was well versed in the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:15) and had a good report (Acts 16:2).

Epaphroditus was sent by the Philippians to aid Paul in Rome. He proved to be an extraordinary helper, a brother to Paul, a companion in labour, and fellowsoldier (v 25). He was totally devoted to the work and hazarded his life so that he was sick, nigh unto death (v 26, 27, 30). To the sending church in Philippi, Paul wrote, *"Receive him ... with all gladness; and hold such in reputation"* (v 29).

Paul's high commendation for his co-workers speaks well for his own love and friendship toward them. As Solomon wisely said, *"A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother"* (Prov 18:24).

THOUGHT: Am I a "befriender" for the Gospel's sake?
PRAYER: Grant me, Lord, a heart like Thine, a heart that loves lost sinners.

BEWARE OF DOGS!

"Strong language, Paul! Why are you so unloving?" Such would be the criticism of new evangelicals and liberals. Was Paul wrong? Or his critics? Did not our Lord say to the religious leaders of His day, *"Woe unto you ... hypocrites! ... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"* (Matt 23:13-16, 23-29, 33) Strong language, Lord! Why art Thou so unloving?

In July 1986, two Australian drug traffickers went to the Malaysian gallows. In the eyes of the law they were murderers. They had poisoned hundreds, and sent many young people to their doom by a slow death. Beware of dogs! Paul was warning those who brought poisonous doctrines into the church, "gospels" which gave no life, only a slow death. They had taught that believing in Jesus was not enough, and that faith in Christ had to be supplemented by circumcision and keeping of the Jewish law.

The Gospel message, then and now, is only one: by grace through faith, not works, not self merit (Eph 2:8-9). Those who perverted this message are enemies of the Gospel. They belong to the category of *"dogs,"* *"hypocrites,"* *"serpents,"* *"vipers"* and *"wolves."* They are evil workers, belonging to the *"concision,"* i.e. not true circumcision of the heart, but mere outward mutilation of the flesh. They are in effect cutting up the body of Jesus Christ by their evil doctrine.

Dogs and evil workers abound today in many respectable churches. Pulpits are occupied by those who teach strange doctrines (Heb 13:9), doctrines of devils (1 Tim 4:1), and damnable heresies (2 Pet 2:1). Today, those bearing titles such as "pastor," "bishop," "elder," "evangelist," "archbishop," "cardinal," "pope," must be examined in respect of what they teach. Always ask: "What do they say? Is it what God's Word says?" Beware of dogs!

THOUGHT: Unless I know the truth, I cannot discern the false.
PRAYER: May I be a serious student of Thy Word, Lord.

GAIN AND LOSS: REVERSE ACCOUNTING

The Christian experience results in a reversal of values, of direction and goals. Paul's life, and the life of all true believers, bears testimony to this truth. Once upon a time, the Apostle took great pride in his carnal achievements: his legal fulfilment (circumcision), his pedigree (stock of Israel, tribe of Benjamin), his religious affiliation (a Pharisee), his zeal (persecuting Christians), his "righteousness" in keeping the law.

This was before the Lord revealed the Gospel truth to him. Then all those things crumbled to the dust. As far as his eternal security was concerned those things were absolutely worthless. As soon as he saw through them, he made that historic statement, *"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ"* (Phil 3:7).

Christ is the *"pearl of great price"* (Matt 13:46). Before Him all other pearls fade into nothing. The knowledge of the Saviour and His undying love more than makes up for the loss of all else. Paul was writing from prison. With Christ, prison, tribulation and death are of little consequence. So Paul asked, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Rom 8:35). Then he listed his own experience: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword. Even if it meant that one had to go through all these to gain Christ, it was worth it!

But who among us has experienced sufferings? It is more realistic if we ask ourselves: To win Christ, am I willing to forgo a social occasion, to give up a doubtful entertainment or pastime, a TV serial, a computer game, an hour of sleep, a worldly friend, some luxury or extra comfort?

THOUGHT: Do I have something (or some things) in my life which I cannot give up for my Lord and Saviour?
PRAYER: Lord, help me set my values right.

THAT I MAY KNOW HIM

Samuel Johnson, the giant of English literature, said on his deathbed: "All knowledge vanishes except the knowledge of God and His Son, our Saviour. That knowledge only remains." On the final day of reckoning, the loftiness of man shall be bowed down and the haughtiness of man brought low. The eternal issues alone remain: the knowledge of the Most High shall abide for ever. That is the glorious vision revealed to men of faith.

Paul caught a view of it on the Damascus Road. Since then his life and outlook were never the same again. He had only one great consuming passion, *"... that I may win Christ, And be found in him... That I may know him..."* (Phil 3:8-10). He had suffered the loss of all things in return for the *"excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"* (Phil 3:8). Nothing in the world mattered once he had found the Altogether Lovely One, the Pearl of Great Price. Now he lived daily only for Him, and was ready to die for Him.

"The excellency of the knowledge" is not head knowledge, but a "trusting and believing knowledge" which grips the heart and mind; knowledge that Christ died for me according to the Scriptures; that He was buried and rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures; that He is ascended on high from whence He will soon come again as Saviour of the redeemed and Judge of the world; that He has prepared a place for me and all who believe, an eternal home, reserved in Heaven for me.

The excellency of the knowledge tells me that in baptism, I am identified with my Lord: in death, in burial, in resurrection. But in this present life that knowledge enables me to live with Him and for Him, *"in newness of life"* (Rom 6:4), and also to suffer for His sake. What does it matter if tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword should be my portion? The excellency of His knowledge cancels out everything else! O that I may know Him more and more!

THOUGHT: What am I doing to know my Lord better?
PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for my lack of love for Thy Word.

PRESS TOWARDS THE MARK!

Christians are in a life-long race which we must all run until we cross the finishing line and obtain our reward. The Apostle called this *"the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (v 14). This prize is the resurrection from the dead (v 11), the transformation of our corrupt mortal bodies to be like our Lord's glorious resurrection body (v 21) and our entry into our everlasting home (v 20). This is the prize which every believer must keep his eyes fixed upon.

The race before us must be run with "holy fear," a lingering doubt that we might not complete it successfully. Paul, in spite of his spiritual stature, expressed this fear in verse 11: *"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."* This is a sanctifying fear that spurs us on to follow after the Lord faithfully. In verse 12, he echoed that same thought: *"But I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."*

Our spiritual marathon must be run with vigour. Whether we have been in it for fifty years or just one month, the same competitive spirit must grip us. Every day the race takes us closer to the mark. *"...now is our salvation nearer than when we believed"* (Rom 13:11). The winning post is almost in sight! The pace "hots up"! A great cloud of witnesses, those who have completed the race before us, are watching, cheering, applauding in the arena (Heb 12:1).

Let us not look back, but press on with confidence. Do not keep recalling past failures and disappointments and those things of the past which may cause you to lose heart. With single-minded determination, let us forget the past and exert our utmost to obtain the prize!

THOUGHT: I cannot do anything about the past, but I can do something about the future.
PRAYER: Lord, evermore give me the spiritual stamina to press on without let up.

PRESS ON IN THE RACE

Our Christian life is a race, with a difference. All who run well will receive a prize, and the prize is incorruptible. Athletes competing in the Olympic games train with might and will day after day, for many long months in order to qualify; then, only a select few will win a prize. The glamour and glory of the event will last but for a time. With passing years, the dazzle fades and even the memory dies away.

Our Christian race is so different! The Lord Himself is our Coach and Prize. He is concerned that we run well, for He has a glorious reward for each and every runner. Are you disheartened, almost giving up the race? O do not, my friend! Hope thou in God. He is the health of thy countenance, thy strength and thy deliverer. Run on!

THE RUNNER'S PRAYER

Lord, make me deaf and dumb and blind
To all those things which are behind:
Deaf to the voice that memory brings,
Accusing me of many things.
Dumb to the things my tongue could speak,
Reminding me that I was weak;
Blind to the things I still might see.
When they come back to trouble me.
Let me pursue the calling high
In Christ, whose aid is ever nigh;
Forgetting all that lies behind -
Lord, make me deaf, and dumb, and blind:
Like Paul, that I may win the race.
I would have lost but for Thy grace!
Forgetting all that I have done -
'Twas Thou, dear Lord, not I, who won!

THOUGHT: How should I train for my life-long race?
PRAYER: Lord, as I run, fix my eyes on Thee and Thee alone.

BE FOLLOWERS OF ME

In the Christian race, we must all learn to follow. Our Lord said, *"My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow me"* (John 10:27). But *"a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers"* (John 10:5). The Apostle Paul said, *"…be followers together of me…"* but *"...mark them ... of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ"* (Phil 3:17-18).

Christendom today is flooded with enticing ecumenical voices calling for "love, tolerance and unity." These and other sounds crowd in upon us. How do we know which to follow? Recall our Lord's words: *"My sheep hear my voice..."* (John 10:27). Then ask ourselves, "Is that the voice of the Great Shepherd of the sheep?" Does this preacher, pastor, bishop or evangelist, whoever he may be, speak the words of Christ? Or is it the voice of a stranger? Strange and deceptive voices must be rejected.

Let us take heed to the words of our Lord. We are His sheep. His voice only should we hear. Paul the Apostle said, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"* (1 Cor 11:1). We follow Paul because he followed the Lord. In the church, oftentimes we are exhorted to follow the pastor or elder. Should we? Yes, if they are following in the steps of Christ. If not, we must cease from following. *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29).

What, then, should we do? We must know God's Word, for therein we shall know God's will. Every believer must read the Bible regularly and consistently. *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim 2:15). When we know God's will, we must follow! This is not always easy or painless, but it is the way of peace.

THOUGHT: Why should I not follow the Ecumenical Movement?
PRAYER: Lord, may I follow only Thee, whatever the cost.

LIKE HIS GLORIOUS BODY

Gipsy Smith, the famous American preacher, speaking to an exclusive meeting of the blacks, was interrupted by a coloured woman who called out, "Gipsy Smith, may I ask you a question?" Looking at her he said, "Certainly, my sister, what is it?" "What colour are we going to be when we get to Heaven? Will it be white or black?" The people held their breath as they waited for the answer. Gipsy Smith did not take long for his reply. "My dear sister, we are going to be just like the Lord!" An approving chorus of Amens rang out all over the hall.

At our Lord's return, *"... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed"* (1 Cor 15:52). This miraculous transformation will be effected *"in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"* when the angel's trumpet shall sound. John the Apostle says that *"when he shall appear, we shall be like him"* (1 John 3:2). Our transformed bodies will be immortal and incorruptible (1 Cor 15:53). Every physical defect and ailment will be forever removed.

What else do we know of our transformed state? Our bodies, being like the Lord's, will not be subject to the physical laws as at present. Recall what happened: *"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut ... came Jesus and stood in the midst ..."* (John 20:19). We shall be able to go through closed doors, windows, roofs, any physical barrier! We shall be able to fly through space, appear and disappear at will, like the Lord!

"For our conversation (citizenship) *is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ."* He must first come to complete and perfect His work of redemption. It will be a glorious unimaginable day.

THOUGHT: Am I prepared for the Lord's return from Heaven?
PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for this blessed hope that I shall be like Thee.

WE LOOK FOR THE SAVIOUR

Of all Christians who have lived through the 2,000 years of church history, the present generation is undoubtedly the most blessed, being eye witnesses of the rapidly appearing signs of our Lord's return. Matthew 24 and other related passages of Scripture should be constantly read so as to remind us of the nearness of this climactic and earth-shaking event, and thereby to be prepared for it.

Horatius Bonar, the great saint of Scotland, has a poem to alert us.

He is Near

I know not in what watch He comes,
Or at what hour He may appear:
Whether at midnight or at morn,
Or in what season of the year.
I only know that He is near!

The centuries have come and gone,
Dark centuries of absence drear;
I dare not chide the long delay,
Nor ask when I His voice shall hear.
I only know that He is near!

I do not think it can be long
Till in His glory He appear;
And yet I dare not name the day
Nor fix the solemn Advent Year.
I only know that He is near!

THOUGHT: Will I have any regrets should the Lord return today?
PRAYER: Lord, keep me burning for Thee till Thou come.

IN THE LORD

In the Lord, all believers are united by the precious blood of the Lamb, who has redeemed us *"that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* (Gal 4:5). Thus Paul addressed the Philippian Christians: *"My brethren dearly beloved and longed for...."* This same warmth and affection ought to prevail at every level in the church community - among leaders, fellowship committees and members, and the general membership. The common bond of love *"in the Lord"* will prevent needless frictions and misunderstandings, and dispel seeds of discord which the enemy is ever ready to sow.

In the Lord - stand fast! We are engaged in a mortal conflict with Satan. Our cunning foe longs to see us at odds one with another, to split our ranks and to scatter us in disarray. Beware the wiles of the devil! Look to the Lord, our great Commander. He is ever victorious. He will aid us in the fight, but we must draw on His strength and grace daily, and stand fast!

In the Lord - be of the same mind! One or two dissenting members can tear the family apart. Should the Lord's body be rent asunder by personal disagreement? Should our private interests override the welfare of the group? This must never be! The Lord's mind must prevail. Submit therefore to Him, and be of the same mind. Any disagreement must be cleansed by His blood and washed away.

In the Lord - rejoice! Our redemption and deliverance from sin must constantly cause us to rejoice in the Lord. Pause and think! What greater delight can there be than being part of God's family? Under any circumstance, good or evil, we have cause to give thanks, and rejoice!

THOUGHT: How did I make Satan rejoice?
PRAYER: Lord, evermore bind us one to another and to Thyself.

LET YOUR MODERATION BE KNOWN

The Christian distinctive is one of "*moderation*" (v 5), meaning gentleness, graciousness, consideration, forbearance. Moderation is the most powerful advertisement of our faith. Men are not interested in our beliefs and doctrines, as they are in our conduct. If our conduct fails, so fails our preaching! Our Lord has set us the example. We do well to follow.

It was a wife's moderation that converted a Hindu businessman. He was enraged when she embraced Christianity. He thought that by harsh treatment he could break her and turn her back to Hinduism. After almost a year of his unreasonable behaviour, an amazing thing happened. His resistance broke down and he followed his wife to receive the Saviour. The surprised missionary asked the woman later, "How did you do it?"

"Well," she said, "it was simply like this. When my husband is angry with me, I cook better meals for him. When he grumbles, I do my housework better, sweep cleaner and make the rooms more tidy. When he loses his temper, I answer him gently. I smile when he treats me roughly. I try to show him that when I become a Christian, I become like my Master. I become a better wife and mother." Her moderation worked!

Lau Ching was the terror of the town. Everyone was afraid of him. Like a wild animal, he roamed the neighbourhood picking quarrels and fighting with all and sundry. One day, hearing the Gospel, he came under strong conviction. He received the Lord in repentance, and his life was amazingly changed. One day, a missionary visiting in the neighbourhood asked, "Have you heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ?" One man answered, "No, but I have seen it! Lau Ching's life tells me that the Gospel is powerful. It made him a new person."

THOUGHT: Keep my temper to myself. It is of no use to others.
PRAYER: Lord, help me to live for Thee, so that others may be attracted to Thee.

PRAYER LIFTS WORRY

Needless worry and undue anxiety sap our spiritual vigour and impede our service for the Lord. This is Satan's subtle snare. Beware lest you fall into it!

Worry, Why worry, What can worry do?
It never stops a trouble overtaking you.
It causes indigestion and nervousness at night,
And spoils the sunny days, however fair and bright.
It clouds your anxious face and sharpens up your tone;
It fosters unease with others, and unease when alone.

Pray! Why pray? What can prayer do?
Prayer changes things: the Lord will answer you.
It's good for digestion, gives restful sleep at night,
And fills the gloomy days with rays of heavenly light.
It puts a shine upon your face, and good cheer in your tone.
Gives you peace with others and peace when you're alone.

Praise! Why praise? What can praises do?
Praises magnify the name of God and bring new joy to you,
Equip you for the battle, fit you for the fight;
They multiply blessings and sweet songs in the night.
Through daily prayer and praise come Heaven's precious peace.
And soon with God in Heaven, our praise shall never cease!

Lord Tennyson wrote this about prayer: "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. For what are men better than sheep or goats if, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer, both for themselves and those who call them friends?"

THOUGHT: No prayer, no power. Much prayer, much power!
PRAYER: Lord, give me a steadfast faith to persevere to the end.

THINK ON THESE THINGS

"We are not what we think we are, but what we think, we are!"

Ponder the truth of the above statement. Young people today fill their minds with the filth that pours out of TV screens and the internet. Result: Society is plagued with violent crimes, sexual offences, and a host of anti-social acts. The media continually feed the hearts and minds of people with moral garbage. As a result, *"from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications ... an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness"* (Mark 7:21-22). What we think, we are!

How important, then, that we guard what we see and think. The Apostle exhorted you and me: Fill your heart and mind with only good thoughts! We must only entertain and absorb *"whatsoever things are true ... honest* (or honourable) *... just ... pure ... lovely ... of good report"* (Phil 4:8). Where can we find all these good and worthwhile things? Not from the newstands and bookshops, not through the media or internet flooding the market-place. Only God's Word and the writings of godly men and women can give good thoughts.

But the natural man and the carnal nature crave after the things of the world. So the Apostle John said, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world ... the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever"* (1 John 2:15-17). And what is the will of God? Surely it encompasses those things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report. Think on these things! Fill your heart and mind with them!

THOUGHT: Sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.
PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to fill my heart and mind with Thy Word, that there will not be any space for the world.

ACCORDING TO HIS RICHES

In the Christian life, one of the hardest lessons to learn is the ministry of giving. The church at Philippi had learnt this lesson and learnt it well. The believers had consistently supported the Apostle Paul with his material needs. They gave, and gave, and gave again!

The Philippians backed their faith with their works (James 2:14-16). They loved their teacher, so they gave. Paul rejoiced greatly when their gift arrived, for it was an evident token of their renewed concern and love. His mention of the matter was not a hint for more gifts, but to commend and to encourage those who gave.

Forced giving is painful, but spontaneous and liberal giving from right scriptural principles is joyous, blessed and satisfying. Today's passage tells us:

(a) When a believer gives as unto God, God is pleased. As a token of worship, the gift becomes a fragrant sacrifice whose sweet smell ascends to God (v 18). But the motive of giving must be right.

(b) God will repay. *"... my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus"* (v 19). *"And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (*2 Cor 9:8).

The needs of God's people and God's work are always present with us. Whenever the needs are made known, what is your response? Ask not, "What has the other person given?" Rather ask, "Lord, what should I give? Thou hast given me out of Thy riches in glory. Let me give back to Thee a liberal portion in gratitude to Thee." Remember: He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly. So, give bountifully and you will reap bountifully (2 Cor 9:6).

Giving to God is putting your money in Heaven's bank. "What I spent I had. What I saved I lost. What I gave I have!"

THOUGHT: Giving is sowing. When giving, think of reaping!
PRAYER: Lord, all that I have comes from Thee. Help me to give cheerfully.

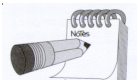
GOD SHALL SUPPLY ALL YOUR NEED

A grievous famine afflicted the earth. For three years there was no dew or rain. But God sustained His servant Elijah by the brook Cherith, sending ravens to feed him. *"And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook"* (1 Kings 17:6). When the brook dried up, God sent Elijah to Zarephath, where a widow sustained him with cakes made from meal and oil meant for one last meal. By God's word, the supply of meal and oil was supernaturally sustained for the duration of the famine.

In these days of modern science and technology, we seem to think that such wonderful things belong only to the past. How wrong we are. God's power is not diminished and His loving care for His own is unchanged. David Brainerd, the famous missionary to the American Indians, was a man of prayer. During one of his journeys to visit the Indians, he was caught in a severe storm. For three days he took shelter in the hollow trunk of a very large tree. For three days, God sent a squirrel which came daily to the tree trunk and deposited nuts at the entrance to the shelter. God sustained his servant by one of His little creatures.

The Apostle Paul had absolute confidence when he wrote verse 19: *"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."* During the world depression of the 1930s, our family faced starvation in our rubber estate in Malaysia. Father's medical training in China was not recognized. The price of rubber had fallen from $100 to $10. Mother prayed for deliverance. By faith, she urged Father to make a personal appeal to the Authority of the State. Father laughed at such an unlikely suggestion. After many entreaties, Father went. A long period of waiting, and the licence was finally granted! With this licence, God supplied our needs for twenty years, until all eight children's education was completed. Truly, God's riches are glorious! His resources never fail!

THOUGHT: With man, impossible! But not with God!
PRAYER: Help me, Lord, not to be anxious for Thou knoweth all my needs and Thou wilt supply.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