

HOW MANY HAIRS DO YOU HAVE?

“Shall I brush your hair before you go to bed, sweetie?” asked Grandma. Mindy, who was spending the night with her grandparents, nodded and climbed on Grandma’s lap. Her scalp tingled as her grandmother brushed her hair with long, gentle strokes.

After a while, Grandma paused and handed the brush to Mindy. “Clean out the hair, please,” said Grandma, “so I can do a better job.”

Mindy hopped down and carried the brush to the trash can. “When you brush my hair, a lot comes out, Grandma,” she said as she pulled out strands that had twisted around the bristles. “Am I going to be bald like Grandpa?”

Grandma chuckled. “No,” she said, “you don’t have to worry about that, sweetheart. I read that it’s normal to lose a hundred or so hairs each day, but you have many more than that on your head—maybe a hundred thousand.”

“Wow! That’s a lot!” exclaimed Mindy. “I wonder who counted them.” Grandma smiled. “Well, God keeps count of every one,” she said. “He does?” asked Mindy.

“Yes,” Grandma answered, reaching for the brush as Mindy climbed back on her lap. “The Bible says our hairs are all numbered. I think that shows He loves us very much, don’t you?”

Mindy nodded. “The first song I ever learned was ‘Jesus Loves Me,’ so...” She paused, thinking hard. “God loves me so much that He cares how many hairs I have.”

“That’s right,” Grandma said as she began to brush Mindy’s hair again. “He is such an awesome God that He even knows when a hair falls out. He cares for you so much, and He watches over you day and night.”

“Even when I’m sleeping,” Mindy said, yawning.

Grandma smiled. “Yes, even when you’re sleeping...”

Thought: Do you realise that God cares about every detail of your life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am so grateful because You know and care for me when I’m both awake and asleep. You know when I’m happy and when I’m sad. Thank You so much for taking care of me. May I continue to trust You. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

ARE YOU SAVED?

Sally was nervous as she sat in the hospital waiting room after her baby brother had been hurt in an accident. “Will Tom be okay, Daddy?” she asked anxiously after a doctor came in and talked quietly with her mom and dad.

Dad nodded. “Yes,” he said, “but he needs your help. Tom has a very rare blood type, and you’re the only person we know who has that same type of blood. He needs some of your blood in order to live, dear. Okay?”

Sally hesitated a few moments. Then she said in a shaky voice, “O-okay. I love Tom so much, so if my blood will make him live, I... I do want to give it to him.” Dad went on to explain the procedure, but Sally was nervous and didn’t understand much of what he said.

Soon everything was ready, and a cheerful nurse prepared to take some of Sally’s blood. Sally was very tense and held tightly to her mother’s hand. After a few minutes, she looked up and asked, “How soon will I die?”

Mom gasped. “Die?” she asked. “Did you think giving blood would make you die, Sally?” Fearfully, Sally nodded. “Oh, honey,” said Mom, giving her a big hug, “you’re not going to die. You’ll be giving only a little of your blood.”

The nurse nodded. “It might make you feel a little weak, but you’ll be up and running around again in no time,” she assured Sally.

When Dad heard about it, he gave Sally an extra big hug. “I’m so sorry we didn’t make sure you understood what would happen,” he said. He patted Sally’s curls. “We wouldn’t ask you to give your life for your brother,” he added, “but we’ll never forget that you were willing to do that. I thank God for you-and for this reminder of what Jesus has done for us.”

“What do you mean, Daddy?” asked Sally. “I’m reminded of the One who did die for us-Jesus, God’s Son,” said Dad. “He gave His blood-He gave His life-for every man, woman, boy, and girl. Because He did that, we receive forgiveness for our sins when we put our trust in Him, and He gives us eternal life.”

Sally nodded. “Jesus died for me,” she said simply. “I love Him for that.”

Thought: Are you sure you are saved? Have you accepted that gift of eternal life?

Prayer: Heavenly Father I know that You love me so much that You sent Jesus to die for me on the Cross. May I be sure I’m saved. If not, I admit now that I’m a sinner and invite Jesus to be my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus’ precious name I pray – Amen.

LOVE AND SERVE THE LORD

Lisa listened closely as her Sunday school teacher began the lesson with a question. "What is the most precious thing you own?" Mrs. Tan asked. "Is it your bicycle? Some jewellery? Money? A pet?" She paused for a few seconds, then added, "Listen and think about it while I read a story to you."

Mrs. Tan picked up a book and began to read. "Queen Helena ruled a tiny kingdom many years ago. She was the last of her family and had no heir to her throne, so she decided to search for a child who loved and served God as she did. 'I am asking God to help me choose the next ruler of this land,' she told her people. 'A day will be set when any child who wishes to become the ruler can bring me his or her most precious possession. It must be a gift worthy to be given to your Queen, and also to God Himself! The child who brings such a gift will be the next King or Queen.'

The special day came, and many children were ready with their gifts. One by one, they presented them to the Queen. She was offered money, power, land—all kinds of things—but all were turned away. "They are not worthy," said Queen Helena. "It is getting late. I will see one more child today."

A young girl came slowly into the room. "Your Majesty," she murmured, "I didn't plan to come, because I am very poor and thought I couldn't possibly offer a gift you would accept. But as I sat praying last night, it seemed that God told me I should come and offer you what I have already given Him." The girl knelt before the Queen. "I lay at the feet of my Queen a heart of love and devotion and a life of service."

"Rise to your feet, my child," said Queen Helena. "A heart of devotion and love, a life of service—these are the qualities that can rightly rule a nation. God accepts them, and so do I. You will be Queen, my daughter, for your gift alone is worthy!"

As Mrs. Tan closed the book, she smiled. "Search your own hearts," she told the class. "What will you offer God? Will you give Him the things that please Him—your love, devotion, and service? That's what He wants from you."

Thought: God wants your heart and life

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know what You want from me is NOT money, toys, clothes, or other treasures I may have. What You want is that I love You and faithfully serve You each day. May I be reminded of this daily so I can press on in my spiritual walk with You. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

GIVE TO THE LORD!

“Wow! That was some earthquake they had in Indonesia!” exclaimed Jess on the way home from church. “I wish I had a thousand dollars! I’d put it in the special offering next week to help those kids that were orphaned.”

Dad smiled. “Well, just because you can’t give a thousand dollars, don’t let it keep you from giving what you can,” he said.

“I don’t have any extra money right now,” said Jess. “I’m saving to buy an iPod and that’s going to take a long time!” She paused, then added, “If I gave to all the needy people in the world, I’d never have any money.”

“That’s true,” agreed Dad, “but there are times when we should look at special needs compared to all the things we’d like to have. I think this is one of those times. Let’s all think it over and pray about it—you, too, Jess—then make our own decision and give what we feel we should give.”

After church the next Sunday, Dad had a question for Jess. “Would you mind telling us how much you put in the offering today?” asked Dad. “Mom and I have a special reason for asking.”

“I gave two dollars,” said Jess. She sighed. “I know that’s not much, but I still don’t have enough money for my iPod.” Jess was surprised when Dad reached into his pocket, took out four dollar bills, and handed them to her. “Thanks, Dad!” exclaimed Jess. “What are these for?”

“Well, God promises joy and rewards to those who give, and your mother and I decided we’d follow that example and give you a reward, too,” explained Dad. “We decided to reward you according to the amount of the sacrifice you made and give you back twice as much as you gave.”

“You know, Jess, those words you just used are some we all need to think about,” said Dad. “The Bible says Christians will be rewarded according to what they have done for God. We can’t begin to imagine the wonderful rewards He has prepared for us.”

Thought: Are you generous in giving to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s lesson. Help me to be generous in my giving to You. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

BE MORE UNDERSTANDING

Puay Hoon cringed as she took a sip from her glass. Finally, she pushed it away. “This isn’t very good orange juice,” she complained. “It’s awfully sour. Yuck!”

“That’s odd,” said Mom. “It’s the same brand we’ve always used. Maybe you didn’t put enough sugar in it.”

“Yes, I did. I’m sure I did!” insisted Puay Hoon. She frowned and crossed her arms. “I think this drink is like Megan,” she added. “They’re both sour.”

“Megan is sour?” asked Mom. “You mean Megan from church? She always seems like such a sweet girl to me.”

“She used to be, but she’s not sweet anymore,” Puay Hoon replied. “Ever since she didn’t make it to the basketball team, she’s been really nasty and rude to everybody- especially to the girls who made it.”

“Really? Well, don’t be too hard on her, honey,” said Mom. “Disappointment is a painful thing, and I’m sure she feels very sad.”

Puay Hoon shrugged, glanced at the pitcher on the table. All of a sudden, she knew what had happened. “I know why this juice is so sour!” she said. “I put enough sugar in the pitcher, but I didn’t stir it well. Look! You can see the sugar at the bottom.” She got out a spoon, stirred the drink, and tried it again. “That’s much better!” she exclaimed. Mom smiled. “All the sugar was at the bottom of the pitcher, so the orange juice was sour until you stirred the sweetness through it. That’s probably how it is with Megan. I believe she’s a Christian, so the sweetness of God’s love must be hidden at the bottom of her heart right now. Maybe the Lord can use you to ‘stir’ it up so that it shows again.”

“How would I do that?” asked Puay Hoon. “First of all, pray for her,” suggested Mom. “Then be sympathetic and understanding. Listen to her if she wants to talk. She may need someone to just listen-sometimes that’s all it takes to help. Remind her that God loves her, and let her see that you’re concerned about her, too.”

Thoughtfully, Puay Hoon nodded. “Okay,” she agreed. “I’ll try to do that.”

Thought: Do you think others are “sour” and therefore you don’t like them? Be more understanding.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be kind and understanding towards others, even people who are difficult. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

ARE YOU STILL A BABY?

“Emma,” said Mom one Saturday morning, “I need to run to the supermarket for a few things, and I’d like you to take care of Andy while I’m gone.”

“Oh, Mom, do I have to? Can’t Robert do it?” asked Emma. “I want to finish a book I’m reading.” Mom frowned. Emma’s attitude toward her baby brother had changed after she learned that he would never be able to do some of the things other children do. She gave him less and less attention. She helped take care of him when she had to, but whenever possible, she busied herself with some other task.

“Emma,” Mom said, “You used to love to care for Andy and take him for walks in the park. Why don’t you want to do those things anymore?”

Emma blushed. “It... it just isn’t the same as before,” she stammered. “What isn’t the same, honey?” asked Mom.

“Andy’s not the same!” cried Emma. “He’s different from other babies. Taking care of him isn’t fun anymore.”

“Andy is the same,” Mom told her. “He’s still the same sweet baby he always was. I’m afraid you’re the one who has changed. You’re not the same sweet, happy girl you used to be.”

“But, Mom,” objected Emma, “you can’t blame me for being disappointed!”

“We’re all disappointed, Emma,” Mom replied, “but we didn’t all grow bitter. It disturbs me that you avoid taking care of Andy. You act as though you don’t really love him at all—as though you love only yourself. I hate to say this, but it seems to me that your bitterness has stopped you from growing spiritually. I’m afraid I have two disabled children—Andy who is mentally challenged, and you – you are spiritually challenged.”

Emma was stunned. She had certainly never thought of herself that way, but she knew it was true. “Oh, Mom,” Emma sobbed after a minute, “I’m s-sorry! Here—give Andy to me! I’ll take care of him. I’ll hug him and love him and...” She buried her face in his neck. “Oh, Andy... you are sweet!”

Mom smiled. “And so are you, honey,” she said. “You’re growing again.”

Thought: Growing spiritually is more important than growing physically and mentally.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

JESUS - THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

“We’re going to pass out tracts at the shopping centre next Saturday?” Aaron asked doubtfully. “Will the manager of the shopping centre let us do that?”

Aaron’s Sunday school teacher nodded. “I’ve talked with the manager there, and he gave us permission,” said Mr. Tan. “I know it’s something most of us aren’t used to doing, but it will be a good experience. Almost every day, we meet people who don’t know the way to heaven, and it’s our responsibility to tell them.” He looked around the class. “How many of you can I count on to come next Saturday?” Aaron and most of the other boys raised their hands.

On Saturday morning, the boys were nervous. It wasn’t easy to talk with people about the Lord. It even took courage to hand out tracts, but they did it. They received different responses. “God bless you. I’ll be praying for you,” said one person. “Keep that junk,” said another. And one lady said, “Okay, I’ll read this and think about it.”

Aaron was feeling quite comfortable when he handed a man a tract that said in big letters, “DO YOU KNOW THE WAY TO HEAVEN?”

The man smiled. “Have you ever been to heaven?” he asked Aaron. “No, but...” began Aaron.

“So you don’t know the way!” interrupted the man. “You’ve never been there, and you don’t know anyone who has.”

“Well, I... actually, that isn’t true, sir!” said Aaron. “I know Jesus. He is there in heaven, and...” Aaron paused as he remembered an illustration he had heard in church. “I’ve never been to Penang,” Aaron continued, “but I have a map that shows me how to get there. Someone who has been there gave me the directions. I’ve never been to heaven, either, but I have a book that shows me how to get there. It’s the Bible, and it has directions on getting to heaven. God who made the whole world, is the author of the Bible! If we can trust a map that was made by a man, don’t you think we can trust directions given by God?”

The man listened in surprise. “I’ve got to admit that I didn’t think you’d have such a good answer for me,” he said. “Okay, I’ll take your little paper and see what it says about getting to heaven.”

Thought: Do you know the way to heaven?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that through the Lord Jesus Christ, I can be saved and given a place in heaven. This I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

DON'T' START LEARNING BAD THINGS...

"Hi, Ben," called Ryan as his friend came into the playground. "Hi," replied Ben. "I've got something I want you to try. You'll..."

Ben was interrupted by Ryan, who jumped up to grab his little brother. "Tim!" exclaimed Ryan. "Don't touch that flower! There's a bee on it!"

"The bee is pretty," agreed Ryan, "but bees can hurt you. Don't touch it. Okay?" Tim didn't say anything but walked off unsteadily to see another flower. Ryan laughed. "Sorry, Ben. What did you want me to try?"

Ben looked around, then pulled a cigarette from his pocket. "Here . . . nobody else is near us, right? Try this," he said. "It gives you a real lift-makes you feel good."

Startled, Ryan asked, "You are offering me a cigarette?" Ben nodded and started to speak, but Ryan interrupted him. "I don't want anything to do with any cigarette," said Ryan. "They harm your body and mind."

"Aw, c'mon! You don't know how they affect you if you don't try them," declared Ben. "That's crazy," insisted Ryan. "They've been proven to be bad. That's a fact, and I don't have to try them to know that."

Just then, Tim let out a wail and held up a finger. "Ouch!" he cried. "Ouch, it hurts!" Ryan ran to help his brother. "I told you not to touch that bee!" exclaimed Ryan. As he looked at the finger, a car turned into the driveway. "Oh, good! Mom's home," said Ryan. "Come on, Tim. Mom will have something to make that finger feel better." He took Tim to his mother, then went back out to the playground where Ben waited.

"You told Tim that bee could hurt him, but he had to go and touch it, anyway," Ben said, shaking his head.

Ryan nodded. "He learned about bee stings the hard way," he agreed. He frowned as he glanced at Ben. "We've been warned that drugs and cigarettes are dangerous and that trying them could lead to getting hooked on them," added Ryan. "I know I'm not going to learn about drugs the hard way-and I hope you won't, either, Ben."

Thought: Do you think you have to try bad things for yourself? Don't learn the hard way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be wise. I know I don't need to touch an open flame to find out I'll get burned. I don't have to step in front of a moving car to know getting run over hurts. Teach me to be wise, and not to start doing bad things... In Jesus' name I pray - Amen.

SET YOUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE

“You need to eat more vegetables,” said Kai Seng, passing the peas to his sister. “Here. You haven’t had any of these yet.” Mag made a face. “I don’t want any!” she exclaimed. “I don’t like peas.”

“Vegetables are very good for you.” Seng helped himself to a spoonful of carrots. “Everyone should have three to five servings of vegetables a day.”

“Since when did you become the vegetable expert?” asked Mag. “We’re learning about the food groups at school,” Seng replied. “We need to eat healthy food-like breads, fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and meat.”

“No desserts?” asked Mom, pointing to the chocolate cake on the counter. “I guess that means no cake tonight.” A chorus of disappointment echoed around the table. “Oh, wait! Hold on!” Seng rushed to explain. “If you’ve had plenty of good things from the other groups, a little dessert won’t hurt.”

“Wow! That’s good news,” said Mom with a wink. “So finish your healthy dinner, everybody, and then we’ll have the cake.” Later that evening, Seng looked at the television screen. “May I play my video game?” he asked. “Didn’t you already use up your game time today?” asked Dad. “Not all of it, and besides...” Seng scowled as he plunked down on the couch, “all my friends get more game time than I do. I don’t understand why I can’t have more.” Dad sat down next to Seng. “Let’s talk about that,” Dad said. “At the table tonight, you told us about dessert in relation to the food groups. What did you say?” Seng looked at Dad in surprise. “I said we need healthy foods from each of the groups, and we shouldn’t eat too much dessert-but some is okay.”

“Yes. Your body needs healthy food, and your mind does, too,” Dad said. “Fill your mind with good, solid things; then give it dessert-but not too much!” Seng smiled. “And video games are the dessert?” he asked. “Correct,” replied Dad. It’s fine to include some of those things, but God wants you to use self-control and make sure you’re getting healthy “mind food” first. That will include reading the Bible and obeying what it says.

Thought: Is your mind getting too much “dessert”?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may I fill my mind with the right things – by studying Your word, reading the RPG and praying to You. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

DO ALL THINGS WITHOUT COMPLAINING

“Come and dry these dishes, Dylan,” called Mom. “Can’t Dana do it? I hate wiping dishes!” Dylan grumbled. “I’m sick of it.”

“Oh, you’re always sick of something or other,” said Dana. Dad looked up from his paper. “We seem to get the ‘sick of something’ illness too often around here,” he said. “We’re about as bad as the Israelites, who complained and grumbled in spite of all the good things God did for them.”

Mom nodded. “I have an idea for a game we can play to help us learn to stop grumbling,” she said a minute later. “When one of us is caught saying we’re sick of something, we’ll also have to tell something we’re thankful for-something good-about that same thing.”

“Okay. You won’t catch me!” Dana declared, but all Dylan said was, “Huh!” For a while, they were all more careful about what they said. They also listened carefully, hoping to catch each other using the forbidden phrase.

One day, Dana walked in from school with a bulging backpack. “I’m so sick of all this homework!” she said. Dylan walked into the room at that moment. “And what’s there about your homework that you’re thankful for, sister dear?” he asked with a grin.

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Dana. Then she smiled and said, “I guess I’m thankful I know how to do it.” Dana sometimes caught her brother using the phrase, too. As he was going to the patio with a glass of milk one day, she came around a corner and bumped into him. “Now just look what you’ve made me do!” he exclaimed in disgust when the milk spilled on his clean jeans. “You make me sick!”

“I’m so sorry, Dylan,” said Dana sweetly, “but now tell me-what about me are you thankful for?” Dylan looked startled for a moment, and then, putting the glass on the table, he solemnly said, “Well, I’m thankful you’re not twins.”

“Oh, you!” sputtered Dana, starting after him-and the chase was on.

Mom and Dad laughed as they watched the kids tease each other. “I think this game is doing our family good,” said Dad. “I think we’re all happier when we’re careful not to grumble.”

Thought: Do you have a habit of grumbling and complaining?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know You were not pleased when the Israelites grumbled, and You will not be pleased with me when I grumble. Teach me to be grateful and not to grumble! In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

THE LORD IS... NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH

Kenny put his elbows on the table and rested his chin on his hands. "If God loves everybody so much, how can He send people to hell?" he asked sadly.

"That's a very good question," replied his Sunday school teacher, Mrs Tan. "I think a true story from Bangladesh will help you understand." Mrs Tan lived in Bangladesh for 2 years as her husband was posted to work there for that period.

"I had two young friends in Bangladesh named Reuben and Milo," continued Mrs. Tan. "They were dirty and poor and had hardly anything at all. One day I took them to the store with me. As soon as we walked in, the store manager started chasing Reuben and Milo out. He didn't want dirty street kids and beggars in his store. He even hit them in his effort to get them out."

The children in the class sat up straighter. "What did you do?" asked one. "I told the manager to stop," said Mrs. Tan. "I said the boys were with me. The manager wanted me to stay-he knew I'd buy things. So, since they were with me, he stopped ordering them to leave. The boys had very different reactions. Milo was happy. He stayed by me and enjoyed being in the store. But Reuben ran outside. I called to him and told him he could come in and would be safe with me. But he kept looking at the manager and shaking his head. He wouldn't believe me-he wouldn't come in."

"What does this story have to do with God sending people to hell?" asked Kenny when Mrs. Tan finished the story. "I made a way for Reuben to come in, but he wouldn't," replied Mrs. Tan. "God made a way for everyone to go to heaven, but some people refuse to come to Him."

Kenny nodded. "So Milo is like the people who believe in Jesus, and Reuben is like the ones who don't," he said. "Yes," Mrs. Tan replied. "I was so happy Milo came in, and so sad that Reuben wouldn't. I think God feels the same way about people accepting or refusing His invitation to heaven."

Thought: Are you like Milo or Reuben?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

CASTING ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM

“How many balloons are there?” asked Michael as he and his father walked toward the crowd of people. They were all waiting to see a group of hot air balloons lift off the ground. “I don’t know,” replied Dad, “but this is a huge event. People come from all over to take part in it.”

Most of the colorful balloons were soon inflated and up in the sky. “Wow!” exclaimed Michael as he watched them floating off. “I bet they’re having fun! I remember how it feels to float up toward the clouds! But that time your friend, Mr Seetoh let me and some of the guys go up in his balloon, we couldn’t go very high. The wind was blowing so hard that Mr. Seetoh kept the balloon anchored to the ground with a rope.”

“Yes, I remember that,” said Dad, turning to Michael with a smile. “Do you know what the balloons remind me of today?”

“Birds,” replied Michael promptly. He pointed toward a bright yellow balloon with bold, gold letters. “That one’s like a sparrow.”

“That’s true, and they both fly through the air,” said Dad. “But I was thinking of something very different. I’m reminded that if we truly give our problems to the Lord, He’ll lift them from us and carry them away.”

“I’ve heard preachers say something like that,” said Michael, “but does that mean we won’t have problems anymore?”

“No, but it means that if we pray about our problems and also trust God, we won’t continue to fret and think of nothing else,” explained Dad. “If we don’t really believe He cares for us, we stay attached to our problems—like you guys stayed attached to the ground the day you went up in the hot air balloon.”

Michael nodded. “We couldn’t really float away,” he said.

“No, and just like the balloon would have to be released, we need to release our fears to God,” said Dad. “Instead of continually worrying and fretting, we need to remember that God loves us and wants us to come to Him and trust Him. When we do that, He’ll give us peace in place of our worries.”

Thought: Do you have problems that seem too big to handle? Cast your burdens to the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, sometimes I worry and fear too much. There are some problems I have – You know what they are, Lord. So please teach me to commit them to You. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

FILL YOUR MINDS WITH THE RIGHT THINGS

“Let’s see... what should I paint?”, wondered Kimberly as she looked at the blank piece of paper in front of her. “I know! I’ll paint a sunset over a lake.”

Soon Kimberly was engrossed in swirling various water colours across the paper. After each stroke, she cleaned her brush in water. Looking good, she thought after a while. But as she turned to add a new colour, her elbow bumped the cup of dirty water, and a little bit splashed across her picture. She blotted it up, but ugly splotches remained on the painting. “Mom, look!” she wailed. “My picture was turning out so good, and now it’s ruined!”

“I’m sorry, honey,” sympathized Mom as she looked at the picture. “Why don’t you get another piece of paper and start over?”

Kimberly sighed and shook her head. “I think I’ll do something else,” she said. Gathering up her paints, she put them away, then went to the living room and turned on the TV. A cartoon was on, so Kimberly watched as evil-looking characters shot and killed each other. “Kimberly, turn that off right now,” ordered Mom, frowning. “You know you’re not allowed to watch that kind of program.” “Oh, Mom, it’s just a cartoon,” whined Kimberly. “Cartoon or not, it’s full of violence,” replied Mom. “You should be thinking about good things.”

“Well, I don’t keep thinking about that stuff,” insisted Kimberly. “It’s not like I watch it every day.” “No,” acknowledged Mom, “but... think about the painting you started. It didn’t take much dirty water to ruin your pretty picture, did it?”

“No,” Kimberly agreed, wondering why Mom mentioned that. “It doesn’t take many ugly scenes to ruin the pictures in your mind and give you bad thoughts, either,” said Mom. “On the flip side, seeing and hearing good things can help you think good thoughts.” Kimberly nodded. “Well, may I play a game on the Internet?” she asked.

“All right,” agreed Mom, “and while we’re on the subject of good or bad things, remember that there’s a lot on the Internet that can be as bad-or worse-than TV. That’s why we allow you access to only certain sites.”

Kimberly smiled. “I know,” she said, “and I’ll remember. I promise!”

Thought: What things do you watch, read, and listen to? Do they help you think good thoughts?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to fill my mind with thoughts pleasing before Thee. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

GIVE THANKS IN ALL SITUATIONS

Aaron threw himself onto the couch and wiped away an angry tear as he listened to the rumble of thunder and the patter of raindrops against the window. “This weather is terrible!” he declared as his dad came into the living room.

Dad stood with his hands on his hips, looking out the window. “Well, we certainly won’t be going to the zoo today,” he said.

“Today is going to waste! I had wanted so much to see the new African lions at the zoo,” snapped Aaron. “We can’t go swimming; we can’t ride bikes or play tennis...”

“Hey! Wait a minute!” exclaimed Dad. “This rain may dampen everything outside, but let’s not allow it to dampen our spirits.” “But how can we help it?” asked Aaron as he sat up.

“Easy!” replied Dad. “We change our point of view—change how we look at the situation. Instead of looking at all the things we can’t do because of the rain, let’s think about all the things we can do in spite of the rain. For instance, we haven’t had a good game of Monopoly for a long time. And the last time we played Scrabble, your mother and sister blew us away. Do you think we could get “revenge” today?”, added Dad with a smile.

Aaron leaped to his feet. “I bet we can!” he said. “Good idea, Dad! We’ve got some other games we haven’t played for a long time either. Let’s get them out too.” He paused. “Liz will want some time to read—but maybe then you can help me with my new model ship. And tonight we could watch a nice video, and have popcorn!”

Suddenly, Aaron looked troubled again. “What is it now?” asked Dad.

“What if we run out of time before we get done with everything?” asked Aaron.

Dad laughed as he put his arm around Aaron’s shoulder. “Well, then I guess we’ll just have to pray for rain tomorrow too!” he said.

Thought: When things don’t go as you want them to, what do you do? Do you smile and make the best of the situation, knowing that God has a purpose for allowing it to happen?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I pray I will not grumble and pout when things go bad. Help me to be thankful to You for whatever situation I am in. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

WATCH WHERE YOU GO...

“Volleyball practice was a mess today!” Siew Ling complained as she got in the car and tossed her gym bag into the back row. “No matter what position I played, the ball kept going off to the side! It was awful!” Her mom glanced at her, and Siew Ling continued. “My coach kept telling me, ‘The ball goes exactly where you send it.’ And then she helped me change my arm position. It made a big difference.”

“Good. Sounds like you...” began Mom

She was interrupted by Siew Ling pointing and calling out, “Look! There’s Mary!” As they passed by, the other girl looked up, then quickly dropped something to the ground and stepped on it. “Mom, was that a cigarette Mary dropped?” Siew Ling asked.

“I think so,” Mom replied, pulling into their flat at Toa Payoh Avenue 2.

“I don’t know what happened to Mary,” said Siew Ling “She doesn’t come to church much anymore. I asked her why she’s been absent so often, and she told me I shouldn’t worry about it. She said she still believes in God and the Bible and all.” Siew Ling paused. “What happened to her, Mom?”

“I don’t know, honey,” said Mom as she turned off the car. After thinking a minute, she added, “But her life—in fact, everybody’s life—is something like a volleyball. It goes just where it’s aimed. In volleyball, if you want the ball to go over the net, you have to practise your aim to send it there. And if you want your life to go toward the Lord and be pleasing to Him, you have to practise, or do, what God says in His Word. Choices you make every day—what you do or don’t do, how you act, who you hang out with—aim your life. They determine where it will go.”

In their hall, Siew Ling stopped. “Mom, can I go to the gym early tomorrow?” she asked. “I want to practise my aim some more.” She paused, thinking. “And I think I’ll call Mary tonight to see if we can pick her up for church on Sunday morning. Maybe I can help her get her aim back in shape!”

Thought: Are your choices in life bringing you to a closer walk with God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to keep a close walk with You. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

PRAYER WARRIOR

Linda stared out of her bedroom window as her mother came into the room and sat down on the bed. “How are you feeling?” Mom asked as she stroked her forehead. “I think you still have a fever.”

“Why do I have to be sick today?” moaned Linda. “I wanted to help my Sunday school class with the puppet show for the Lentor Residence where the elderly people stay.” Her lower lip quivered a little.

“And it makes you feel bad that you can’t go, doesn’t it?” said Mom. Linda turned over. “Yes, it does,” she answered. “My teacher said we would be doing it for the Lord, and I really wanted to help. Now I can’t.”

“I know, dear,” said Mom, “but you can pray that the Lord will use the puppet ministry to bless the elderly in Lentor Residence.” Linda thought about that. “It just doesn’t seem the same,” she said with a sigh.

“Maybe not, but...” After thinking a minute, Mom stood up. “I’ll be right back,” she said and left the room, returning in a few minutes with a strand of pearls. Mom knew it was Linda’s favorite piece of jewellery. “There’s a very important part of this necklace that you can’t see,” Mom said.

Linda looked puzzled. “What do you mean?” she asked. “Well, what do you see when you look at this?” asked Mom. Linda took the necklace. “The pearls,” she said after examining it. Mom nodded. “That’s what everyone notices, but look here.” She carefully pulled two pearls apart to reveal the thin white thread holding them together. “No one notices this plain and simple thread, but without it, my necklace would fall apart.”

Still puzzled, Linda looked at the pearl necklace and then at her mother. “Okay,” she said uncertainly.

Mom smiled. “Prayer is like this thread,” she explained. “It’s behind the scenes, but it’s very important in all we do for God.” Mom fingered the pearls in the palm of her hand. “Even though you can’t go with the others to Lentor Residence, you can have a very important part in their ministry. You can ask God to use the puppet show to help the elderly understand the Bible lessons taught.”

Thought: How often do you pray?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for today’s reminder that I can be a “prayer warrior”. I know although that is not something everybody notices, but You do because You hear each prayer. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

FUTURE GLORY

“Why does Grandpa have to hurt so much?” Bryan asked his dad as they left the hospital one afternoon.

“I don’t know, Bryan,” Dad answered. “It’s hard to see Grandpa the way he is now, isn’t it? But I feel better when I remember that Jesus has a wonderful place prepared for Grandpa in heaven.” Bryan nodded, but the thought that Grandpa would go to heaven didn’t really make much difference in the way he felt. Bryan’s thoughts were interrupted by Dad’s voice. “How about a hike up Mount Faber tomorrow?” Dad asked. Bryan’s eyes lit up. “Okay!” he exclaimed. “I’ve been wanting to do that.”

Less than halfway up the hill the next day, it became a struggle for Bryan to keep up with Dad. Whatever made me think it would be fun to climb this hill although it is not very high? he wondered. And when he heard Dad say, “Time for a break,” Bryan sighed in relief.

After a bit, Dad stood up. “Ready to go again?” he asked. Bryan hesitated, trying to decide if he should suggest going back down. Dad ruffled Bryan’s hair. “You’re not going to quit on me now, are you, son?” he asked. “When we get to the top, you’ll see that it was worth the struggle of a hard climb.” Bryan wasn’t so sure about that, but he nodded and trudged along.

When they finally reached the top, they could see the nature reserve and a nice view of Sentosa and whole city below. Bryan smiled, “You were right!” he exclaimed. “This is awesome!”

Soon they found a nice spot to spread out the lunch Mom had prepared. “Like you said, Dad, being up here is worth the hard climb,” Bryan declared a little later as he enjoyed the chicken bun. Dad nodded and said, “I’ve been thinking, our climb up here was hard but it has a good ending. What’s happening to Grandpa is something like climbing a mountain of his.”

It took only a moment for Bryan to catch on. “You mean Grandpa’s having a really hard time right now, but his life will have such a good ending that it’s worth it,” he said. As Bryan thought about it, he knew that was the same thing Dad had said the day before, but he understood a little better now.

Thought: All believers have the hope of heaven where there will be no more suffering!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to look forward to what awaits me in heaven. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

PRESS TOWARD THE GOAL

"These are exactly what I want!" exclaimed Alicia, admiring a pair of shoes she was trying on. "Can I get them?"

"Well... this is our first stop," said Mom, "but it's up to you. You are spending your own money." Alicia was so sure she wanted the shoes that she not only bought them, she also decided to wear them.

In another store, Alicia pointed. "Look! Here are some shoes almost like the pair I just bought." She looked at them more closely. "These cost less," she said. "Maybe I should have gotten them instead."

"Too late now," said Mom. Later, they again saw the same shoes on sale. Alicia was dismayed. "I should have waited," she moaned. "I could have saved some money."

In store after store, she continued to pout.

Finally, Mom became annoyed. "Look," she said, "you found the shoes you wanted, and you got them. Even if you got the worst possible bargain, it's too late to do anything about it because you're already wearing them. So quit comparing, and enjoy them. It does no good to waste energy on regrets."

When Alicia showed the new shoes to her father that evening, she just couldn't help but tell him about the money she could have saved if she had only waited. "But Mom said to forget about that and enjoy my shoes," she finished.

Dad nodded. "That's good advice," he agreed. "As far as this purchase is concerned, there's no use going over and over what you wish you had done differently." Dad paused. "That's a good thing to remember whenever some project we undertake doesn't turn out the way we hoped—even those things we do for the Lord. We should learn from past mistakes so that we don't repeat them, but thinking too much about them just makes us unhappy and doesn't change anything."

"Yeah, next time I'm going to shop around to get the best deal," Alicia said, nodding, "but for now, I'll just enjoy my new shoes."

Thought: Do you continue to fret over things you can't change—like times you didn't do well on a test when you knew you could have studied more? Try harder next time – press on!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give me the wisdom to learn from my mistakes so that I will not repeat them. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES

“Mom, it’s going to be so cool to have Lyn living right across the street!” Kerry exclaimed. “We’re going to be best friends and do everything together. We’re going to sit together on the school bus, and she’s coming to Sunday school with me every week-and pizza is her favorite food, just like mine!”

Mom smiled as she took a pizza out of the oven. “It’s nice that you and Lyn have so much in common,” she said. Kerry nodded. “We’re going to do everything together,” she repeated.

The next day, Kerry came storming into the house. “Lyn isn’t my best friend anymore,” she declared angrily. “I went over to play with her but found out she was off playing tennis with Justine.”

“Be sensible, Kerry,” said Mom. “It’s nice that you two are friends, but you need other friends, too. Justine and Lyn like tennis, and you don’t.”

“I don’t care,” said Kerry stubbornly. “Best friends always stick together!” Mom tried to reason with Kerry, but she stormed off to her bedroom instead.

At dinner that evening, Kerry was surprised to see spaghetti on her parents’ plates, while her own plate contained only pizza left over from the day before. “Where’s my spaghetti?” she asked. “Since pizza is your favorite food, I decided you could have it for every meal,” Mom told her. “Mom says you can have the rest for breakfast tomorrow,” added Dad.

“I don’t want pizza all the time,” Kerry objected. “I like other things, too.” She frowned. “Why are you doing this?” she asked. Mom smiled. “Well, I was hoping it would help you see that variety is a good thing,” she said, “not only in meals but also in friendships. Both you and Lyn should have other friends.”

“Mom’s right, Kerry,” agreed Dad. “Even Jesus didn’t spend all His time with just one person. Your influence for Him will be greater as you show interest in, and love toward, a number of people.”

“I didn’t think about it that way,” Kerry said thoughtfully. “Can I have spaghetti now? And maybe invite Bee Tin over later?”

Mom grinned. “Yes, if you finish all of your spaghetti!”

Thought: Are you jealous if your best friend has other friends? Don’t be.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please teach me that I must love my friends in the right way, and that does not include being jealous about them having other friends! In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

HIDE GOD'S WORD IN YOUR HEART

“...forty-seven, forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty,” Dad counted loudly. “Ready or not, here I come!” Zach scrunched sideways into the small opening under the couch and pulled his knees up to his chest. “No!” he exclaimed as his little sister tried to wriggle in with him. “Go away! There’s not enough room here, and if Dad sees you, he’ll find me, too. Go find your own place.” But Zach’s warning was too late.

“Gotcha!” cried Dad. He swooped down and swung Katie off the ground. “Not fair!” protested Zach as he slowly crawled out. “Katie gave me away.” “You could have let her hide with you instead of pushing her out where I could see her,” Dad said. “There wasn’t enough room,” replied Zach. “That space is so small that there’s room for only one person.” Dad stooped and poked his head into the opening. “It is small,” he agreed.

“Yeah, If I’m in it, there’s no room for Katie, and if she’s in it, there’s no room for me,” said Zach. “It’s like what we learned in science class—two things can’t be in the exact same space at the exact same time.”

“You know what?” asked Dad. “That’s kind of like your memory verse last Sunday.”

“It is?” Zach frowned as he thought about it. “I remember,” he said. “Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Dad nodded. “Let’s think about the space under the couch as being a heart, and you as being God’s Word,” Dad suggested, “and you, Katie—sorry, honey, but can we let you stand for sin for a moment?” Katie nodded, and Dad continued. “If God’s Word—you, Zach—is really hidden in the heart...” Dad motioned toward the small space, “there won’t be room for sin.” He motioned toward Katie. “There won’t be room for anger or lying or fighting.”

“So we should memorize lots of verses,” said Zach.

“Yes,” said Dad, “but to really hide God’s Word in our hearts, we need to be committed to God and willing to do what He says, okay?” “Okay,” Zach said thoughtfully. “Memorize verses and obey them, right?” “That’s a good plan,” agreed Dad. “Read, study, memorize, and above all, obey!”

Thought: Are you hiding God’s Word in your heart? Are you committed to both memorizing God’s Word and obeying it?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when temptations come, help me to remember what the Bible says. This will enable me to do what pleases You. In Jesus’ name I pray - Amen.

YOU ARE FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

“Hey, Dad, look at this ugly white lizard,” Daniel called as he peered into the darkness of a tank in the reptile house at the zoo. “It doesn’t have any eyes.” Daniel watched as the lizard crawled off a rock and slid into the pond.

“Actually, that’s not a lizard,” said Dad, stepping up beside him. He pointed to the sign on the tank. “It’s a Texas blind salamander,” he added as he opened his zoo brochure to the reptile section. “Look, Daniel. It says here that Texas blind salamanders are born with tiny, sightless eyes, but they lose them as they grow older.” Dad paused, then added, “God made them that way for a reason—they don’t need eyes. According to this, they live in complete blackness in caves, and eat fungi and bits of plants and insects that wash into the caves.”

Daniel studied the salamander. “I guess I can understand why God didn’t give it eyes,” he said. “If it lives all its life in darkness, there’s nothing for it to see.” Daniel pointed. “What are those little feathery wings on the sides of its head?”

Dad looked at the brochure again. “Let’s see . . . oh, those are its gills,” he said. “Blind salamanders spend most of their time underwater and breathe through gills, like fish.” Leaning forward to get a better look, he dropped the brochure. Daniel snatched it before it landed on the ground. He handed it back to his father. “Thanks, Daniel,” said Dad. “You certainly can move quickly.”

“It’s simple,” said Daniel with a shrug. Dad smiled. “When you were younger, you used to complain that you were too small and had thin arms and bony knees,” he said. “You even asked God to give you a big, strong, muscular build. Do you remember that?”

Daniel nodded. “I still wish He would,” he said. “Well,” said Dad, “I think God knows that what you need right now is good coordination, so that’s what He gave you. You’ve found it very useful in the activities you like.”

As Daniel looked again at the little white salamander swimming contentedly in the pond, he glanced at his own arms. The salamander doesn’t need eyes, and I don’t need huge muscles, he thought. That’s okay. I guess God has a reason for making us just the way we are.

Thought: Do you think other kids are better looking, smarter, or more talented than you? God creates you the best way you should be!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be thankful and grateful for how You have made me. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

LITTLE SIN?

As Colin dangled his fishing line into the pond, he watched two frogs that seemed to be fighting over a place to sit on a nearby log. Colin laughed as both frogs fell into the water and began swimming and splashing as though playing a game.

A moment later, a large snake slithered onto the log. It lay very still, and Colin thought it wanted to sleep in the sun. The frogs swimming nearby also noticed the snake and moved quickly away. But then, they came back, and little by little, they got closer again. Maybe they're checking to see if that snake is really sleeping, thought Colin. The snake seemed to pay no attention to them, and gradually the frogs came so close that they were within its reach. Colin felt frozen to the spot as the snake suddenly came to life and grabbed the nearest frog. That foolish frog was soon swallowed, and the other one swam away quickly. Colin ran home to tell his parents what he had seen.

The next day, Colin came home from school with news. "Remember Brian? The kid I used to play with sometimes?" he asked. "He's always getting into trouble lately. Today he got caught taking money from a teacher's desk, and now he's suspended from school!" Colin shook his head. "I don't know how he got so messed up."

Dad put his arm around Colin's shoulders. "Remember the frogs and the snake?" he asked. "You said the frogs noticed the snake and swam away. So why did one get caught?"

"Well, they swam away, but then they came back. It didn't seem like the snake was going to hurt them," replied Colin. "But then they just got too close."

Dad nodded. "The devil likes to 'catch' us that way," he said. "First we might be shocked at a wrong thing someone does. Then we get used to it and think it's not so bad. It goes on and on from there until we even do it ourselves."

"So that's probably what happened to Brian," he said thoughtfully.

Dad nodded. "We all need to guard against getting used to what we call 'little' sins. We should never see how close we can get to sin without being hurt by it. Instead, we need to quickly turn away from it."

Thought: Do you also have "little sins"?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to stay away from sin. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

HELP EACH OTHER

“This is cool!” exclaimed Philip as he and other members of his Sunday school class hiked through Bukit Timah Reserve. Sometimes they walked easily along the well beaten trail. Other times they had to scramble over fallen branches or make their way around them. “Beat you to the next bend in the trail, Tom,” called Philip. But as he started off, he tripped on a tree root, and down he went! “Ouch!” he cried, grabbing his ankle. Their teacher, Michael, hurried over as Philip got up. “I think I can walk okay,” said Philip, gingerly testing his ankle. “It doesn’t hurt too bad.”

“It will be easier for him if he doesn’t have to carry the extra weight of his backpack,” suggested Tom. “I’ll carry it for him.” “Me, too,” chimed in several other voices.

“Thank you, boys,” said Michael. So for the rest of the hike, the boys took turns carrying Philip’s backpack.

At the end of the hike, the boys came to a clearing and had lunch. “You know,” said Michael, “what you boys did for Philip today reminds me of what Jesus tells us to do. In life, we each carry our own ‘backpack’ of responsibilities and problems, but if any one of us has a load that’s too heavy, the others ought to help carry it until that person is able to handle it alone again. You helped Philip physically, and Jesus wants us to help others spiritually as well. Think of a few ways kids like you get burdened down and what a friend could do to help.”

After a moment, Philip spoke. “Some kids have trouble with schoolwork, and then they’re tempted to cheat,” he said. “Maybe we could offer to help them with studying or with school projects.”

“Yeah, and we could make friends with new kids at school and invite them to our class,” offered Tom. “We could even invite the tough or naughty kids to come.”

“If somebody’s bike breaks down, we could let him borrow ours,” said Pete. “We could pray for the kids, too.”

Michael nodded. “Good suggestions,” he said. “This week, let’s see how many people we can help with their ‘backpacks’ of burdens.”

Thought: Is there someone whose burden you can help carry?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be helpful to others. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

ARE YOU A KIND CHILD?

Ben hurried eagerly into the supermarket with his mother and older brother. He led the way to the aisle that was filled with different kinds of candy and gum. They were going to pick out treats for him to take to his class the next day.

“How many are in your class?” asked his brother, Eric. Ben shrugged. “There are 42, counting Ben and his teacher,” Mom told them. Ben picked up a package of candy. “Can I get this kind?” he asked.

“Okay, but... let’s see,” said Mom, reading the back of the package. “We’ll need three bags of these. It says there are only twenty pieces in one bag.”

“Two bags will do” said Ben. “Think again, Ben,” advised Eric. “40 isn’t enough for 42 people.” “I’m not taking one for Steven and Kok Leong,” declared Ben. “They’re mean and I don’t like them.”

“Ben,” said Mom, “you can’t take treats unless you take them for everybody. You must share with Steven and Kok Leong, too.” Ben scowled. “I told you... I don’t like them,” he said stubbornly. Mom looked at him sternly. “You’re getting treats to pass out on Children’s Day, remember? That’s supposed to be about kindness, Ben,” she said quietly. She pointed to the candy display. “Either get some for Steven and Kok Leong, too, or put all of it back.”

Slowly, Ben reached out and picked up another bag of candy. “Well, okay,” he said. “They can have some, but I’ll... I’ll...” He tried to think of a way to spoil the treat for Steven and Kok Leong. “I’ll look mad when I give it to them,” decided Ben.

“Doesn’t sound very loving to me,” observed Eric. “The Bible verse I learned in Sunday school last week says that if we’re living for God, we should be kind to everyone, not just people we like.”

“Does that mean I have to smile when I give them candy?” asked Ben. He made a face. “They probably won’t even say thank you.” “Maybe not,” said Eric, “but I think you should smile real friendly-like when you give it to them.”

“I think so, too,” agreed Mom. “And I’m sure God agrees!”

Thought: Is it hard to be kind to a person who is not nice to you?

Prayer: Teach me Heavenly Father to be kind to all. Thank You for today’s verse that reminds me to be kind and forgiving. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE BIBLE

“None of this stuff will fit together right,” wailed Laura, looking in dismay at the pieces of a craft kit. “This is supposed to make a centerpiece of flowers, but I can’t figure out how to do it.” Dad glanced over to where she was working at a table. “Aren’t you missing something?” he asked as he looked at the things she had laid out. “Did this kit come with directions?”

“Yeah, and I already read them,” answered Laura, “but I couldn’t understand them, so I threw them away.” She rummaged through the wastebasket and pulled out a paper. “Here they are,” she said, handing the paper to her dad.

“Try taking one step at a time,” suggested Dad. “Let’s see...it says to bend the green pipe cleaners in half according to the diagram.” He showed Laura the diagram and then waited while she took the pipe cleaners and bent them. “Good. Next it says to wrap the yellow yarn around the small spiral wires.”

“Will you help me?” asked Laura. So they spent the afternoon together, reading the directions and following them closely until the flowers were finished and combined into a pretty centerpiece. Laura held up the finished project and grinned at her father. “I bet this is the first time you spent an afternoon making flowers,” she said. “Thanks, Dad. It just wouldn’t come together for me. Those directions were too hard to understand.”

“But we needed them, didn’t we?” asked Dad.

“Yeah,” agreed Laura, “and I had read them, but I needed to slow down and follow them step by step.” Dad smiled and nodded. “Well, when you see your centerpiece, it can be a reminder of how important it is to read and follow the directions,” he said. “And let’s be sure to remember to read and follow the directions God has given to help us in our daily life.”

“You mean the Bible,” said Laura. “I do read it, but sometimes I can’t understand it, either.”

“I know,” said Dad, “but don’t toss it aside! Instead, ask God to show you what it means. I’ll always be glad to help you understand God’s directions, too.”

Thought: Do you think the Bible is too hard for you to understand? Press on...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may You guide me and help me in understanding the Bible. This is my prayer in Jesus’ name – Amen.

ARE DIFFICULTIES GOOD FOR ME?

“Take a look at this. This is a diamond! But it is an uncut diamond” said David, the Sunday School teacher, holding up a dull looking stone. The children in his Sunday school class looked surprised as they passed it around. The stone looked a lot like something David might have picked up on a walk through the park. “Most diamonds look dull like this when they come from the mines,” he told them. “Before this diamond will flash and sparkle, it must be cut by a diamond cutter.”

David explained to the children how the diamond cutter has to decide the right place to split away the rough, unimportant parts and leave smooth facets on the stone. David then showed the children a shiny cut diamond and said “See how much better it looks after being cut!” David then said to the children, “Here’s what I want you to remember. God is also doing ‘lapidary work’ on His jewels—Christians. What do you think I mean by that?”

“Does it mean God works in our lives to make us better Christians?” asked Daniel.

David nodded. “Yes. When we’re first saved, we’re something like a rough, uncut gem,” he said. “Then God begins to develop Christian character in us through our day-by-day experiences. Sometimes He uses trouble and tough times to polish us and make us more like Him. But there’s a big difference between the diamond cutter’s cutting and polishing and His. Can you guess what that might be?”

“I think I know,” said Tim after a moment. “God would never make a wrong cut—He never makes a mistake.”

“Good answer!” exclaimed David. “And another difference is that we’re not lifeless like this diamond is. We have a choice—we can become bitter about what happens and rebel, or we can allow the Lord to shape our lives. Even though the cutting and polishing may hurt, He knows what He’s doing. He knows what’s best for us. And it takes a long time—our whole lives—before He finishes with us.”

Thought: Have you been complaining about your troubles—or have you been letting God use a difficult time to shape you into the kind of Christian He wants you to be?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to bear any difficulties You may allow in my life. I know sometimes You are “cutting and polishing” me so that I will be a better person. Thank You for shaping and molding me. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

DO IT HEARTILY AS UNTO THE LORD

“Hi there, Jon. How was school today?” asked Mom cheerfully.

“Okay,” said Jon. He hesitated, then reluctantly handed her his report card.

“Oh, report card day,” said Mom. She looked it over. “Hm-m-m-m,” she murmured. “Some of your grades have dropped since your last report card, but if these are the best you can do, they’re fine.” She looked at Jon. “Are you doing your best?” she asked. “This D in reading, for example. Is that really your best? You’ve gotten A’s and B’s in that subject before.”

“Yeah, but it’s boring,” grumbled Jon. Mom frowned but didn’t say any more.

When Mom called Jon for dinner that evening, he shuffled slowly to the dining table. He was not eager to hear Dad’s opinion of his report card. “It’s too dark here,” complained Jon as he pulled out his chair. The light over the table was very dim. “I can’t even see what we’re going to eat. Can’t we have brighter lights?”

Dad grinned. “For some mysterious reason, women like to eat with the lights dimmed, Son,” he said, “but we guys like to see what we’re eating, don’t we?” Mom laughed and reached for the light switch. The room brightened at once. “That’s much better!” declared Jon. “Dinner looks yummy!” And after dinner, Jon grinned at his mother. “Okay,” he said, “now you can hit the dimmer switch again if you like it dark.”

Dad picked up Jon’s report card. “From looking at your grades, Jon,” he said, “I get the impression that the dining room light is the only thing you like to have working at full power.” Mom nodded. “For some mysterious reason, kids seem to like to use a ‘mental dimmer switch’ and turn down the brain power when they do their school work,” she teased. Then she looked serious. “Neither parents nor God would be pleased if they do that,” added Mom.

“Right!” agreed Dad. “If the dining room lights couldn’t be any brighter, that would be okay—we could enjoy our food anyway. And if these grades are the best you can do, that’s fine, too. On the other hand, if you’re able to do better, it’s time you buckle down and study harder.”

Thought: Whatever you do, always do your best for the Lord!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to do my best for You, in whatever task You have given me. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

JESUS IS THE ONLY WAY...

“Yes, they are!” Michael’s voice rang throughout the house. “No they are not!” Sandy shouted back at her older brother. “Don’t be so narrow-minded!” exclaimed Michael crossly. “When you’re a little older, you’ll learn more about the world and find out you’re not always right.”

“Well, Dad’s older than you, Mike, and I bet he agrees with me!” Sandy replied indignantly. She turned to her father, who was just coming into the room. “Michael’s been learning about different religions, Dad, and he thinks they’re the same as Christianity and will also provide a way to heaven” said Sandy.

“Yes, they are!” protested Michael. “You should be willing to listen to what the other religions claim instead of being so narrow minded.” “The other religions also teach man to do good” muttered Michael. Michael further added “They also claim that by doing good, man can earn a place in heaven”.

Well, I learned a verse for Sunday school that says no one gets to heaven except through Jesus,” said Sandy. “Isn’t that right, Dad?” Her father nodded. “Better not be too broad-minded, Sandy’s right, Michael” cautioned Dad. Dad said to Michael, “The Bible says in John 14:6, which are the very words of the Lord Jesus, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” Dad further explained to Michael, “Jesus is the only way to heaven. Man being born sinners cannot go to heaven by doing good works; only by acknowledging themselves sinners and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour.” Michael realizing that he had been wrong in his thinking, then apologized to Sandy and Dad.

Thought: Only the Lord Jesus Christ is able to save us from our sins.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for reminding me that there is no way to heaven except through Jesus Christ. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

ETERNAL LIFE FROM GOD...

"I had fun today," said Tommy happily when his mother came to tuck him into bed. He had spent the afternoon at a birthday party for Jeff, a friend in his Sunday School class. "I really like the truck I gave Jeff," added Tommy with a grin, "and he likes it, too."

Mom smiled. "Good," she said. "Now you need to settle down. It's time to pray and then go to sleep."

After they prayed together, Tommy looked up with a puzzled expression. "Mom, how do you know for sure if you're really saved?" he asked as he climbed into bed.

"Do you understand that Jesus died for your sins, and that you can't save yourself?" asked Mom.

Tommy nodded. "Sure-I know all about that, and I asked Jesus to be my Savior last January. But sometimes I still sin, and that makes me wonder about it."

Mom nodded. "Tommy, think about that truck you took to Jeff's party today," she said. "You really like it, so did you bring it home again when the party was over?"

Tommy shook his head. "No," he said. "It's Jeff's. I gave it to him."

"What if he's mean to you tomorrow?" asked Mom. "Then will you take the truck back?"

"Of course not!" said Tommy. "It belongs to Jeff now, not to me."

Mom nodded. "That's right, Son," she said. "You gave it to him as a gift, so it's his. And when you trusted Jesus to forgive your sins and save you, God gave you a gift-the gift of eternal life. You didn't earn it, just like Jeff didn't earn the truck you gave him. And just like you gave it to him to keep, God gave you eternal life to keep. He doesn't take back His gift, either."

"Whew!" Tommy sighed with relief. "I'm glad I don't have to worry about that anymore." He yawned. "Night, Mom," he added, snuggling down in his bed.

Thought: Have you admitted that you're a sinner? Have you trusted Jesus to save you?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to die on the Cross for my sins. Thank You for saving me and giving me eternal life. In Jesus' name I pray - Amen.

DISCIPLINE IS GOOD FOR YOU!

“Mom, you’re always scolding and punishing me,” complained Alicia as she sat on the “time-out” corner. “You never get mad at Alan.”

“Oh, yeah? Think again!” The challenge came from Alan, who had come into the room and overheard the remark. “I used to get punished a lot-and I still do sometimes. So quit pouting and learn your lesson, sis.”

That afternoon, the family attended a school funfair at the zoo. The special event was elephant rides. After watching for a while, Alan chose to have a ride on the larger elephant, and Alicia wanted to ride the smaller one.

“Want to see how you looked?” asked Dad when the rides were over. He held out his digital camera, and they all gathered around to see the pictures he’d taken. “Did you notice that the trainer just spoke to the bigger elephant while you were riding?” asked Mom. “He sometimes used his stick with the smaller one.”

Alicia nodded. “At first, I thought it was mean of him to do that,” she said, “but he said it was a young elephant and was just learning to obey. He only tapped it-he didn’t hurt it.” “I’m sure the older elephant also gets disciplined from time to time,” said Dad, “but it probably learned from its earlier training and doesn’t need to be corrected so often.”

Mom nodded. “I guess Dad and I are ‘trainers,’ too,” she said. “We give you instructions, and sometimes we need to correct or discipline you so you’ll learn.” “Yeah,” said Alan, “and I’ve already learned a lot from having had more years of training than you’ve had, Alicia.” Dad smiled. “The Bible instructs parents to correct their children,” he said. “That’s the purpose of occasional scoldings and things like the ‘time-out’ chair.” Alan pointed to a booth next to the elephant rides. “Hey, Dad, maybe you should buy one of the elephant saddles they’re selling over there,” he said. “We could use it for the time-out corner.”

“Yeah,” agreed Alicia. “That would make the ‘time-outs’ more fun!”

Dad laughed. “A time-out isn’t supposed to be fun, so no elephant time-out corner!” he said. They all laughed with him.

Thought: Are you unhappy when you are disciplined? Remember – your parents love you and discipline you to help you grow in the right way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I must confess that sometimes, I think my parents are “mean” when they correct me. But please help me remember parents who love their kids must punish them so the kids will learn the right way and grow correctly. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

This month's study is on The Fruit of the Spirit. The word "fruit" is singular, meaning one "fruit." And "the Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit. This is not a physical fruit you eat, but a special spiritual fruit. It is a fruit with 9 points or parts. These are the 9 virtues or characteristics of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

Dear reader, who has this Fruit of the Spirit? Clue: the Holy Spirit lives in the heart of the child of God. You must be a true believer before the Fruit of the Holy Spirit can be found in you.

We will find out more about The Fruit of the Spirit this month. And we will study each characteristic (good quality) in detail in the following days.

Please circle all the fruits:

potatoes corn apples
broccoli biscuits honey-dew
candy pears carrots grapes
pork oranges chicken cherries
beans strawberries peas kiwi
water-melon beef bananas

Thought: Am I a child of God? Does the Holy Spirit live in my heart?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to believe in You, so that I will have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' I pray – Amen.

WHO HAS THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT?

When a person believes in the Lord Jesus, he will confess his sins and invite Jesus to be his Lord and Saviour. When he genuinely does that, the Holy Spirit will come and live in his heart. If the believer follows the leading of the Holy Spirit and seeks to be filled with the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit produces the Fruit of the Spirit in his heart. So, the child of God will have the 9 characteristics of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.

Dear reader, does the Holy Spirit live in your heart? If so, be guided by the Holy Spirit and ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Slowly, you will have the 9 virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit in your life. If you are not a child of God, believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be in God's Family!

However, it is not going to be easy to be filled with Holy Spirit. You must first empty yourself of your pride, selfishness, anger etc.

Tick off some of the things the person with the fruit of the Spirit will do:

- () Play rough and never say "sorry" or "excuse me."
- () Be kind to those smaller and weaker than you.
- () Show love to others - share your things.
- () Do good and not bad things.
- () Be proud and show off all the time.
- () Always be thankful to God and be happy with what you have.
- () Make trouble for other people.

Thought: Can people see the good qualities of the Fruit of the Spirit in me?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to understand what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, for this I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

BEARING THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Before a farmer plants his crops, he must prepare the ground. Weeds and big stones must be taken away. He must dig to make the ground soft. Manure or black soil must be added. After the seeds are planted, the farmer must water them once or twice a day. Even when the plants come out, the farmer must continue to water them. And he makes sure there are no weeds and no insects attacking the plants. Then, in time the fruit will come out.

The child of God must keep close to God every day. Talk often with the Lord – this is prayer. He must also read God's Word, and worship God every Sunday, to learn more about God. All these are like spiritual vitamins for the believers. Then the different good virtues of the fruit of the Spirit will be seen in them.

Underline the 9 characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit.

cheating pear

apple trouble love sadness

joy peace longsuffering gentleness

faith crying banana meekness fighting

grapes hate temperance strawberry

orange anger goodness

Thought: I must not forget to take my "spiritual vitamins" every day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be spiritually strong. Let me show others the fruit of the Spirit in my daily activities, for this I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

LOVE, JOY, PEACE

Love, joy and peace are the first set of the 3 characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit. They are what you have in your heart and mind. These good qualities come from your relationship with God. The more you communicate with God, the better your bond (closeness) with Him. How to communicate with God? Talk to God and read His Word every day.

Dear reader, you can have love, joy, and peace, too. Remember, God loves you. The Lord Jesus has died on the cross for your sins. Confess Him as your Savior. You will know great joy. Because you are set free from your burden of sins. This will give you peace in your heart!

Circle the words “love” “joy” and “peace” in the following song.

Ev'ry joy or trial
Falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial
By the Sun of Love;

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blest –
Finding, as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest.

(Frances R. Havergal)

Thought: May I have love, joy and peace in the Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to keep close to You, and I will always have love, joy and peace. This is my simple prayer in Jesus' name - Amen.

GOD IS LOVE

God is holy and must punish sin. But God loves man. How do you know that? Read John 3:16 again - "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Jesus Christ came to earth as a human person to take the punishment for your sins, and my sins. And when we believe in Him, He forgives our sins and gives us everlasting life in Heaven.

Dear reader, do you know God's love? Romans 5:5 says "... the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Love is the 1st characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit.

Draw some pictures or name some of the things around you, which show God's love. An example is the beautiful rainbow.



Thought: I see many things in Nature, telling of God's love for me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for loving me. Help me to appreciate the beauty of Nature, for this I pray in Jesus' name - amen.

LOVE OF CHRIST

Before the Lord Jesus went to the Cross to die, He told His disciples "...so have I loved you." Yes, He loves you, too. He went willingly to die a very cruel death because of your sins, and mine. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Dear reader, the Lord Jesus loves you so much that He paid the penalty for your sins. In other words, He took the punishment for your sins. Are you going to accept God's gift of salvation today?

Read the Bible verses and answer the following questions -

1. What is the Lord Jesus' 1st great Commandment?

_____ THE LORD THY GOD (Mark 12:30).

2. What is the Lord Jesus' 2nd great Commandment?

_____ THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF
(Mark 12:31).

3. What did the Lord Jesus command in John 15:17?

_____ one another.

4. What is the royal law?

_____ THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF
(James 2:8).

Thought: Have I received the salvation of the Lord Jesus?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for sending the Lord Jesus to die for my sins. Teach me how to share Your love with others. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

LOVE FOR GOD

There are many ways to show your love for God. Every day, you must pray to God. Do not forget to read God's Word too. Be sure to go to church. You can listen to His Word and learn His Truth in Sunday School. The more you know about God and His Word, the better you will love Him and His Word. Then you will want to obey God and keep His commandments.

Dear reader, do you know what is the first great commandment? It is to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength."

Look every direction for the word LOVE.
It appears 15 times.

L S B L A Z N A Y F E G K L
T O A O G L O V E Q V H F O
U W V V F R X P J Z O L I V
E P I E D L B H K L L O V E
V Q V Z O X O C A O X V U V
O O F V H G Y V I V Z E W O
L H E V O L O V E E W F X L

How many can you find? _____

Thought: Do I love God more than anyone or anything?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to love You more than anyone or anything else. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

LOVE FOR MAN

The Lord Jesus says the second great commandment is “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” In today’s context, the word “neighbour” could mean someone who lives in the house next to yours, or someone who lives near you. But the phrase “thy neighbour” mentioned in the Bible means any other person that is not you. It can be the person living next door, or your classmate, or even that naughty boy or bossy girl in school.

We all love ourselves. We feed ourselves. We clothe ourselves. We wash ourselves. Will you want to hit yourself? Of course not! Do we want to say bad things about ourselves? Of course not! Since we are to love our neighbour as ourselves, we are not to do anything harmful to him or her!

Read the following story and answer the question at the end:

A man was traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. Along the way, he was attacked by thieves. They stole his money and left him half dead by the roadside.

A priest came by, saw the man, and walked by the other side. Then a Levite (holy man of the Jews) came by. He saw the poor man, and passed by the other side, too.

Finally a Samaritan came by. When he saw the man, he had compassion (pity) on him. He bandaged the wounds of the man and took him to the inn (a small hotel). The next day, before the Samaritan continued on his journey, he gave some money to the inn-keeper to take care of the sick man. He promised to repay any extra money spent on the sick man, when he next came to the inn again.

Who showed love to his neighbour? _____

Thought: Do I love my neighbour as myself?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me how to obey Your second great commandment - to love my neighbour as myself. This I pray this in Jesus’ name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF BROTHERLY LOVE

Do you know David and Jonathan - two very good friends mentioned in the Bible? When they first met, David was a young shepherd boy and Jonathan was the son of Saul - the first king of Israel. King Saul tried to kill David as he was afraid that the latter would be the next king. Now if David really did become the next king, what would happen to the son of the current king? Usually, new kings would kill all the descendants of the previous king in order to get rid of any potential enemies. Despite knowing this, Jonathan protected his friend. Why?

It is because Jonathan did not crave for the great riches, power and glory owned by a king. He accepted and obeyed God's will for the kingship to be passed on to David, instead of him. The other reason is his love for David is as much as his love for himself. This is shown when he protected David at the expense of great danger to himself. His father was full of hatred for David, and would stop at nothing to kill him. Despite that, Jonathan was willing to stand up to his evil father.

We have learned it is God's will for us to love our brother and neighbour. Let us do it in practical ways so that others can see that we obey God!

What would your answer be?

1. At meals during the JW camp, do you grab whatever food you like and not consider whether there is enough for the rest?
2. Will you help a new child adjust in JW or in school?
3. Would you share your new computer game with the others in your group, even if it means you would have less time to play with it?

Thought: I must learn how to put others before me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me behave so that others will know I am an obedient child of God. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

THE JOY OF JESUS

The 2nd characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is joy. What does the word “joy” mean? Is it just to be happy, or pleased? Well, that is the general meaning of the word “joy”. However when we have the joy of Jesus, it far exceeds the normal joy others talk about. Joy is the deep strong comfort and bliss we have because of our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Are you not glad to know God loves you? When you love the Lord, you will follow His commandment to love your neighbor. That is a very tough thing to do, but with God’s strength, you can do it.

If you have believed the Lord Jesus and are born again into the family of God, you will want to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Psalm 100:1). What if you are sick or have a problem? Does it mean that Christians have fewer problems than non-Christians? Of course not. The Bible does not teach us that. But what we do know from today’s text is we shall have joy when we keep God’s commandments and keep in His love – meaning not do anything that will make God angry with us.

So even when we have difficulties and troubles, we would be able to echo with the prophet Nehemiah that “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

Try to fill in the missing words of this hymn -

Jesus is the ___ ___ of living,

He’s the King of Life to ___ ___ ;

Unto Him my ___ ___ I’m giving,

His for ___ ___ more to be.

I will ___ ___ what He commands me,

Anywhere He leads I’ll ___ ___ . (*A. H. Ackley*)

Thought: Real salvation brings real joy

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to obey You everyday, so that I may be able to experience real joy every day. This is my prayer in the precious name of Christ - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF JOY

Paul was a diligent servant of God. He set up many churches in different places. He worked hard to take care of the many church members. He went through many difficulties because of his faith. Some of these are written in today's text - being beaten, put in prison, stoned, shipwrecked (had accident on the sea), being in danger from thieves, from strangers and from his own people. There were times he had no rest (not enough sleep), had no food or drink, and suffered the cold.

How do you think someone who has suffered the above scenarios would feel? Would he or she still be happy or full of joy? What if you were not given enough food, punished for no fault of yours, or put through physical danger? Would you like it? Of course not!

However, Paul did not fret. Paul was not unhappy. Of course, he would rather not have difficulties, but he knew that through difficulties, he could be brought closer to God. Also, he knew that he was suffering all these for the sake of Jesus. That is why he could say in Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice". To rejoice is to have joy.

Sometimes God allows unpleasant (not nice) things to happen to you. Why? There are many reasons: to increase your faith; to remind you to always pray, to help you trust God more, or to test whether you will continue to love God.

If you are tested with difficult circumstances, would you still have joy?
Are you able to sing this song, and mean it?

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,

Down in my heart, Down in my heart, Down in my heart,

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy

Down in my heart, Glory to His Name!

Thought: Do I throw a tantrum when I don't get my way?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to rejoice in You always, even when things go wrong. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

PEACE PROMISED BY CHRIST

The 3rd characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is peace. What is peace? It is the calm or quiet that you can feel, even when trouble happens to you. When things go wrong, people often become angry, but the Lord Jesus promises His peace to all who believe in Him.

Only children of God have this special peace. It does not mean they have no sickness or pain. Believers may have problems, but they need not feel sad or unhappy because they have this peace promised by Christ. They also know they belong to the Lord. Dear reader, God loves and cares for you. The more faith you have, the more you trust God, the greater the peace in your heart!

Teck Leong was initially worried when his father shared with the family over night devotion that the doctor had found a small cyst (or lump) in his liver. However, it was not clear from the X-ray whether it was cancerous. The doctor has advised his father to go for further tests. That night was one of the longest nights for Teck Leong. He tossed in bed, scared of what would happen if his father really had cancer. Then he suddenly remembered what his JW teacher taught – Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

That brought him to his senses, and he committed his father’s condition to God. And guess what? When the results came out – the lump was a harmless growth and the specialist said it was too small to worry about!

That evening, Teck Leong knew what it meant to commit his worries to God, and to have peace that only our Heavenly Father can give.

Thought: Do you have the peace of God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to put my faith in You, that whatever comes my way, even if there are difficulties and troubles, I will still be able to have Your peace. This I pray in Jesus’ name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF PEACE

Have you heard the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? These young Jews were groomed to serve the Babylonian king as they were among the finest of the Jewish people. Although these 3 were given the best of food and garments, they were required to serve the king and as we read today, bow down to worship the golden image made by King Nebuchadnezzar. What would you do if you were in their position?

There was a lot for them to lose if they disobeyed the command to bow down to the golden image. If they simply followed what they were told, they would continue to enjoy a lifestyle that many others wanted, for they were given special privileges and probably some of the best the powerful empire had. However, if they refuse to obey the king, death was certain! And it was going to be a painful and terrible death – for they would be burnt alive in a huge fire furnace.

Because they knew that bowing to the image was wrong, they bravely refused to obey the command. Instead, they calmly told the king that their God could save them and even if God chose not to save them, they would still not worship the image. They trusted God and there was peace in their hearts even though they would be put to death. For this, they were tied up and thrown into the burning furnace but God saved them! Dear reader, do you have this special peace?

Fill in the blanks.

1. To talk to God is to [P] _ _ _ .
2. God's home is in _ [E] _ _ _ .
3. The child of God must _ _ [A] _ God's Word.
4. The child of God must attend Sunday _ [C] _ _ _ .
5. Jesus _ _ _ [E] down to earth to save sinners.

What is the word formed by the alphabets in []? _ _ _ _

Thought: Real Christians have real peace.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may Your special peace and comfort strengthen me, especially in time of trouble. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

LONGSUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS

Remember the first set of 3 characteristics? They are love, joy and peace. Today we look at the next set of 3 characteristics. These are longsuffering, gentleness and goodness. This set of good qualities help us in our interaction (dealing) with other people.

When you believe in the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in your heart. As you obey His leading, He will help you show the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Try to memorize the verse: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness...”

Word Search – words can be in any direction:

LOVE FORGIVEN PEACE JESUS HEART FRUIT
JOY HOLY PRAY LIFE HELP SPIRIT BELIEVE

J E S U S P I R I T I U R F
O L O N G S U F F E R I N G
Y P E A C E V E I L E B E L
L A G E N T L E N E S S V I
O T R A E H N E V I G R O F
H E L P G O O D N E S S L E

Read the remaining words:

_____,
_____, _____.

Thought: How do I interact (deal) with other people?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, although I am young, please teach me longsuffering, gentleness and goodness. These are difficult concepts, but please give me wisdom to understand as I learn from my RPG readings. This I pray in Jesus’ name - Amen.

LONGSUFFERING

The 4th characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is longsuffering. Do not be scared by the long word – just think of it as “suffering long”! It also means having patience with people, that is, being able to endure (bear) rude or difficult people. For example someone may irritate (disturb) you. If you are longsuffering, you will suffer long, and will not become angry with that person.

It is not easy to be patient with someone who always tries to quarrel with you. However if you really want to please God, you will commit these times to Him and He will help you to have this virtue of longsuffering.

Fill in the missing alphabets.

1. The opposite of a short ruler is a _ _ _ _ ruler.
2. Je _ us loves me.
3. A child of God has the fr _ it of the Spirit.
4. God gives eternal li _ e in Christ.
5. Christ can _ orgive my sins.
6. B _ lieve in Christ and be saved.
7. A child of God must p _ ay every day.
8. Are you read _ _ _ the Bible every day?

The missing alphabets form

_____.

Thought: Am I longsuffering towards others?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me develop the virtue of being longsuffering towards others. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF PATIENCE

The virtue of patience is very similar to that of longsuffering which you have learnt in your previous RPG devotion. While longsuffering has to do with enduring difficult people, patience has to do with enduring difficult circumstances.

There are many English proverbs that originate from our precious Bible. One of them is “As patient as Job”. Some of you may be familiar with the account of Job in The Old Testament. He was a very rich man who loved God. That is rare – for many rich people rely on themselves and think they do not need God since they are so wealthy.

Job was tested by God. He lost his family, his cattle and everything, but that was not all. His body was covered with sore boils (swellings). That was a painful and terrible disease to have. He had to use a broken piece of pottery to scratch himself. Yet he was patient despite the circumstances that he was in, and looked to God.

Dear reader, when you are hungry, can you wait patiently for your dinner? After praying, do you wait patiently for God’s answer? It is not easy to be patient, especially in difficult times (having sickness, pain, or trouble). But dear child, remember – God is good and will not allow you and me to be tested beyond what we can bear.

Thought: Do I blame God when things go wrong?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide me to be patient and continue to trust You, especially in difficult times. This is my prayer in Jesus’ name – Amen.

GENTLENESS

“The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men.” The word “gentle” means kind. The 5th characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is gentleness. This good quality of gentleness means being kind to others. You like other people to speak nicely to you, and not treat you roughly. Therefore, you should do the same to them.

Dear reader, it is not just the use of the magic words “please”, “thank you”, and “sorry”. What we are talking about is a change in our hearts, not merely a change in our speech. What God wants in us is a change in how we think, not just a change in what we say.

To some of you, gentleness may be seen as a weakness. Especially to some boys, they think to be gentle is to be like a “softie”. That is absolutely not true. Being gentle is not being weak. Being gentle is actually great strength, for the person who is gentle knows how to control his strength and channel that to being kind and calm in the face of difficult people or situations.

Is gentleness one of your characteristics?

Tick off the statements that are true of you:

☐ speak in a nice way to others.

☐ smile at others.

☐ treat others in a rough way.

☐ willing to help others.

☐ show an angry face.

☐ speak with a fierce voice.

☐ be kind to others.

Thought: God’s children are different from other people.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to show gentleness towards others around me. This I pray in Jesus’ name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF GENTLENESS

Have you heard of Joseph, the one whose father gave a coat of many colours to? His father loved him so much that he gave him this very special coat which caused his brothers to be so jealous that they sold Joseph away as a slave. However, God was with Joseph and he was made the 2nd most powerful man in Egypt by the Pharaoh.

Sometime later, there was a serious and long famine, and Joseph's brothers had to go to Egypt to buy corn. They did not know that their brother was alive. They did not expect him to be alive and therefore did not recognize Joseph when they came to bow to this powerful Egyptian man. Was revenge on the mind of Joseph? What would you do to people who betrayed you? Joseph could easily have taken revenge on his brothers. Instead, he showed great kindness to them by granting them food and eventually allowing them to live in Egypt.

Dear child, it is not easy to be gentle towards those who have treated you badly. Joseph must have found it difficult to be gentle to his brothers but with the help of God, he was able to do so. Perhaps you can pray to God to enable you to be gentle to others?

Write down 3 things you can do to show your gentleness to people around you.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thought: May I learn to be like Joseph!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to show gentleness towards others. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

GOODNESS

We use the word “good” very often. It could indicate competence (John is good in his studies); reliability (that bicycle has good brakes); enjoyment (that was a good meal), but what does it really mean to be good? What does it mean to have goodness? Goodness is the 6th characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit. What does it mean? It is NOT JUST the opposite of being bad. It is much more than that. To have goodness is to be right with God. It is to have a righteous character that will please God. That would include being honest, truthful, and trustworthy, yet that is not all.

Again, it is not the external goodness we see – a “good” child who obeys his parents. It is the internal – why the child obeys his parents. If you love God, you will hate sin. You will want to obey God’s laws, and say “No!” to sin. Since we know it is God’s law to honour our parents, we must obey them! To be good is not only doing what is right but having the correct attitude that flows from a heart that wants to please God.

Your love for God can be seen in your actions. Always do what is right and pleasing to God.

Write down the opposite meanings for example:

1. right _____
2. good _____
3. love _____
4. yes _____
5. happy _____
6. Heaven _____

Thought: May I really be a good child for the Lord.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, show me how to be a good child. I know I have been naughty or selfish, but Heavenly Father, help me to be a good child from today. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF GOODNESS

Samuel was a faithful judge (leader) who served God and his people faithfully. In fact, God named 2 books of the bible after this man - 1st and 2nd Samuel! Why was Samuel a good man?

Samuel ruled Israel at a time before there were kings in Israel. In the absence of kings, Samuel was the most powerful man in Israel. He could have done a lot of things to benefit himself, but he did not. When Saul was made the first king of Israel, Samuel did not fight with him for power and position. The account of him in today's text is at the end of his life and ministry, and it tells us he was a good man. He asked 5 questions:

1. whose ox have I taken?
2. or whose ass have I taken?
3. or whom have I defrauded?
4. whom have I oppressed?
5. or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?

The answer to all these questions is obvious – Samuel has cheated no one and has been a good man. He kept his promise to be a faithful and good servant of the Lord.

Dear child, continue to persevere in being a faithful and good child for the Lord, and slowly He will help you grow the virtue of goodness.

break the CODE and read the message:

GUR ADEO TDO, BRENXSHA LCO

TELNXDHF, ADCTFHSSREXCT, LCO LMHCOLCG

XC TDDOCRFF LCO GEHGU. (RIDOHF 34:6)



Thought: I must obey God's laws.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to abide in You. I know it is not easy but please give me the grace to improve bit by bit on a daily basis. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

FAITH, MEEKNESS, TEMPERANCE

People living in Singapore are blessed with a amazing variety of food - we can get any kind of cuisine we want , from Indian, Peranakan, Russian, German to Chinese food. How about fruits? We can also get a huge variety of them here - cherries, strawberries, kiwis and more tropical ones like papayas, pineapples and mangoes. But whatever fruit you may find here, none looks nor tastes alike. You cannot find an apple with the same texture or flavour of a durian.

How about the Fruit of the Holy Spirit? It is one fruit, but it has so many parts! How is that possible? Humanly speaking, it is not possible. But you see, our God is the God of impossibilities. And likewise, this fruit of the Holy Spirit is possible only because God makes it so.

Make no mistake – it is very difficult to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is by years of trusting and leaning on God that this fruit can be nurtured.

We have learnt the wonderful characteristics of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness and goodness. Today we come to the last set of 3 characteristics. They are faith, meekness, and temperance. These 3 characteristics guide the children of God in the way they should behave.

Dear reader, do you have these characteristics? Try to memorize “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...”

Write out the 9 characteristics of The Fruit of the Spirit -



Thought: Do I have all the 9 characteristics of The Fruit of the Spirit?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide me to live for You daily, so that the Fruit of the Spirit can slowly be seen in my life. I pray this in Jesus' name - Amen.

FAITHFULNESS TO GOD

The 7th characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is faith. This word “faith” means faithfulness. Another word for it is loyalty. You are on the side of God, and will not do anything to let God down. It means being a reliable follower of Christ. You can be trusted not to do anything that will shame the Name of God.

Dear reader, can you be depended on to stand up for the Lord? Remember, as God’s children, you belong to Him, so you must be a good testimony for Him at all times.

There is a wartime story of a village which was captured by an enemy troop which hated God. The captain knew that there were many Christians living in this village, and he wanted to break their morale. After rounding up the villagers, he threw a Bible on the ground and told them that their lives would be spared if they spat at it. What would you do?

To shock the villagers, they first chose the pastor and leader of the village. The pastor hesitated, then stepped forward to spit at the Bible! An audible gasp was heard. How can the pastor do such a thing? But that cowardly act weakened the villagers and one by one, choosing their own lives rather than honoring God, the adults came forward to spit at the Bible.

The turn came to a little girl – perhaps about 10 years old. In other words – about your age. What do you think she did? Calmly, she walked to the Bible, picked it up, and wiped the Bible clean as much as her small hands could. Then hugging it closely, she declared that she would never betray the Lord who died for her.

Dear child, what would you do if you were her?

The Lord Jesus says, “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10b). May we be faithful followers of Jesus!

Thought: May I be like that faithful little girl.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to be a faithful Christian. I know that it is very tough to stand up for You at times and to remain faithful especially when things go wrong, but please give me strength to do so. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

FAITHFULNESS TO OTHERS

Yesterday's reading taught us that a child of God must be faithful to God. If you are faithful to God, you will also be faithful to people around you. Remember, that being faithful means others can depend on you.

Dear reader, is faithfulness one of your characteristics? If you remain faithful to God, you will also be someone whom others can depend on. You must be faithful in what you say and what you do. For example, if you have promised to help your friend in a subject you are strong in, be sure to help him. If you promised mum to clean your room properly by a certain time, then do it.

Read the following verse (Ephesians 5:21) to find the missing alphabets:

SUBMITTING YOURSELVES ONE TO ANOTHER IN THE FEAR OF GOD.

1. 1st alphabet of the 8th word _____

2. 1st alphabet of the 5th word _____

3. 8th alphabet of the 1st word _____

4. 1st alphabet of the 4th word _____

5. 5th alphabet of the 5th word _____

6. 1st alphabet of the 8th word _____

7. 3rd alphabet of the 2nd word _____

8. 7th alphabet of the 2nd word _____

The missing alphabets form _ _ _ _ _

Thought: Do I say one thing and do another thing?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be faithful in keeping my promises to others. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF FAITH

Abraham was a very wealthy man who lived in place called Ur of the Chaldees. One day God instructed Abraham to leave his dwelling. Many of us know from our Sunday School lessons that he did exactly that. Was an easy decision? No it was not. For him to leave that place was to leave behind opportunities to make himself richer. He also had to uproot himself from familiar and comfortable surroundings. You may have heard of people migrating from Singapore to other countries or vice-versa. Why do people migrate? Because they hope that the new place they go to, will be a better place. For Abraham he was not certain that the place he was going to would be a better place. However, by faith, he obeyed God. God led Abraham to Canaan and promised him that he would be the father of a great nation.

The second great test of faith Abraham passed was when God told him to kill his beloved son, Isaac. God wanted to see how much faith Abraham had in Him! And you know what? Abraham proved himself faithful. He attempted to kill Isaac but the Lord stopped him. To be faithful in big things, one must first learn to be faithful in small things. Are you faithful in small things? These could include reading your bible daily, praying for a non-Christian friend, or simply committing to God any family problems you have.

There are many other heroes of faith in the Bible. See whether you can find them in the crossword below! Shade the names of the heroes of faith.

F T U W J O S E P H D
A B R A H A M Q X Y I
K B C A A S I O Q Z V
Q O E N O C H W S K A
B X Y L N Z F T U E D
G I D E O N O S M A S

DAVID	JACOB
JOSEPH	MOSES
GIDEON	ENOCH
NOAH	ISAAC
SAMSON	ABRAHAM
ABEL	

Thought: May I start being faithful in small things.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, although I am but a child, teach me to stay faithful in the small things I do. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

MEEKNESS

In today's text, is Jesus pronouncing a special blessing on the weak, the feeble, the frail, and the fragile? Is this a blessing for those who are mild mannered with good disposition?

What is the meaning of "meek"? Is a meek person weak? Sometimes, it is easy to confuse meekness with weakness. Meekness is actually the opposite of weakness, for meekness is strength under control. Jesus was meek, but He is most powerful for He is the Creator of everything!

When Jesus pronounced "Blessed are the meek", what he meant was that those who are saved by the Lord will not want to be proud or boastful. Even if they were strong, they would remain gentle and humble.

Real meekness comes from knowing that we are saved by the Lord and there is nothing we can do to save ourselves from the punishment of hell.

Write "T" for True or "F" for False of a person who is meek?

- () – gets angry very easily.
- () – pushes his way around.
- () – a meek person is a weak person.
- () – God's word teaches meekness.
- () – Jesus is described as meek and mild.
- () – A child of God must learn to be meek.

Thought: May I learn true meekness from the Lord.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be a meek person. This I pray in Jesus' name - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF MEEKNESS

If I were to ask you who was the meekest man in the world – what would you answer be? Well, if you have read today's text – you'd know the right answer! It was Moses! Now why was Moses the meekest man on earth?

Although born of Hebrew slaves, Moses was brought up in the palaces of Egypt as he was adopted as a child by the daughter of the Egyptian King – Pharaoh. He grew up in the lap of luxury and had everything he wanted. He was well educated, enjoyed the privileges few could afford, and could have continued the life of an Egyptian prince.

When Moses was 80 years old, the Lord called him to help the children of Israel. They were slaves in Egypt. Moses was used of God to work many fantastic miracles, such as the parting of the Red Sea. God also gave Moses the 10 Commandments to teach His people. Moses was a great leader and a lawgiver. Yet he was not proud, but was meek. His brother and sister criticised (talked bad about) Moses. What was the reaction of Moses? Was he powerful? Yes he was. Could he have punished them? Yes he could. But remember the definition of meekness – it is strength under control. He kept quiet, and left the matter to the Lord, and God punished his sister with leprosy - a terrible skin disease.

That is truly meekness. Moses was the leader of the entire Hebrew population of about 2 million. He possessed great power, yet did not lift a finger against those who went against him.

Dear reader, how about you?

Are you meek?

What do you do when others talk bad about you? Do you feel like scolding them? Do you fight back? Be like Moses – leave it to the Lord!

Thought: May I be meek like Moses!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the precious reminder of meekness. May I be guided by the Holy Spirit so that I will have the characteristic of meekness. In Jesus' name I pray - Amen.

TEMPERANCE

The 9th characteristic of the Fruit of the Spirit is temperance. This word means self-control. In other words, the ability to control yourself, or to hold yourself back from doing something that is not good.

For example, someone in class complained to the teacher you copied during the spelling test. And you know that was completely untrue. How would you react? Many of us would be angry, some of us will want to fight back, some of us will cry... If you have temperance, you will control yourself, and seek the Will of the Lord by praying and asking God what is the best thing to do next. To non-Christians, the next thing to do is obvious – retaliate. But for us, that is not the way of temperance.

Dear reader, when you are tempted to do wrong, what should you do? Pray for strength to control yourself not to do it.

Fill in the following words in the white spaces:

GENTLE MEEK PEACE PRAY LOVE HELP TRUTH										
	T	E	M	P	E	R	A	N	C	E

Thought: I don't have to give in to sin.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to have temperance in my daily life. I know it is so easy to be angry, or hurt, but Heavenly Father, teach me to look to You for help and please help me control myself so I can have temperance. In Jesus' name I pray - Amen.

A BIBLICAL EXAMPLE OF TEMPERANCE

The time of Daniel was a time of pain and shame for Israel for this nation of God was invaded by foreigners, and some of their best youths were taken away by the king of Babylon. Daniel was one of these young Jewish boys, taken to Babylon. People there worshipped idols. But Daniel loved the Lord, and he made up his mind to be faithful to his God. It is important to note that Daniel “purposed” in his heart. In other words – he prepared his heart, and right from the beginning, he told himself to be temperate and to be holy unto God.

When offered the choicest meats and best wines, he refused as he knew those were offered to idols and eating them would not bring glory to God.

Do you like to eat? And here, we are talking about what must be yummy food! Although Daniel may have been tempted to give in, to eat and join the rest, he exercised temperance, and dared to be different.

Is temperance (self-control) one of your characteristics?
Underline or shade your answer -

1. Your little brother broke your favorite toy.
You are very sad -
You pushed him away / You prayed and forgave him.
2. It will soon be your bed-time.
You have not finished your Bible-reading -
You continue your Bible-reading /
You go off to watch your favourite TV show.
3. The little girl was running.
Her shining dollar coin dropped to the ground -
You pocket the coin / You return it to her.

Thought: Do I really try to say “No” to myself, and “Yes” to God?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me control myself not to give in to bad habits and bad actions. In Jesus’ name I pray - Amen.

AGAINST SUCH THERE IS NO LAW

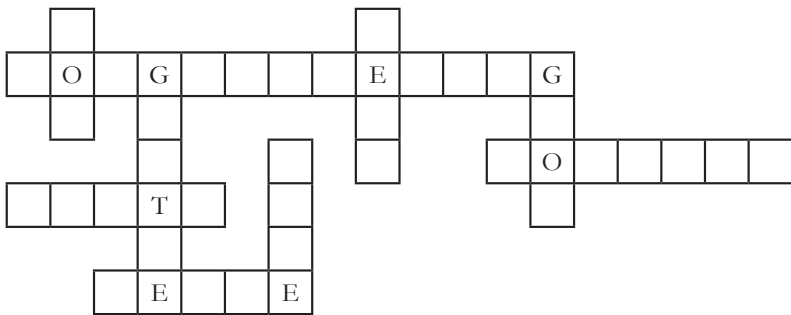
Remember the 9 characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These 9 virtues will be found in the child of God. And there is no law (commandment) against these 9 good characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit.

Dear reader, have you believed on the Lord Jesus? Because of God's love and grace, you can be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus. Then the Holy Spirit will live in your heart. But remember, it will be a long process, and the Holy Spirit cannot do His work if you insist on living your life the way you want. If you submit to Him, the Holy Spirit will produce His Fruit in you gradually.

You will find that you can develop some characteristics of the Fruit of the Holy Spirit faster than others. For example, you may be strong in faith, but still hot-tempered. You then need to develop the characteristic of temperance. Does that mean you have failed in producing the Fruit of the Spirit? No, it does not. What it means is that you need to work on characteristics that are lacking.

Fill in the following words:

PEACE JOY MEEK LOVE
GOOD FAITH CONTROL
GENTLE LONGSUFFERING



Thought: May I improve each portion of the Fruit bit by bit...

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for these lessons on the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Teach me to be more like Jesus each day, for in being so, I will have more and more of the Fruit of the Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray - Amen.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

“And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). Can you imagine what the Lord Jesus was like? He communicated with God, morning and night, and was busy all day, serving God, taking care of people.

Dear reader, what about you? As a student, you’ll need to study hard and complete homework. But how about your other daily activities? Do you devote your time only to yourself, or do you try to live for the Lord, and be like Jesus? Let us follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Read and circle all the 9 good characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit.

If you are a child of God, you want to live for God. For the love of Christ constrains (makes you to do it). Even when you have problems, the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Lord Jesus says: “My peace, I give unto you.” Remember to thank God for His mercy & longsuffering (patience). The Lord Jesus shows His gentleness when sinners are sorry for their sins. For all have sinned, but God is abundant (rich) in goodness. Have faith in God. Christ willingly suffered a very painful death, in meekness & temperance (self-control), to finish His work on the Cross of Calvary.

Thought: Am I following God or man?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to follow Your example, walking in Your steps. This I pray in Jesus’ name - Amen.

OPPOSITE OF FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The Bible in Luke 6:44 tells us that every tree is known by its fruit. An apple tree bears apples. And orange trees bear oranges, of course. Matthew 7:17 further says that every good tree brings forth good fruits. Children of God therefore should bear the Fruit of the Spirit. What are the 9 characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit? Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance.

A bad tree bears bad fruits. Those who are not children of God are under the control of the devil (the evil one). They will bear evil fruits. These are bad actions and things that do not please or honor God.

John has been going to JW for almost a year, and because he was a smart boy, he could remember the Bible stories and memorise verses very well. However, there did not seem to be any real change in his life. He remained proud of his own achievements. He remained selfish when he played computer games with brother. He was as ungrateful to parents. He was as uncaring to animals, and could be seen to be bullying cats near his school. Most of all, he does not read the bible or the Junior RPG. Do you think he is saved? Well, we will never know. What we need to know though, is whether we ourselves are saved.

Dear child, are you saved? If you are, both yourself and others will see changes in your life.

Thought: Am I really saved?

Prayer: (for those who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour)

Heavenly Father, I know I am a little like John. I go to JW, I know the stories and I memorize bible verses. But there is no real change in my life. I really want to be changed, and I pray that You will forgive me of all my sins. I confess now that I need and want to have Jesus to be my Lord and Saviour. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

Prayer: (for those who have already accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour)

Heavenly Father, thank You for saving me and help me to develop the Fruit of the Spirit. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

LIVING IN TENTS IN THE WILDERNESS

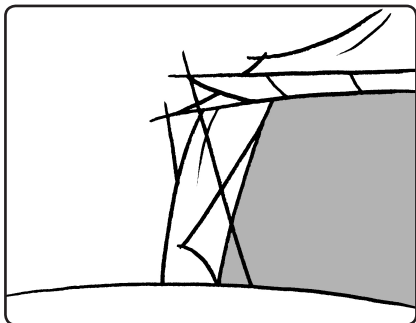
After 430 years living in the land of Egypt, the children of Israel multiplied to about two million. Afraid that the children of Israel might become powerful, the Egyptians oppressed and tormented them with hard labour. God sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. On their way to the Promised Land and as they wandered in the wilderness for forty long years, they continued to live in tents.

Their tents were made from long pieces of goats' haircloth which were about 2m wide and black in colour. A frame made of poles was clad with a piece of this cloth to form a long awning which provided a roof and walls at the two ends. The two ends of the cloth were pegged to the ground with tent nails. The walling of the front and back of the tent were vertical hangings of brightly coloured materials. These hangings were also used as dividers to make rooms in the tent.

Living in tents reminded the people of Israel of the temporary nature of their life on earth. To remember their days of living in tents, the Jews kept the Feast of Tabernacles. Once a year, they would live in "booths" made of tree branches for seven days. We may never have the experience of calling a tent our home. But, have you ever thought of this:- Just like theirs, our life on earth is temporary. Christians are only pilgrims on this earth on our journey to heaven. There, our Heavenly Father has already

prepared mansions for us. Surely, you would love to have all your friends join you in heaven. So, tell them that they can begin this journey by believing in Jesus.

Look at the picture of the tent. Draw the husband standing in front and the wife sitting in the tent inside.



Thought: I am thankful for my present home and even more for my mansion in heaven.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me not to love the things of this world, but to set my affection and love on the things above. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

ALLOCATING THE LAND

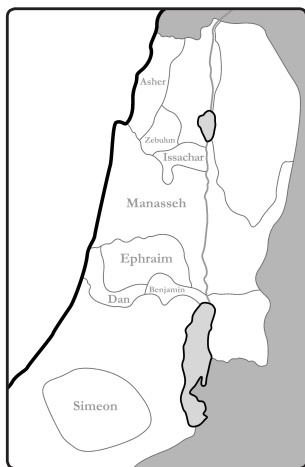
God promised to bless Abraham with countless descendants and land for them. He showed Abraham the extent of the land in Canaan after he returned from Egypt. However, it was only hundreds of years later that his descendants (the twelve tribes of Israel) entered the Promised Land. Many battles were fought before Joshua conquered the Promised Land. After the conquest, the land has to be distributed among the twelve tribes. They knew that the Promised Land was a gift from God. Therefore, they must commit to God the allocation of the land among the tribes and among the families. The land was divided into portions and each was allocated by casting lots.

The 'lot' was a two-sided disc. They believed that God controls the result of every throw of the lot. Therefore, they allocated the land according to the God's will. "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD." Proverbs 16:33.

Boundaries were marked out and to alter it was to act against God's will. Therefore, selling one's land was dishonouring God. If the land had to be sold because the family was poor, it would be returned to the family in the Year of Jubilee. In the meantime, if a member of the family was able to raise money to redeem the land, the new owner had to return it at once. Land was passed from father to sons.

The eldest son received twice as much as his brothers. This was called a double portion. If there were no sons, the property could be passed to daughters, but land always remained within the family.

Look at the map of Israel and the land allocation. Write Manasseh, Gad and Reuben which are east of River Jordan. Write Naphtali north of the Sea of Galilee and Judah west of Jordan.



Thought: God cares about His children's welfare and is in control of everything.

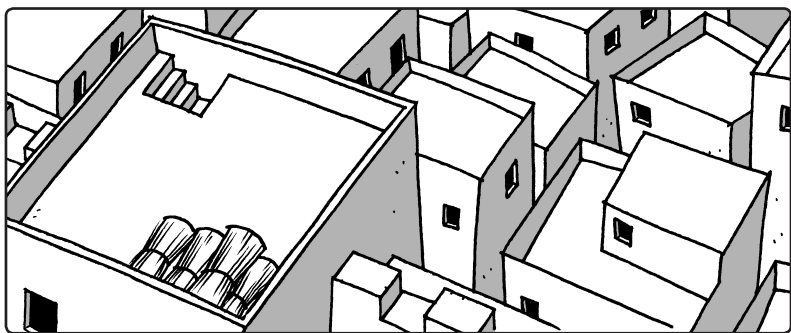
Prayer: Heavenly Father, I praise Thee for Your care and for being fair in everything you do. This I pray I Jesus' name – Amen.

HUMBLE HOMES IN THE PROMISED LAND

Rahab's house was in the city of Jericho. People in cities do not live in tents but in houses made of stone, usually white limestone. Houses in those days were built very close to each other. Each had one single square shaped room, with a flat roof and an external staircase to access the roof. For the very poor, there could be a ladder instead. There was just one small window placed high up so that thieves cannot enter in. There was only one door which was kept open during the day to let light in and was secured with a wooden bar at night. Oil lamps were used to light up the house in the light.

Rahab hid the two spies on the rooftop. Thus, the roof proved to be such a useful space where Rahab saved the lives of two of God's children. It was used for storage, drying of crops in the day and for resting in the cool night air. Guess who told the people to build railings or parapets round the roof to prevent anyone from falling off. The answer is found in Deuteronomy 22:8. Don't you marvel at how well God knows and supplies our every need? Houses were considered gifts from God. The children of Israel held a dedication service for every newly built house. So, do you regard the house you are living in now, as a gift from God? If so, there is no need to wish for a more beautiful or larger house because God knows exactly what you need and has supplied it. Every gift from God is perfect.

Look at the picture of a house in the city. Draw two persons sleeping on the roof as well as a few bundles of flax stacked in a corner.



Thought: The house I am living in is a gift from God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be contented with whatever shelter You have provided for me while on earth. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

MORE ABOUT THE ROOFS OF THE HOUSES

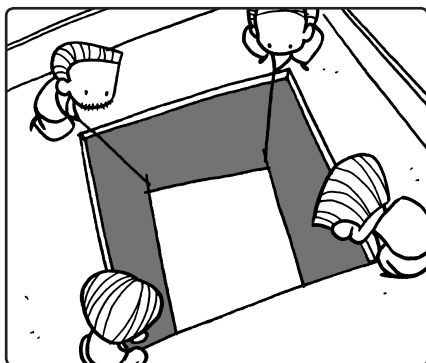
The roofs of the houses of olden days were flat and often leaked. This is because the roofing materials were neither strong nor solid. They consisted of brushwood branches woven together and layered across sycamore rafters or wooden planks. These were then covered with a thick layer of clay that filled the spaces between the branches forming a hardened layer of plaster. Fresh coats had to be applied yearly as they get worn out or washed off by rain. Plaster helps to prevent leaks during heavy rains.

Owing to its weak structure, cutting through the roofs in those days was a piece of cake. This was exactly what four good and faithful friends of a paralysed man did to the roof of a house in the town of Capernaum. Jesus was preaching in the house. It was so crowded with people that the entrance to the house was blocked. They did not give up because of their brotherly love for their friend. Since they could not bring the afflicted man to Jesus the normal way, their solution was to carry their sick friend up to the rooftop, cut away part of the roof and lower the sick man through the roof. Ingenious!

This Bible passage is not written just to tell us of roof construction. It tells us of the importance of having faith in God. The four men believed in Jesus' love and his power to heal. God is so pleased with their faith that He gave them a solution. Good ideas are gifts from God.

Look at the picture of the four friends lowering their paralysed friend down from the roof.

Draw the missing friend.



Thought: Faith pleases God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we lovingly and faithfully point our lost friends to Jesus. Only Thou can save them. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

HOMES OF THE WEALTHY

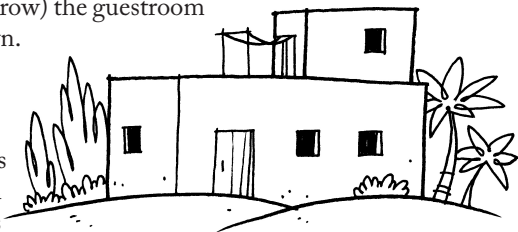
In Prophet Elisha's time, houses of the rich were distinctly different from those of the poor. Their houses had a courtyard which is an enclosed space with rooms built around it. Many Korean and Chinese houses were also built like that. The courtyard was used for many activities, including cooking and washing. The stairs to the rooftop led down into the courtyard instead of the street. Compared to the poor man's house, this house was more secure.

The wealthy woman in Shunem, who invited Elisha to stay, lived in such a house. Elisha stayed in a 'little chamber'. It could be a room built above the roof. It was furnished with a bed, a table, a stool and a candlestick. It was common then for the people to sleep on the floor as furniture was a luxury. Ask your grandparents if they had a bed to sleep on when they were your age. Notice how the wealthy woman showed hospitality to Elisha. She knew what his needs were. So, she provided a bed for him to rest from his journeying and a table for his meals. The candlestick provided light in the night. The "little chamber" was away from the noise of the household. It was a place suitable for praying and rest.

The Shunamite woman did not show off her riches but showed hospitality. If you continue to read the rest of 2 Kings 4, you will see how God blessed this hospitable woman afterwards. Hospitality in the modern world means hotel service. Her hospitality is of a different kind. She gave and share what God had given to her with someone in need. Have you ever invited a friend who needs a place to study to your home? Do you share your notes with him? Of course, do not forget to ask mum and dad first. Mum may even agree to cook something delicious for your friend.

Indicate (with an arrow) the guestroom in the picture shown.

Thought: Hospitality is caring and sharing with others what God has given me.



Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to show hospitality and care for others using the blessings that Thou has given me. In Jesus' name I pray— Amen.

FAMILY LIFE IN BIBLICAL TIMES

When the word “family” is mentioned, what comes to your mind? It will be father, mother and children. The father is the head of the family. During biblical times, the father ruled over his family like a king. That means everyone in the family must do whatever he tells them to do. Then you may ask: what if the father was an evil man? That is why there was this strict discipline over the sons in the family, as in the Bible verses you have just read. You may think that it was so cruel to stone the son to death. But imagine what would happen when the rebellious son lived on and became a father himself. What would you expect his children to be like? Like father, like son. What if his brothers and sisters behaved like him too!

A son who was stubborn and rebellious, a drunkard, a robber or a glutton, would be a disgrace to the family. His parents would need to correct him by teaching or even by punishing him. We can be sure that his parents would do their very best to help him repent. But, if he continued to be disobedient, he would have to “face the music”. That means he had to face judgment for his own evil deeds. His father had no choice but to bring him to the elders of the city. It was according to God’s law. The elders would assemble at the city gate. There, the elders would listen to the father’s case against him. If the son was found guilty, the men of the city would stone him to death. The father would be extremely sad over his son but he chose to obey God’s law. God’s law encouraged the people to avoid evil deeds.

God has given fathers and mothers the authority over their children. Therefore, it is important for children to obey their fathers and mothers. It is so important to God that He has included it in the Ten Commandments.

Find the verse (Exodus 20: __) that will help you unscramble these words.

orHon yth rethfa nda yth othrem

Thought: God has made my father the head of the family. He has authority over me.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to love, respect and obey my parents always. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Unlike modern days, only the men and older boys worked in the farms; women did household chores and made daily trips to wells to draw water. Like every other member of the family, the wife and her daughters worked hard. They cooked meals, and collected eggs from the chicken coop. They had to grind flour for bread and sewed clothes. Women were subservient to men (which means the women did whatever the men told them to). However, they were loved and well-respected for being good mothers.

In Biblical times, children were considered a great blessing. When parents grew old and weak, children would support them. Moreover, they were expected to help parents in farms as well as with household chores. So, it was the more children, the merrier!

Back then, boys were considered to be a real blessing. It was because men stayed with the family throughout their lives and could increase its wealth through marriage and possessions. Actually, until two or three generations ago, the Chinese also prefer boys to girls. In some families, the men and boys got to eat before the women and girls. Boys got to go to school but the girls had to stay home to do all the housework or even help in the family business. Nowadays, it does not matter whether you are born a girl or boy. Your parents will still look upon you as treasures. God has always loved boys and girls fairly. The Bible says that children are rewards to those who trust in God. They are also called “arrows in the hand of a mighty man”. They will fight to protect the family.

Happy is the family when the head of the family fears and obeys God. Read Psalm 128: 3-4. The godly father is full of joy looking at his wife and children. The mother is busy with her many children sitting and enjoying the food round the table. Blessed is the family where Christ rules over the home.

Complete this verse...

“Thy wife shall be as a fruitful _____ by the sides of thine

house; thy children like _____ plants round about thy table.”

Thought: Blessed is the home where Christ is the unseen but real head of the home.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for blessing my family with so much joy and for protecting us. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

SLAVES

Servants in wealthy families in Biblical times were actually slaves, different from the domestic helpers employed to help in your homes today. The rich bought their slaves from the market place and did not need to pay them any salary. These slaves were either prisoners of war, or the poor and destitute. Although they became the property of their masters, they were protected by the Law of Moses. They had a right to the Sabbath rest and to attend the various festivals of the Jewish year. If the slave was a fellow Jew who had sold himself to repay a debt, the master must set him free after six years of service. He must be given animals, grain and wine. In the Year of Jubilee, he could receive his freedom and at the same time have his inheritance (remember the land his ancestor passed to him and was sold) returned to him. However, a slave could be set free at any time if a member of his family could pay his debt.

In Luke 17:7-8, Jesus described the life of a slave. A slave had to serve his master hand and foot all day long. After plowing or feeding the cattle, his master would not ask him to rest or to eat. Instead, the slave had to continue serving the master. Only after the master had eaten could the slave eat. No matter how hungry or tired he was, he had to serve the master first. He would not even receive a word of thanks from the master because he was just doing his duty. What a hard life!

Jesus was teaching us that as Christians we will always be “unprofitable servants”. The Lord does not need us to serve Him or to do things for Him, yet He has given us this privilege to do so. With this privilege comes responsibility to carry out our duties well and diligently.

Thought: Thank God for giving us the privilege to serve Him.

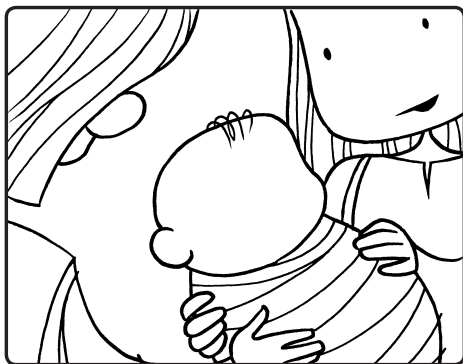
Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, thank You for saving us, making us Your children and giving us privilege to serve You. Help us to be diligent in our service unto You. This I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

WHEN A CHILD IS BORN

“Let’s go see baby brother”, Daddy might have said to you smilingly one day. Then it was followed by a trip to the hospital. There you walked through corridors and saw nurses and doctors. Everywhere was so squeaky clean. In the room, Mummy was sleeping. “She went through hard labour,” you heard Daddy whisper to grandma. Then it was back to the corridors and there you saw a few excited people peering through a large glass panel, and you may wonder, “Which one is my baby brother?” There were rows of trolleys and in each was a bundle. Some bundles were pink and some were blue...

However, when we read about the birth of Jesus, we find a very different scene. There were no nurses, doctors or hospital beds. But there was one thing in common. The babies were bundled up. Jesus was “the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes”. Of course, not all babies were born in a dirty and smelly manger. Most were delivered by midwives. Then, they would wrap the baby up with a piece of cloth. They believed that a baby wrapped this way would feel secure and have straight arms and legs! Whenever the mother changed the cloth or bathed the baby, she would rub the baby with olive oil which is plentiful in Israel.

Even today, there are some nannies who believe in wrapping the babies with a white nappy cloth like the Jewish mothers. They believe that the baby would feel comfortable and not have “wind” in the tummy.



From the beginning of time, everyone loves babies and welcome them into the family. Every child is a gift from God. The greatest gift is Jesus.

Draw the face of the baby in the swaddling clothes.

Thought: Baby Jesus was God’s greatest gift to mankind.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for baby Jesus, the holy child that Thou did send a long time ago to be the Saviour of the world and to be my Saviour too! In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.

ENTERING ADULthood

In New Testament times, Jews worshipped in synagogues every Sabbath. “Synagogue” refers to an assembly of at least ten Jews or the building they worshipped in. In the synagogues, Scripture in parchment scrolls were kept and read on Sabbath days.

Under Singapore’s Law, a child is considered an adult only when he/she turns twenty-one. Only then can he/she sign contracts and marry without parents’ consent. Under Jewish law, a boy becomes an adult at the age of thirteen. A girl becomes an adult at the age of twelve. From that day, the parents will not be held responsible for their behaviour for they will be held responsible for their own actions. They must bear their own responsibility of obeying the Mosaic Laws. If they break the law or fail to follow tradition, they will face judgement themselves. As adults, they can now own properties and can be legally married according to Jewish Law! The most important thing is that the young men now qualify to read the Scripture in the synagogues.

In the Bible, there is only a record of Jesus’ visit to the synagogue in Nazareth, when He was 12 years old. He spent three days in the synagogue, listening to the rabbis or teachers of the Jewish law and asking them questions. Jesus’ knowledge and wisdom astounded the people around. We would not be surprised because we know He is God and God knows everything. However, the Bible has no record of what happened when Jesus turned thirteen. In Luke 4:15-17, we read that He taught in the synagogues. He stood up and read Scripture. Jesus was allowed to do that because He was already a thirty-year-old adult. In fact, He could do that the day He turned thirteen.

Christian children do not need to wait till they turn thirteen. They can stand up to read the Bible or lead in the singing of Christian songs at gatherings. In fact, children are encouraged to serve God this way. Some of you have already led in the singing of songs and reading the Bible in camps and meetings.

Thought: There is no need for me to wait till I am an adult before I serve God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to grow in faith as I grow physically. Help me also to serve You faithfully. This I pray in Jesus’ name – Amen.

HOW MARRIAGES WERE ARRANGED

In Biblical times, young people did not date. When they reached a marriageable age, their parents would find partners for them. Let us look at an example of how a marriage was arranged. Abraham did not want his son Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites were unbelievers and ungodly. So, he sent a trusted servant back to his hometown to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham made his servant promise that he would bring the future wife to Canaan. Isaac must not go to Mesopotamia. He also said that God would send His angel ahead of him to guide him.

Abraham's servant also prayed for guidance. God will always listen to His people's prayers. Sometimes, He answers immediately. That happened to Abraham's servant. Right after he prayed, pretty Rebekah appeared. She drew drinking water from the well and offered it to Abraham's servant and his camels. That was the sign from God to say that Rebekah was the bride chosen for Isaac.

The servant then asked Rebekah to bring him to her family. He then explained his mission to Rebekah's father, Bethuel and her brother Laban. When they agreed to the marriage, the servant was so delighted that he praised and worshipped God. However, there was one more hurdle to cross. Rebekah must also agree to follow the servant back to Canaan. She was willing! Then he brought out the gold and silver jewelry and clothing for Rebekah as well as 'precious things' for her family. These 'precious things' are the dowry that every groom and his family must give to the bride and her family.

The next morning, the servant bid them farewell and left with Rebekah on the long journey back to Canaan. Thanks to God, it was mission accomplished!

Circle the correct answers:

1. God chose Rebekah to be Isaac's wife. TRUE / FALSE
2. Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a Canaanite woman. TRUE / FALSE
3. Both Abraham and his servant prayed for God's guidance. TRUE / FALSE

Thought: God's choice is the perfect choice.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to obey You in everything I do. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

BETROTHAL

Did you notice the word 'espoused' in Matthew 1:18? Another word for it is 'betrothed'. They are old words that mean 'engaged to be married'. When a man and a woman want to marry each other, they may first get engaged. Today the couple may throw a party or just gather some friends and relatives for a meal to announce their engagement. For Jews, it was compulsory for them to hold a simple ceremony. The man and woman would make an agreement or a promise to get married.

The betrothal or engagement was a serious matter. The engagement would normally last for a year. The man would look for a house and would make preparations for the wedding. Two things tell us of how seriously the Jews treat the betrothal. First, if her fiancé died before the wedding, the betrothed woman would be considered a widow. Second, the betrothed couple must be faithful to each other. Otherwise, the unfaithful man or woman would be considered guilty of breaking the seventh of the Ten Commandment. That man or woman would be judged to have committed adultery. Under the Law of Moses, they had to go through a divorce.

Today we read that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. When Joseph found that she was pregnant, he was distressed. He wanted to put her away, which means to divorce her. But, he did not. The angel Gabriel had told him the truth in a dream. Joseph trusted and obeyed God's words and married Mary as promised. Not only is it important to keep our word but also to find out the truth before we make any decision.

We all know that Mary's baby was Jesus, our Saviour who 'was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and is the Son of God'. God promised to send Jesus to save us. He did. God always keep His word. God is faithful.

Make use of the clues
to fill in the blanks:

				⁴ T					³ W
¹ B		² T			T			D	
				T					

1. Another word for ENGAGED
2. We must ____ and obey God.
3. We must keep our ____.
4. We must find out the ____.

Thought: I must always trust God, keep my word and love the truth.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Thy faithfulness in sending Thy Son, Jesus to save us. Help me to commit each day into Your hands, in Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

THE WEDDING

Jewish weddings in Bible times were held in the evenings. Family and friends of the couple would be invited to celebrate with music, dancing, laughter, eating and drinking. Guests were expected to wear special clothes, and it was considered an insult to turn down an invitation to a wedding. On the wedding day, bride would be dressed splendidly and wear a veil. Together with the girls who had dressed her, she would wait for the bridegroom. He too would be dressed up for the occasion. He would leave his own home with his male friends who would be carrying lighted torches.

On this day, the bridegroom would set out from his home to fetch his bride from her parents' home. The groom would remove the bride's veil and lay it on his shoulder. The procession then set out from the bride's home to the bridegroom's home. Oil lamps held by the bride's attendant maidens would light the way.



In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins in today's Bible passage, the foolish virgins ran out of oil early in the evening. When the bridegroom arrived, they were excluded from the festivities because they had not kept themselves ready. We must be like the wise virgins, all prepared to welcome the bridegroom. For the church is the bride of Christ waiting for Jesus Christ's coming. When Jesus comes again, it will no more be as a baby in a manger. He will return in all glory and power to claim His own!

Thought: I can only be ready to meet Jesus if I read the Bible, pray, and obey God every day.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we be ready to welcome the Lord Jesus at His Second Coming. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

THE WEDDING FEAST

Wedding feasts were held in the bridegroom's house. When the procession reached the groom's house, the couple would enter under a canopy. From there, they would commence the feast which could last for as long as 7 days! During the feast, friends and relatives would ask for God's blessings for the couple.

We do not know how many such weddings Jesus attended. Today, we read of one where he performed his first miracle. It was at a wedding feast in the town of Cana of Galilee. We read that the bridegroom ran out of wine. To save him from embarrassment, Jesus' mother asked Jesus to do something to help. She believed that Jesus had the power to save the situation. Jesus then turned water into fine wine. Fine wine in those days was simply grape juice with no alcohol content. It was very different from the alcoholic wine of today. Jesus simply asked the servant to fill six waterpots with water. When the servants had filled them with water, He asked them to "draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast". Thus the servant carried the water (now turned to wine) to the governor or ruler of the feast. When the latter tasted the water that was made into wine, he was so pleased with the quality that he complimented the groom for it. He praised the groom for keeping the good wine to the last.

An important lesson we learn here is taught by Mary. When she asked Jesus for help, she truly believed that Jesus could do what she asked for. The presence of Jesus at any wedding is the true blessing for the couple.

1. Write in your own words the miracle that Jesus performed at this wedding.

2. Can anyone take water and turn it into wine? YES / NO

3. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Thought: God is able to do what He promises us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please give me simple faith to trust your Word and obey You. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

ABOUT DEATH

The early Israelites were not certain of what would happen after death. Their idea of life after death was rather vague. However, the idea of resurrection became clearer when we come to the Book of Daniel. After Jesus' death and resurrection, His teaching became even clearer (John 11: 17-27).

Immediately after a person died, there would be a time of wailing among the mourners. This announced the death to the neighbours. Wealthy families would pay people to cry loudly for the dead. This was supposed to add prestige to the dead and to show that he or she was greatly loved and honoured. Believe it or not, until recently, this was still practised by unbelievers in many parts of the world.

But what happens after death? For David, he had the assurance that he "will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Psalm 23:6). David can only do so if he has eternal life in the Lord. Do you have this blessed assurance that God will bring you to glory in heaven? Can you say, "Jesus is mine"?

What must you do to receive eternal life?

I must _____ that Jesus is the _____ of _____ who _____ for my sins, was buried, and _____ again the third day.
(*John 3:16, I John 5:11, 12 and I Corinthians 15:3-4*)

Do you know why Christians need not despair when a loved one is called home to glory in heaven?

It teaches us that we are not to sorrow as if we have no _____ like the unbelievers. When a Christian dies, he is only _____ in Jesus. God will bring him to be with _____ in heaven.
(*1 Thessalonians 4: 13, 14*)

Thought: When a Christian dies, his precious soul will go to be with the Lord. There is no need to be afraid of death.

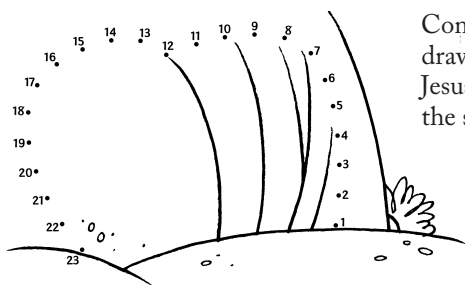
Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to pray for the salvation of my unsaved friends and relatives so that they will also get to heaven. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

ABOUT BURIAL

For the Jews, the dead were never to be cremated, but to be buried. To be cremated is to be burnt to ashes by fire. Those who were cremated were supposed to be those whose deeds were evil. God sent fire from heaven to burn them up. This happened to the wicked people in Sodom and Gomorrah. The cities were destroyed and all the people in them perished in a fire. Does it not give us an idea of how terrible the eternal lake of fire and hell will be?

Burials had to take place quickly because a dead body would decompose easily in the heat. In those days, the fridge was not invented yet. For the Jews, no matter how urgent it was for the body to be buried, they would not bury the dead on the Sabbath or on a holy day. For the burial, they would wash, wrap the body loosely in linen cloth and carry it to the burial place on a wooden stretcher. Wealthy people had their dead bandaged with spices between layers of linen.

The dead were buried in caves. Natural caves were widened and provided with niches or shelves where the bodies were laid. The mouth of the tomb was sealed with a huge stone or boulder blocking the passage to the burial chamber. This stone would have been extremely difficult to remove once it was in place. Burial caves were painted white as a warning to the living. Thus, it was indeed a miracle when the stone at the mouth of the Jesus' tomb was rolled away. What a triumph it was when the women who went to His tomb that early morning heard the angel say, "He is not here; for he is risen".



Complete this outline drawing of the cave where Jesus was buried and with the stone rolled away.

Thought: All Christians need not fear death because of Jesus!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that Jesus is my risen Saviour. I pray I will continue to keep close to Him, and to daily read the Word, so I can learn how to be a better disciple of Christ. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

WIDOWS

There are certain groups of people God specially cares for. They are the orphans, the strangers and the widows. Orphans certainly are very pitiful as they have lost their parents, their nearest and dearest guardians. The strangers too, tend to be poor, and lonely, being far away from home and without friends. Widows are women who have lost their husbands.

We have learnt that women in biblical times, worked hard at home for the family but did not hold any job or bring in any income. They depended on their husbands entirely for money to feed, clothe and house the family. They also could not inherit anything from their husbands. So, when their husbands die, they had to depend on charity. They and their children lived on donations and were permitted to glean the fields or pick up leftovers from the harvests of the landowners. Widows were not only poor but were often bullied for they had no husbands to protect them.

God is great and good. He has compassion especially for the lowliest. He will not only provide for them but also protect them. There are commandments which God has given to provide for and protect the strangers, fatherless and widows. For example, part of the tithe would be for the Levites, strangers, fatherless and widows. God also forbid the harvesters to clean out the fruits like the corn, the grapes and olives from the fields. Some must be left for the needy. God will also not allow anyone to take advantage of the widows. Those who ill-treat them will be punished.

Even the disciples and the church in the New Testaments days were concerned when the widows were neglected. They chose some godly members to take care of them and all the needy. Why did the Bible specially mention the widows? It is because they represent the lowliest people – the poor and needy as well as the weak and defenceless. How should you treat them if you find any of them in your neighbourhood, among your friends, in church or at school? God wants us to be compassionate to them.

In school, are you kind to the weak or slow? Do you help a child who may not be as talented as you in studies, or who may have some physical ailment? When classmates return to class after being away perhaps because of illness, would you assist them and tell them what they missed in lessons?

Thought: Am I kind to the weak and slow?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give me a tender heart to care for others. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

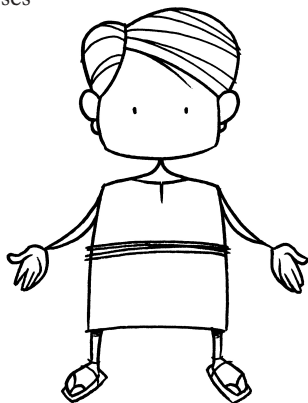
CLOTHES IN BIBLE TIMES

In Biblical times, there were no fashion designers, fashion shows or fashion magazines. Everyone had a basic wardrobe which was made up of a loin cloth, or small waist slip with an undergarment, a tunic with a girdle and some form of head wear. These varied only in colour, material and style. Clothes were expensive because they were sewn by hand. There was no mass production to make it cheaper. So, the poor often own not much more clothes beside the one they were wearing. The loin cloth was worn round the lower part of the body. When a man had to do hard work, he would only wear a loin cloth (John 21: 7) so that he can move about easily. Over the loin cloth would be a tunic made of a single piece of cloth, which would be knee-length for the men, and ankle-length for the women.

Jacob had twelve sons and his favourite son was Joseph. He loved him so much that he gave him a coat of many colours. In those days – that would be very special! The other sons did not have this coat and they were jealous. The special coat showed Jacob's favouritism. It also caused the brothers to be jealous of Joseph so much so that they sold Joseph to be a slave in Egypt.

This true story tells us that the clothes that we wear can affect how others look at us and feel about us. Nowadays, there are so many styles created to suit our taste and occasion. But, let us be neat and modest in our dressing to help us be good witnesses for Jesus.

This man on the right is wearing a tunic and a girdle or belt. To see what Joseph's coat looked like, draw some coloured stripes and sleeves onto the tunic and colour his belt.



Thought: The clothes I wear will reflect who I am.

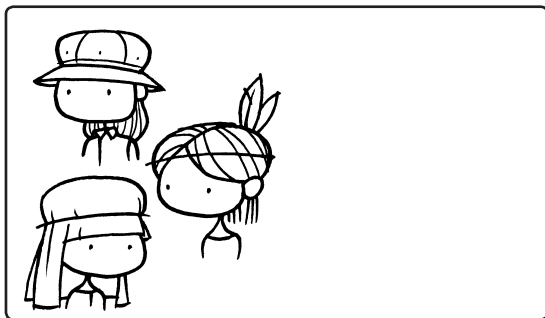
Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to dress modestly and appropriately so that I can be a good witness for Jesus. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

HEADWEAR

The purpose of a headwear is to cover the head to protect it from either the sun or the cold. Although not very popular in Singapore, headwear is often worn by people of Biblical times. They did not wear any hats or caps like modern people but a headdress similar to those the Arabs wear today. The men also wore a skullcap fitted closely to their heads. A piece of material was then folded into a band and wound around the turned up edge of the cap to make a kind of turban.

The women wore a square material folded to make a sunshield for the eyes and allowed to fold over the neck and shoulders to give protection from the sun. The headdress was then held in place by a plaited cord. The veil, worn to cover the face, was not generally used by the Jews. They were only used on special occasions, such as betrothed maidens in the presence of their future husbands and at their wedding. Rebekah covered her face when she first met Isaac (Genesis 24: 65).

In Hebrew, the word “veil” in Ruth 3:15, denotes a shawl, a large piece of material used to cover the head and upper parts of the body. When Boaz gave Ruth the barley, it was a gesture of his kindness and love for her. God will give us a special type of headwear when we get to heaven. It is called a crown. It will be a reward from God for our faithfulness.



Look at the pictures of the different types of headwear and draw one which Ruth might have worn, a veil that covers the head and wrapped across her shoulders

Thought: The best headwear is the crown God will give to Christians in heaven.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the crown of righteousness for the faithful. I pray I'll be a faithful child and that someday, I'll get that wonderful reward from You! In Jesus name I pray – Amen.

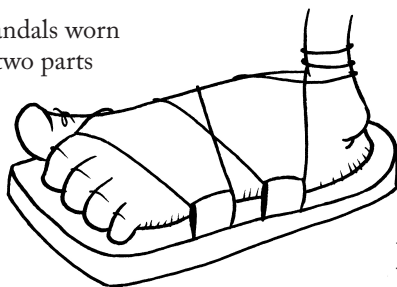
FOOTWEAR

Footwear simply means what you wear on your feet. Today, there are countless types of footwear – high-heels, boots, clogs, beach sandals, sports shoes etc. You name it; they have it in the shops. Some are made for comfort; others are for fashion. Some are expensive; some are reasonably-priced. Compare these shoes with the footwear worn by people of Biblical times. The people were sometimes barefooted as even the simplest sandals were costly. It was common for the poor to walk around or even travel long distances barefooted. When we read of “shoes” in the Bible, it actually refers to the sandals that were worn.

A sandal consisted of a sole made from a piece of cowhide cut to the shape of the foot. It was secured by a long thong (which looked like a leather strap) which came up through the sole between the big and second toes (like ‘Japanese slippers’) and was tied round the ankle several times. Slippers were also worn.

When Jesus sent his twelve disciples out to preach the gospel, he gave instructions to them before sending them off. They were to take nothing except for a staff or stick and nothing else. No bag, no bread, no money and no extra coat. Jesus wanted them to concentrate on one thing and that was to preach the gospel. Then Jesus instructed, “But be shod with sandals.” Why do you think the Lord Jesus did not ask them to bring bread and money? Jesus was teaching his disciples to depend on God for their daily needs. Jesus understands our every need, and will make sure we’re well taken care of.

Look at the sandals worn
and label the two parts
identified.



Sole

Latchet

Thought: When God gives us a task, He will equip us to carry it out.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, teach me to depend on You for my daily needs and be prepared to share the Gospel everywhere I go. In Jesus’ name I pray – Amen.

WHY DO THEY WEAR CLOAKS?

In Singapore, we do not wear cloaks as this is a hot country. In cold countries, people wore cloaks to protect them from the cold. The weather could be chilly especially at night. Cloaks could be made from thick woolen cloths and had seams at the shoulders with the ends of the cloth forming slits for the arms. For many people, their cloak was their only means of keeping warm at night. It was like a blanket. Without their cloak to cover them, they might freeze to death when the temperature dropped very low.

In today's Bible passage, God taught the people to be kind to the poor. In those days, it was common to take a neighbour's cloak as a pledge. What does that mean? It means that when a man lends money to his poorer neighbour, he would take the poorer neighbour's cloak to make sure he returns the money he borrowed. When the debt was paid, the cloak would be redeemed. But, see how much God cares for the poor. He commanded

the lender to bring the cloak back to borrower by the end of the day before sundown. It is because

God knows that the borrower will suffer in the cold without his cloak. God warns that He will punish the lender if he fails to bring the cloak back to the borrower.

God teaches us not to take advantage of the poor and destitute, but be kind to them. God will hear their prayers and punish those who take advantage of them.

Look at the picture on the left and label the parts. Write the words tunic, cloak, girdle and sandal.



Thought: May I always be kind to the weak and poor.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I know some will try to bully the weak or laugh at the poor. Help me never to do such terrible things, but to be kind to them. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

PRIESTS' CLOTHES

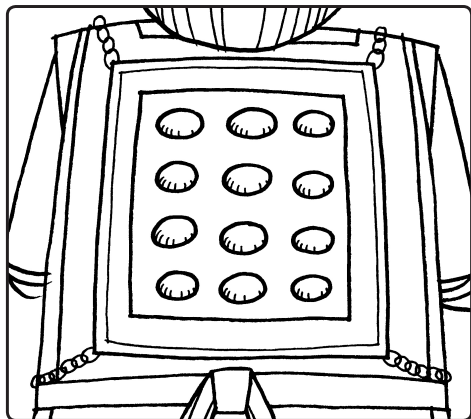
The high priest was appointed by God to perform the most holy duties. He was the only person who could enter the most holy place of the temple to make offerings to God. He was given holy garments made by talented tailors chosen by God. Thus, the high priest dressed specially and differently from ordinary people and priests.

The holy garments consist of a blue robe, a white linen tunic and an embroidered ephod (a kind of apron). The ephod had jewels and a belt or girdle of fine gold, blue, purple and scarlet twined linen. And his breastplate had 12 stones to denote the 12 tribes of Israel.

God made Aaron the first high priest. The book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was also made a high priest. Would they do the same thing?

Of course not. Although Aaron was a high priest, he had to be cleansed of his own sins before offering sacrifices for others. The Lord Jesus in contrast is absolutely sinless, and is the most extraordinary high priest. He sacrificed Himself for us. He has given all born again Christians a robe of righteousness too!

Look at the picture of the high priest and colour the 12 stones on the breastplate.



Thought: Our Lord Jesus is not only the KING but the HIGH PRIEST.

Prayer: Thank You Heavenly Father for the robe of righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to us. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

MEALS AND HOSPITALITY

In Abraham's days, hospitality was very important and common practice. Anyone who came into a family's tent or home was considered to be under their protection. Strangers were never turned away. Whenever a visitor came, he would be given a meal whatever the time. Even an enemy would be fed!

One hot day, when Abraham was sitting at the doorway of his tent, three men arrived and stood before him. The moment Abraham spotted them, he ran to greet the strangers. We are not told whether Abraham knew who the three men were at that time. He did address one of them as 'My Lord'. But we do know how warmly Abraham welcomed them. He bowed humbly and invited them to his home for a rest. He offered to bring water to wash their feet and invited them to rest under the tree. At the same time Abraham offered to bring them some food. Notice what Abraham offered to bring. It was 'a morsel of bread'. A morsel means a small piece. Would Abraham serve his guests just a small piece of bread?



In the tent of the Bedouin Arabs

it to his guests together with milk and butter. Abraham stood by them under the tree while the guests ate. Although it was such a sumptuous meal, Abraham humbly called it 'a morsel of bread'. Abraham was generous. One of his guests was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself! The other two were angels.

The Bible said that Abraham went into the tent and asked Sarah to help prepare a meal. Sarah was asked to bake bread and he went to take care of the meat. Abraham directed a servant to kill and prepare a calf for meat so that he could serve

Thought: Abraham was humble and generous and God blessed him greatly.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make me humble and help me share generously with others what Thou have given me. This could include my time and kindness. Through these, I hope I can learn to be a more practical Christian. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

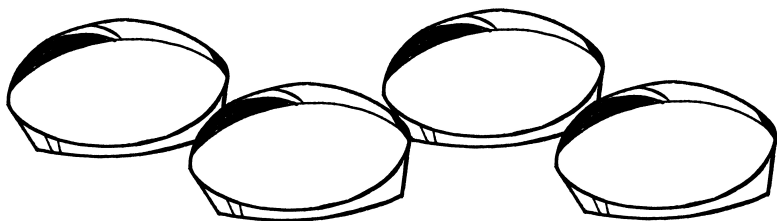
EVERYDAY FOOD

What do the people in the biblical times eat every day? It was not rice, but a type of bread they baked themselves. They would grind the wheat and barley grains in a hand mill to turn them into flour. The flour was mixed with water to make dough. It was then baked in a homemade oven. In some towns, there were communal ovens which every family could share. The bread was put in the night before and collected in the morning. Bread was always broken by hand and never cut with a knife.

While bread was eaten daily, it was supplemented with home-grown vegetables – beans, lentils, leeks, onions, garlic etc. Fruits and nuts were in plentiful supply too. These included olives, figs, grapes, pomegranates, melons, almond and pistachio nuts. The Promised Land was called the land of milk and honey. Obviously, milk was the next most popular drink besides water or grape juice. Milk, when fermented becomes yoghurt and when churned becomes butter and cheese. The women made all these at home. Honey was used to sweeten food and gotten directly from the beehives. Aren't the women of those days clever?

While in the Lord's Prayer, we can ask of God to provide us with physical food daily (Matthew 6:11), it is also important for us to feed on spiritual food too. What is "spiritual food"? It is the reading of God's Word, reading of Quiet Time material such as your Junior RPG, prayer, and meditation. Are you taking your spiritual food every day?

What are the foods that the Israelites and people of Bible times do not eat? Draw four of them here.



Thought: For spiritual growth, we need spiritual food.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us food on the table. Please help me remember that I need my spiritual food too in order to grow spiritually. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

FORMAL MEALS IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES

During Old Testament times, guests invited to a meal were greeted at the door by the host with a formal kiss of welcome. Then a servant would remove the guest's sandals and wash his feet. The guest's head may then be anointed with oil scented with spices. He would then be given a drink of water, to show that he was received peacefully. Seating arrangement was important. Honoured guests were seated on raised platforms or at reserved places. The chief guest would be seated on the host's right and was always given the best food. Washing of hands before meals was a must because they did not have any cutlery like forks and spoons. In the Old Testament times, people sat cross-legged around a mat with the food in the centre. In the New Testament times, the Roman custom of 'reclining' at the table was adopted. This is how Jesus and the other guests dined when invited to dinner at the house of Simon, the rich Pharisee.

There will be a marriage supper of the Lamb (meaning Jesus) in heaven. Do you know that Jesus has already sent an invitation to every one of us? Have you accepted it? Jesus knocks on the door of every heart and is waiting for an answer.

Write down two differences between the way we eat and the way people in Biblical times eat.

(Back page of Jesus and His Times)

We eat sitting on chairs.

They eat _____

We eat with chopsticks, forks and spoons.

They eat with _____

Thought: Only those who have accepted the Lord Jesus will be at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to be sure of my salvation, and look forward to being with You in Heaven! In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

JEWISH EDUCATION

During the New Testament times, Jewish children's religious education began at home. Fathers were responsible for teaching their sons, at an early age. For the Jews who were better off, some sent their sons to synagogues for formal religious education. A religious teacher was paid by the synagogue to teach the children. At the synagogue, the boys sat in a semi-circle on the floor around the teacher who sat on a chair. Thus, the phrase 'to sit at the feet' came about. The boys were taught to repeat and memorise verses from Old Testament Scriptures.

For Jewish girls, their mothers taught them how to do housework, preparing them to become good wives and mothers in the future. Unlike Jewish boys, Jewish girls had less opportunity to learn the Scriptures. When guests were invited to a home for a meal, the girls were expected to tidy the place, cook and serve. Today, we learn about two sisters, Mary and Martha. During Jesus' visit, both of them were expected to be busy doing what women ought to do. However, Mary chose to spend her time sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to his teaching. Jesus did not rebuke her. Instead, he defended Mary when Martha complained against her. The Lord Jesus said that Mary had chosen the good part. He told Martha that she should also not be so bogged down by her chores but spend time listening to God's Word.

Today, children both boys and girls can learn the Word of God taught by their parents at home. In addition, they are also able learn from Bible lessons taught to them by their Sunday school teachers every Sunday. God wants parents to teach their children the Word of God at home.

1. How should the parents teach the Word of God?
Read Deuteronomy 6:7,
"And thou shall teach them _____ to thy children".
2. Why do we memorise Scripture? Read Psalm 119:11,
"Thy word have I _____ in mine heart,
that I might not sin against thee."

Thought: Am I diligent in the study of God's Word?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for godly parents and teachers who teach me Thy Word diligently. May I be serious about learning and living out the lessons contained in Your precious Word. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

FARMING

In all likelihood, none of your parents are farmers. But in bible times, many were farmers. They grew crops like wheat and barley. After the autumn rains had softened the ground, the seeds were sown. Ploughing and sowing were done at the same time. First, seeds were scattered. Then they were ploughed into the soil to prevent the birds from eating them. When Jesus told the parable of the Sower, everybody was familiar with the action. The farmer scattered seeds out of a bag while he walked the length and breadth of the fields.

The plough was drawn by a pair of oxen. The law did not allow two different animals to plough together. Any unequal pull strength will cause the weaker animal to suffer. Boulders and obstacles would break the plough. The ploughman must exercise care to avoid hitting them. He must also look forward all the time to produce straight furrows (lines in the ground for seeds to be sown). If he were to keep looking back, he would not be fit to be a ploughman. Likewise, to be fit for the Kingdom of Heaven, we need to look to Jesus, who has gone before us.

A farmer's life was hard because it was backbreaking work the whole year round. In winter, he had to weed the fields. In spring, when the grain began to swell in the rain, he had to watch out for pests and birds that might eat up his crops. At the end of April, the fields would be ready for harvest. It would yet be another busy season for the farmer. After harvesting, there would be threshing, winnowing, sifting and storing to do. The farmer may grow other crops like flax for linen, vines of grapes for wine as well as olives and figs. In the book of Matthew, the Lord Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest truly is plenteous but the labourers are few." Are you willing to labour for the Lord.

Thought: Whenever I tell others about Jesus, I am sowing the Gospel seed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father help me to be a faithful labourer in the harvest of souls for You. I know it will not be easy work but with Your help, I shall be able to do it. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

FISHING

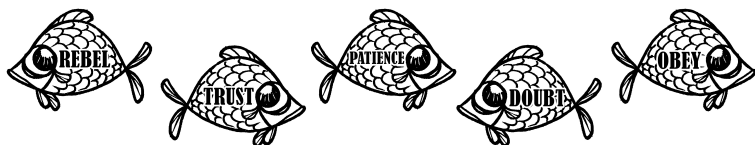
In Jesus' time, the Sea of Galilee was the main fishing ground. It was teeming with fish. Its shores were dotted with tiny villages as well as large towns like Capernaum. It is actually a large lake, and residents made their living from the catch of the lake.

Fishermen rowed their boats out and cast their nets over shoals of fish in the deep waters. Nets were circular and about 5 metres in diameter. Weights around the edges would drag the net down to the seabed, trapping the fish below. It was then pulled into shallow waters and hauled up the boat. Then they would sort out the fish and throw those without scales away. Fishes without scales were forbidden food under Jewish law. The fishermen's work included cleaning and selling of fish, as well as mending of their nets. They were doing just that when Jesus called them.

The Bible said that after Jesus' death, the disciples sadly returned to fishing. Fishing was their only occupation. But that whole night, these experienced fishermen caught nothing. In the morning, the risen Jesus suddenly appeared and instructed them to cast their net on the right side of their ship. Though they could not yet recognise their Master, they obeyed and caught 153 fishes. Their catch could have broken the net and yet it did not! However, they did have difficulty hauling the fishes onto the boat.

How amazing! Jesus knew exactly where the fishes were swimming. He could even make the fishes swim into the net. Jesus was training the fishermen to be 'fishers of men'. They were learning to trust and obey Jesus every step of the way.

Colour the fish that are swimming in the right direction.



Thought: Our God is in control of everything. We must trust and obey Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to trust You more. I thank You for the lesson today, that even fishes obey Your instructions. May I be an obedient child of God. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

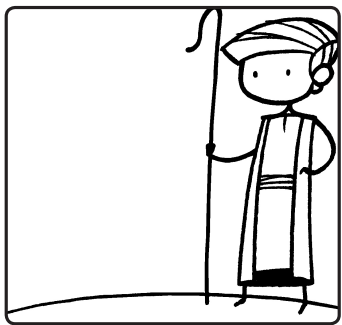
THE GOOD SHEPHERD

There were shepherds since the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Sheep and goats provided wool, milk, meat and leather. The horns were used as trumpets and containers for oil. Sheep and goats were part and parcel of the animal sacrifice in the temple. They were also a measure of wealth.

One shepherd could be employed by a number of owners to look after their sheep and he would hire helpers. For any animal that was lost, the shepherd had to pay its owner. Helpers hired by the shepherd did not have the same responsibility. Sheep get lost easily and are easy prey for wild animals. Therefore, a good shepherd would never fail to carry a staff, a rod and a sling with him. The sling is similar to what David used to kill Goliath. The shepherd would lead them forward to the pastures and dogs would be at the rear to guard them from straying.

Though they might be many in number, the sheep are known individually by the shepherd. Each night, he would sort them out by ownership. Ever wonder what names do sheep have? The sheep would recognise only the shepherd's voice. In the evenings, the shepherd would gather his sheep into a fold. The fold had only one door and the shepherd would lie across the doorway to protect his sheep with his own body. Sometimes, thieves could climb over the low wall, kill some of the sheep and throw the carcasses over the wall to accomplices.

The Bible mentions shepherds fondly. The first privileged few to hear the good tidings of Jesus' birth were shepherds. Young David was a shepherd before he became a king. Jesus, a descendant of David, describes himself as the Good Shepherd.



Look at the picture of the shepherd below. The staff is in his hand. Draw a sheep standing up.

Thought: Like sheep we often go astray. Jesus is the Good Shepherd whom we must follow.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for the Lord Jesus who is Good Shepherd watching over me. Help me never to stray from You. In Jesus' name I pray – Amen.

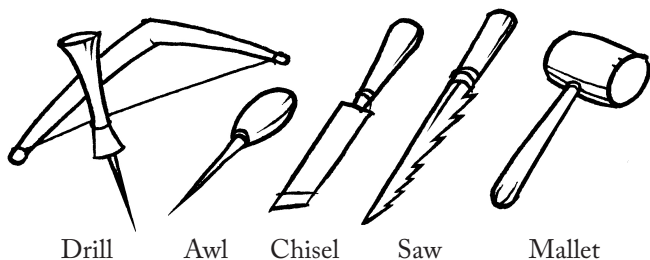
CRAFTMEN AND TRADERS IN THE MARKET PLACE

Besides farmers, shepherds and fishermen, there were also craftsmen and traders who worked at the market place. These craftsmen were the potters, carpenters, metal-workers, leather workers, cloth sellers, money changers or tax collectors.

In every village, there were a number of these craftsmen who made useful things for the people, earning a living at the same time. Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus must have been taught carpentry by him. It was tradition for a son to learn a trade or craft from his father, grandfather, or an uncle. One of a father's main duties was to see that his son learnt a useful trade. Thus, there was a saying among the Jews, "He who does not teach his son a trade is bringing up a thief."

A basic carpentry kit included an axe for chopping down trees, an axe for shaping wood, and a hatchet. Besides these, there were precision tools for sawing, drilling, chiselling, hammering and filing. These were simple tools but were used to make door and window frames, tables, benches, plows, yokes, kneading troughs for dough and even toys for the children. Carpenters and the other craftsmen were respected for their skills. Today, many things are mass-produced in factories by machines. The skills that we now learn to earn a living are very different from those of the past. Unlike God who never changes, man keeps changing. His words are kept pure for us forever.

Look at the simple tools of a carpenter and see if you can identify them.



Thought: Let us use all our skills to glorify our unchanging God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your gift of talents to each of us. Help us to faithfully use them for Thy glory. This I pray in Jesus' name – Amen.

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