October to December 2014
Teenz RPG Series on
“ A Reformed Life”

Do pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance before you begin your devotional time, for unless the Spirit reveals the meaning, we cannot understand scripture (1 Corinthians 2:10). Then you must read the scripture text; please don’t be tempted to read the devotional alone without reading the Bible. Memorizing the scripture text will help you meditate upon it (Psalm 1:2), even long after you have finished your devotional time. After reading the devotional, always end with self-reflection: compare yourself against the standard of God’s Word, and humbly yield to the Holy Spirit to direct you towards that standard (James 1:23-25). Be ye doers of the Word, not hearers only!

At the end of this series, may you be able to say as David said, *“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.”* (Psalm 63:1)

May all glory be God’s alone!

Dn Milton Ang
On behalf of the Teenz RPG committee

Ephesians 2:1-9
Memorise Ephesians 2:8
"And you hath he quickened, who were dead..."

CAN MY LIFE BE REFORMED?

When a person is saved, the Bible tells us that he is "a new creature". The person's entire outlook on life changes now that Christ is in the picture. The change is so drastic that in this passage, Paul refers to it as a person being "quickened", or made alive, though he was once dead.

The difference in the person's life should then be clear for all to see. In the past, he would have followed his own will and his own way, "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind". Now, after salvation, he is able to obey God's laws and live in a manner that is pleasing to God.

But from this illustration, it is clear that a reformed life – a life of obedience to God – does not begin with our own efforts. In our sin, all of us are spiritually dead, and we have no ability to make ourselves spiritually alive, any more than a cadaver can come back to life by itself. The beginning of a reformed life – of our salvation – is not brought about by hard work or determination. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly tells us, it is "for by grace are we saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, let any man should boast." The beginning of a reformed life, therefore, is the salvation grace of God that is freely given to sinful man, and not something that we earn.

Therefore before we even consider living a reformed life, we must first be sure that we are spiritually alive. Otherwise, all attempts to lead a life that is pleasing to Christ are futile. We may have grown up in a Christian home, and perhaps have always believed in the existence of God. Yet it is vital that we check to see if we have believed in God personally. Growing up in church, attending worship services, and serving in various ministries does not make us spiritually alive. God alone is the one who quickens us, who awakens our spiritual senses and enables us to believe.

We need to cry out to God and ask for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we can be saved. If we have not yet confessed Christ and obtained salvation, then this is the first and most essential thing to address.

THOUGHT: Have I been saved by the blood of Christ, and been made spiritually alive?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be sure of my salvation, and to seek to live a reformed life as a person who is spiritually alive.

THURSDAY, OCT 2

James 2:15-20
Memorise James 2:20
"... faith without works is dead"

AM I LIVING A REFORMED LIFE? (I)

In James 2:15-16, we are given an illustration of what faith without works is like. If a person is hungry and in need of lodging, what should we do for him? If we do nothing but wish him well when it is within our power to provide what he needs, there is ultimately no worth to that well-meaning expression. James likens this to the Christian walk. He highlights how good works are important, as proof of the fact that we are truly saved. In the above illustration, we see that simply professing a belief in Christ does not mean that we are saved – it must be backed up by a life of good works.

This does not mean that salvation requires works – instead, he points out how a reformed life is evidence of a person who is saved. To further illustrate this, James notes in verse 19 that "the devils also believe (that there is one God), and tremble". This belief in the existence of God does not equal salvation – we can see this in how they tremble and fear God, but ultimately do not submit to Him. Faith that does not result in good works is therefore described as "dead, being alone" (v17) – it was never a living faith to begin with.

If we are truly saved, then living a reformed life means having real changes in the way we think, feel and act. If we claim to have professed Christ but still cling on to our old ways despite knowing what the Bible says, then we are not living a reformed life.

In such situations, it is necessary for us to examine our faith – is it a living faith, or a dead faith? A true, living faith would show itself in our lives; we would yearn more for the things of God and strive to live a life that is pleasing to Him. A dead faith, on the other hand, produces only fear and despair – much like the 'faith' that the devils have. If our faith has thus far only given us fear and despair, then we must go back and consider again what it means to be saved, and check if we have indeed accepted Christ as our Saviour.

THOUGHT: Is my faith a living faith that has changed the way I think, feel and act?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to show my faith in Thee by the way that I lead my life.

1 John 1:6-7
Memorise 1 John 1:6
"... if we walk in the light, as he is in the light..."

AM I LIVING A REFORMED LIFE? (II)

In yesterday's reading, we learnt that true faith shows itself in works. However, living a reformed life is about more than showing one or two good works in our lives. We see this in 1 John 1:6. There are people who claim "that we have fellowship with him (God)". Having fellowship with God means that we have first obtained salvation – that is what allows us to then enjoy fellowship and communion with God. However, if we claim that we have salvation but "walk in darkness", then we are lying about having fellowship with God. We may be saved, but God is not pleased with us and we do not have fellowship with Him.

The word "walk" indicates a continuous journey over a period of time. Thus, when applied here, it is focused not just on one or two acts, or even a number of acts of good or evil. Instead, it is referring to the way that we live our lives as a whole, and the manner in which we have spent our days.

Thus, we are not leading a reformed life if the way we live is characterised mainly by "darkness", which indicates sin. On the other hand, if we "walk in the light, as he (God) is in the light", it means our lives are patterned after God and the light of His Word. Our lives are characterised by holiness and purity. We yearn for spiritual fellowship with God through prayer and reading His word, and we do all things in service to Him for His glory. As long as we do this, we enjoy fellowship with God.

In light of this, we need to examine how we have lived our lives ever since we became believers. If we were to take stock of all the things that we have done from then until today, are we able to say that the way that we have lived is characterised by light?

If, after taking stock, we find that our lives up to this point have been filled with nothing but sin and continued rebellion against God, then 1 John 1:6 warns us that "we lie, and do not the truth". "Doing not the truth" means that we have failed to obey God's Word. If this is the case, then we must repent now and ask God for forgiveness for not living a reformed life.

THOUGHT: Do I have fellowship with God, or have my sins stopped me from enjoying that blessing?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to confess any sins I may have, so that I can enjoy fellowship with Thee.

SATURDAY, OCT 4

Romans 7:21-25
Memorise Romans 7:22

"... when I would do good, evil is present with me."

IS A REFORMED LIFE A PERFECT LIFE?

Over the past two days, we have seen how important works are – they are proof of a living faith. Also, we have seen that if we continue doing works of darkness it affects our fellowship with God. However, this does not mean that if we have sinned, we can never again live a reformed life. A reformed life is not a sinless life.

In Romans 7, Paul writes about his constant struggle with sin. When he talks about the "law in my members" in verse 23, he is referring to the fact that there is still the vestigial remains of his fleshly nature that battles within him constantly tempting him into sin, and that it is always "warring against the law of [his] mind". On one hand, he knows the law of God and desires to obey it. Yet on the other hand, there is the "law of the flesh" – the sin in this imperfect body that we have, which he had to struggle against. Sometimes, in this struggle, he fails and falls into sin. This is what causes him to cry out in verse 24, "O wretched man that I am!" Does this mean that Paul was a wicked sinner who was doomed to hell? Far from it, for he was a man who was constantly aware of the frailties of the human body and its propensity to sin. Instead it was precisely because of His desire for a reformed life, that he was continually searching his heart, and was so sensitive to sin, that every little errant way within him caused him great anguish and despair before God.

Thus, we see that a reformed life does not mean that we have completely banished sin from every part of our lives. Living a reformed life does not mean that we have become immune to temptations, or that we will never again sin. While good works are part and parcel of a reformed life, but so is the constant struggle against sin.

Do we face this struggle against sin? If we are living a reformed life, we will face it on a daily basis because we now have the mind of Christ, which causes us to want to obey God, and mortify the sinful nature that is still in us. A person who is not living a reformed life will not be actively engaged in this tug-of-war with sin – he or she will be succumbing to the flesh and sinning without this agony of soul.

THOUGHT: Do I struggle against sin, or have I been giving in to temptations without much of a fight?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to have a greater delight in obeying Thy Word, and help me to daily war against sin in my life.

WHAT IS THE FRUIT OF A REFORMED LIFE?

We have learnt that a reformed life involves good works that can be seen, and that these good works must be consistently shown in our lives. Today's passage provides us with more details on what these good works are, and why they are important.

The necessity of works is once again highlighted here when Paul says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh". Therefore, living a reformed life will help us ensure that we do not fall so easily into fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, and thus live a life that is glorifying to God.

The reason why this is so is simple: Paul again notes that the flesh and the Spirit are at war with each other. He describes it as the flesh "lusting" against the Spirit, and the Spirit also doing the same against the flesh – this means that the strong desires of one are completely against the strong desires of the other. There is no way to fulfil the desires of the flesh while fulfilling the desires of the Spirit, and vice versa. Paul then lists out examples of where the lusts of the flesh are seen, and what the fruit of the Spirit is. In the next few days, we will examine each fruit – each good work – in greater detail.

But coming back then to the idea of our lusts. Which desires do we spend more time fulfilling? The more time we spend on fulfilling the lusts of the flesh, the less we will spend on fulfilling the desires of the Spirit. The reverse is also true. If we are actively engaged in the work of God, focused on growing in faith and performing good works, then we will be less inclined to sin.

We must take a moment to reflect on how our time is spent. Are we serving God in a ministry or in some other capacity outside of a formal area of service in church? Do we spend time studying God's Word in Bible studies and fellowship groups? These are the things that will help us fulfill the desires of the Spirit and help us fight against the lusts of the flesh.

THOUGHT: Am I walking in the Spirit, or am I too busy fulfilling the lusts of the flesh?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be engaged in serving Thee and in showing forth the fruit of the Spirit.

MONDAY, OCT 6

1 Corinthians 13:4-7
Memorise 1 Corinthians 13:13
"... seeketh not her own..."

DO YOU HAVE LOVE?

The word "love" in Galatians 5:22 is "agape", which is also translated as "charity" in 1 Corinthians 13. It is a very particular word that describes unconditional love – the same kind of love that God showed to us when He sent Christ to die on the cross for our sins.

Agape love is different from the love that is commonly depicted in the world today. One clear difference is the fact that agape love "seeketh not her own" – this means that it is sacrificial, and it places the needs of others over our own needs with no selfish motivation behind it. People may be very willing to put the needs of their family above their needs, but that is primarily because of the relationship they share. These people would not be as likely to show that same love to total strangers. Those with agape love, however, can go beyond relationships and show love even to enemies, just as Christ loved us even while we were yet sinners.

But agape love is not blind – it "rejoiceth in the truth", which means that it is based firmly on God's Word. Turning a blind eye to sin is not agape love. A person with agape love would still rebuke sin, because he knows that God hates sin and will punish and condemn sinners, or chastise believers.

Living a reformed life requires us to show this same love to those around us, even complete strangers, or our enemies. One of the greatest expressions of agape love is taking the time and effort to share the gospel with those who are still outside of God's kingdom – it requires us to set aside any personal fear or anxiety, or any personal differences we may have with the people we are reaching out to.

In this, we see the principle of agape love clearly demonstrated. Giving the gospel to someone shows that we are trying to save them from Hell by pointing them to Christ, and we are willing to go through anything to deliver that message. This same idea of being willing to do and dare much for the sake of leading others to Christ is what we need to carry into all our interactions, whether with believers or unbelievers.

THOUGHT: Do I show agape love to others in my interactions with them?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to love others in the same way that Thou first loved me.

1 Peter 1:3-9
Memorise 1 Peter 1:8
"...wherein ye greatly rejoice..."

DO YOU HAVE JOY?

In today's passage, Peter spends the first three verses talking about the amazing and wonderful salvation that we have in Christ. He touches on God's "abundant mercy" shown to us when we do not deserve it, the "lively hope" we have through the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the "inheritance incorruptible" that is waiting for us, and the fact that we are "kept by the power of God" with our salvation forever secure.

Peter then notes that it is because of all these reasons that "ye greatly rejoice", referring to the people mentioned in 1 Peter 1:1. This shows us that the joy that Christians are supposed to have is not based on any common, earthly thing that can be obtained by effort. A few days ago, we learnt from Ephesians 2 that the salvation we have is given to us freely, and that we did not earn it. Here, Peter highlights just how marvellous that salvation is. This is the reason for our joy as Christians –that God has given this unspeakably great gift to us, even when we do not deserve it.

Are we generally joyful? As Christians, we have the greatest reason in the world to be joyful – we have salvation! It is a priceless treasure that cannot be bought, and once it has been given to us it can never be lost. It does not just ensure our deliverance from Hell, but also grants us the promise of eternal life in Heaven where we can enjoy fellowship with God forever.

But does this knowledge affect the way we feel on earth? It is all too easy for us to replace this heavenly joy with earthly joy if we focus on the things of the earth. If we are constantly fixed on the material enjoyments that we can find, then our joy will come and go with these material things. If our joy and happiness comes and goes depending on our worldly situation, then we are behaving exactly the same as unbelievers.

As Christians, we must be a joyful people. Being joyful does not mean to just wear a plastic smile and show a happy and cheerful front to others all the time. What it means is that we are able to rejoice and give thanks to God even in the most dire situations, because we know that God is in control and has the best plan for my life – both in this and the next. This is another fruit of the Spirit that shows we are leading a reformed life.

THOUGHT: Do I know what salvation really means, and does the knowledge that I have it bring me joy?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to rejoice in the salvation Thou hast given me.

Philippians 4:6-7
Memorise Philippians 4:6
"Be careful for nothing..."

DO YOU HAVE PEACE?

Another fruit of the Spirit is peace – both an inward calmness of soul and an outward attitude that does not encourage needless strife. It begins, however, in the mind of the believer. In Philippians 4, Paul urges the believers in Philippi to "be careful for nothing". It does not mean that they are not to care about anything – instead, the call is for them to set aside anxious worrisome care. It is natural for us to worry about many things in life, and it is particularly easy to fall into a state of constant worry when many vital factors of life are outside our control. Therefore, Paul instructs the Christians to "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God".

The result of this is that God's peace, which "passeth all understanding", will keep the believer. This means that the peace which God gives when we commit all matters to Him is a peace that the world cannot understand – it is a peace that allows Christians to go through any hardship, no matter how dire.

It is also important to note that Paul's remedy for anxious care is not good and sound planning, nor is it rooted in anything that man can provide. Yes, God may work through many things, but the ultimate source of peace comes when we commit all our cares fully to Him. This means that even if the present situation may be very troubling indeed, with no help or clear solution in sight, a Christian who has committed all things to God will still be able to go through the day without fear and without being bogged down by cares and anxiety.

Christians have the greatest reason to have peace. There is no situation we may find ourselves in that God does not know of, and which He is not able to guide us through. His Word overflows with promises of His provision. As Christians, do we find ourselves in a state of constant worry over the future? Has the worry grown to a point where we find ourselves constantly burdened with thoughts of the future? If that is the case, then we need to listen to Paul's exhortation – bring the requests to God, and find peace in the promises of His Word.

THOUGHT: Do I worry about things because I doubt God's power to provide for me?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to cast all my cares upon Thee.

James 5:7-10
Memorise James 5:10
"Be patient therefore, brethren..."

DO YOU HAVE LONGSUFFERING?

The word "patience" can refer to two things in the Bible; either the ability to bear with difficult circumstances, or the ability to bear with difficult people. When translated as "longsuffering", the Bible is referring to the second situation. Thus, this fruit of the Spirit involves the patience that we have towards other people.

In James 5:9, there is an exhortation to "grudge not one against another". The word "grudge" carries the idea of groaning or grumbling, whether in impatience or distress. In this particular context, we note that James is telling them not to do this against other believers in particular. Thus, if a fellow believer wrongs us, or is particularly hard to deal with, we must still show patience and forbearance. The example that James points us to is that of the prophets "who have spoken in the name of the Lord". The Old Testament is filled with examples of prophets of great patience, who never ceased rebuking sin in Israel even though they were often met with a very poor response.

The principle of longsuffering is very clearly illustrated in the example that James gave about the prophets. When God gives us a task that requires us to deal with people who are difficult, do we exhibit the same level of patience that the prophets did? They continued to serve God in their respective ministries and often had to put up with harsh criticism, general disinterest, and sometimes even physical violence. No matter how unreceptive and unrepentant the people were, the prophets continued to persist in their efforts. Likewise, we need to exhibit that same level of tolerance towards all men – not just believers. In school, we will inevitably meet with people who we do not get along with very easily. In such situations, we must remember that God has placed us there as witnesses. Hence, we must have longsuffering to the people around us, whether they are believers or unbelievers.

It is easy to get along with people who are generally agreeable. The trait that marks us out as Christians is this working of the Holy Spirit within us that allows us to go beyond what unbelievers are capable of, and which helps us to bear with even the most difficult people, for the cause of Christ.

THOUGHT: Am I very impatient towards the people around me?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be longsuffering towards others.

1 Thessalonians 2:7-8
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 2:8
"... as a nurse cherisheth her children"

DO YOU HAVE GENTLENESS?

Gentleness is a generally well-understood virtue. In today's passage, Paul uses the image of a "nurse" – a mother or the caretaker of a child – as a means to show how gentle the apostles were when delivering God's Word. This comparison therefore tells us that gentleness involves the general behaviour of a person; it is characterised by the same tenderness that a mother would show to her children, and not with sharp or harsh words.

It is important to note that this gentleness cannot simply be put on – it involves the person's heart as well. Paul states that he and the other apostles were "affectionately desirous" towards the Christians, and that they were willing to give to the uttermost because the Christians "were dear unto [them]". Although the word "gentleness" focuses on the tenderness of a person's outward demeanour, it comes with an inward love.

It can be easy for us to be brusque, curt or harsh in our treatment towards others, particularly to those whom we know well, or to complete strangers. Our family members often see the less gentle side of us, since we are more prone to behave mildly towards those who are not as close to us. However, a Christian is supposed to behave differently from the world, and the gentleness we exhibit is one way in which we can show that we are of Christ.

The gentleness that we are supposed to show is more than just a general mildness in our demeanour. As seen in this passage, gentleness is seen because of a deep care that we have for others. Paul and the apostles were gentle because they desired to see the Christians accept the Gospel, and then to grow in the Word of God. As a result, they did their best to nurture the Christians with love and tender care, instead of always exercising their apostolic authority and demanding submission. In the same manner, our gentleness must not be simply for appearance's sake – cultivating gentleness towards those around us requires us to care first for their souls. This will lead us to behave gentle to unbelievers, so we can share the Gospel, and to believers, so that we can build them up in the faith.

THOUGHT: Do I behave gently towards the people around me?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a love for others so that I can minister to them with gentleness.

DO YOU HAVE GOODNESS?

Yesterday's reading focused on gentleness – an inward love that shows itself in a tender demeanour. Today's passage on goodness centres around the actions that arise out of that demeanour. The word "goodness" stresses the good works that are actively done.

In Galatians 6:10, Paul exhorts Christians to do good at every opportunity that is presented. He notes that we should do good "unto all men", however he also mentions that this should be done especially towards fellow believers.

It is important to note that "goodness" is not a generic term. Society believes many things are good – like not caning children – but which are actually contrary to what God's Word tells us is truly good. Therefore, when the Bible instructs us to do good, we must also use the Word to judge exactly what is good, and therefore ought to be done to all men.

Since such "goodness" is very specific, we must not go about with the mistaken impression that we must do everything that people claim is good, or which seems good to us. The good that we wish to do must be in line with God's Word. If we fail to properly determine what is good, then we may mistakenly apply this verse and end up performing sinful acts in the name of "the greater good", which is ultimately wrong in God's eyes.

Do we do good towards our fellow believers in particular? One act of goodness we should not shy away from would be rebuking our brothers and sisters in Christ if they are in sin. It is not a pleasant task, but it is still characterised by goodness. Thus, in such a situation, we also see the essence of goodness – true goodness is not simply the intention or the desire to perform an act; it is the act being actually carried out. Having a desire to rebuke my brother who is in sin is not goodness until I act upon it.

Are there other acts of goodness which we have failed to perform? Have we only entertained the idea of performing them? If so, let us resolve today to "do good unto all men", and to "not be weary in well doing".

THOUGHT: Am I doing good, or only thinking of doing good?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the boldness and perseverance to consistently do good to those around me.

DO YOU HAVE FAITH?

Hebrews 11 begins with a description of what "faith" is – it is the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". This means that it makes the fulfilment of future promises a reality to us, and we treat them as something real and substantial. It is what convinces us, just as evidence convinces people, so that we act on the promises even now when we cannot yet see them.

The rest of Hebrews 11 is commonly known as the "Hall of Faith", as the writer cites many examples of believers who were given a promise by God, and who then went on to live their lives in light of that promise, trusting that God would fulfil all of them. In Hebrews 11:33-37, we see that this faith enabled them to do amazing things for God, and to endure terrible trials without capitulating and compromising. They lived by faith! Thus, we see that faith is the underlying fruit of the Spirit that shows very clearly to the world that we believe in a God who is real.

God has left a host of promises in His Word for us which cover every possible need that we may have in this life, and into eternity. It falls upon us to decide whether or not we will believe what God has said. This is the inward, subjective faith that we must exercise. Once we exercise it, others will be able to see it in the way that we conduct ourselves, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Are we easily afraid? Do we fall into temptation without much of a fight? Do we find it a chore to serve God? Do we doubt that God can help us in certain situations? All of these issues stem from a lack of faith. God's Word supplies comfort and consolation for every situation; it warns us about the penalties of sin; it tells us about the blessings and joy that come with service; it testifies of His power and willingness to use that power for our good. In every situation, faith is the key to helping us live a life that is pleasing to God, just as it was the key to helping all the saints in Hebrews 11 leave behind a good report for us to follow.

THOUGHT: Am I leaving behind a good report by exercising faith in God's Word?

PRAYER: Lord, increase my faith!

Numbers 12:1-3
Memorise Matthew 5:5
"... Moses was very meek..."

DO YOU HAVE MEEKNESS?

Meekness is not the same as powerlessness or timidity. Moses is described in this passage as the meekest man in the world. Yet we know that he served as the leader of some two million Jews, and that he led them out of Egypt against the will of Pharaoh. Before they were allowed to leave Egypt, God used Moses to smite that nation with ten plagues, and then to guide the people of Israel across the Red Sea. Clearly, Moses was not a man lacking in power, personality or status.

Yet in today's passage, we see that even though he was a leader of great importance, he did not take offense when Miriam and Aaron questioned his authority in Numbers 12:2. When Miriam and Aaron spoke against him, he did not make use of his authority to rebuke them. Instead, it was the LORD who chastised Miriam and Aaron and struck Miriam with leprosy. Even then, Moses interceded for Miriam and asked for God to heal her immediately. God's final judgement, however, was for Miriam to be put out of the camp for seven days, and Moses did not contest it. Thus, we see that meekness is not a lack of power or authority – rather, it is power under control, born out of a submission to God's will.

From Moses' example, we know that a person can be in a position of great power and influence and still be meek. This is because meekness is, first and foremost, submission to God. Then, it shows itself in our interactions with others when we are able to put them first. When Miriam challenged Moses' authority, he was still able to put himself aside and cry out to God to have mercy on her, despite the fact that she had wronged him.

In this day and age, self-assertion and self-confidence are prized as virtues. Meekness is therefore seen as a weakness – something that places us at a disadvantage to others. However, from God's Word, we can see that meekness is in fact a fruit of the Spirit. Once we are capable of submitting to God in meekness, we will be able to do so in order to seek good for others first, even if it means having to submit to others.

THOUGHT: Am I submitting to God in meekness, and exercising that same spirit of meekness towards others?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be meek like Moses.

Ephesians 5:18
Memorise 1 Corinthians 9:27
"... but be filled with the Spirit."

DO YOU HAVE TEMPERANCE?

To have temperance is to have self-control. Today's verse is one that is often used against drinking. It is the perfect picture for what self-control is. Paul writes to warn the Christians in Ephesus not to be drunk with wine, "wherein is excess". The word "excess" carries the idea of behaving in a reckless, wasteful and lawless manner. Being drunk with wine leads to all manner of sinful behaviour as the believer loses control over his or her ability to exercise sound judgement – they will not be able to exercise any temperance at all.

In direct contrast to this, Paul exhorts the believers to be "filled with the Spirit". The idea behind "drunk" and "filled" are similar here – it is to be so full of it that the substance affects the person's judgement. In the case of the Spirit, such a filling leads to a greater ability to exercise self-control, so that the believer is kept from sinful behaviour.

While we may not drink, our self-control can be affected by any number of things that we fill our minds with. If we fill our minds with the things of the world, then exercising self-control becomes that much more difficult because our ability to make judgements is swayed by what we have imbibed.

On the other hand, if we make it a point to be filled with the Spirit through the constant, regular study of God's Word, then such a filling builds our ability to rightly discern between right and wrong, and in turn makes it easier for us to exercise self-control.

The general "spirit" of this day and age tells us to do what we feel like, whenever we feel like it. The world trumpets this idea of following our feelings from every corner, be it in movies, advertisements or books. Thus, the danger of being "drunk" with the ways of the world and lose our capacity to exercise self-control is very real. To remedy that, we need to redouble our efforts to fill our hearts and minds with the things of God.

THOUGHT: Am I drunk on some wine of the world, which is leading me to excess?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be filled with Thy Spirit, and to exercise self-control.

Ephesians 2:10
Memorise Colossians 2:6
"For we are his workmanship..."

WHY LIVE A REFORMED LIFE?

We have spent the past few days examining the fruit of the Spirit, which is the mark of a reformed life. It is clear that living a reformed life is not easy, and that it involves much struggle on the Christian's part. Why should the believer put him or herself through so much hardship?

Today's reading points us back to Ephesians 2, which we last considered on October 2. The reason why we should endeavour to live a reformed life is stated here. As a result of our salvation, we are now "his workmanship" – like an object that Christ has created. The purpose for which we were created is "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them". This is really the purpose that God has for our lives. This is why he saved us! It is not for us to live our lives in any way that we like. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, so that we can fulfil God's will for us in our lives, to do the good works which He has appointed us to do.

Thus, we see that living a reformed life is not optional: it is part and parcel of what it means to be saved. When we obtained salvation, we who were once dead have made alive. We were not simply raised to live as sinners again. When He gave us salvation, the appointment He prepared for us beforehand was for us to consistently and continuously perform good works, and then to continually "walk in them".

When a carpenter takes a block of wood, the wood itself has no choice over what it is shaped into. It is up to the carpenter to decide whether he will fashion a cupboard, a chair or a table. In the same manner, we have no power of our own to decide what kind of life we want to live. As believers, God has taken us as sinners and turned us into the objects of his salvation, able to do works pleasing to Him.

Do we have an interest in living a reformed life? It comes together with being a Christian. This is what God intends for us, and therefore if we are truly saved, we must want to fulfil God's intention in our lives. Not to do so would be the height of ungratefulness, when God has given us the amazing and marvellous gift of salvation.

THOUGHT: Am I truly saved? If I am, is there anything I would hold back from the One who has given me salvation?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to submit to Thy ordained plan for me to walk in Thy ways and to do Thy work.

ARE YOU DEAD TO SIN?

One of the ways which the Bible describes the complete transformation of salvation, is through the analogy of dying and living. This is used by Paul in Romans 6 to bring across the point that as believers, we must put aside our old life of sin. He explains it through the idea that when we are saved, we become dead to sin, and therefore must not live in sin any longer, but to walk in the newness of life.

But then we ask, what does it really mean to die to sin? Verse 6 tells us that it was the old man that was crucified together with Christ. The old man here refers to that which we were before salvation. It describes our old carnal self, who was a slave to sin and enemy of God. We did not know God, and were living only to fulfil our selfish desires.

Then by the wonderful grace of God, we heard the gospel and were saved! What happened then was that this old man died, never to return again. Just as Christ was crucified and died upon the cross, our old man died together with him. This is what Paul was talking about in Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me".

The implication of this is that we are now freed from sin (Romans 6:7). We are no longer imprisoned in the deathly grip of sin, but instead are now free to serve Christ. Whereas prior to our salvation, we could do nothing but sin, yet now that the old man is gone, we are able to not sin. Yet we must note that this does not imply sinless perfect. Though the old man is dead, yet our carnal fleshly nature still remains. Yes the old man who was a slave to sin is gone, but we still sin, not because we are forced to, but because we allow ourselves to succumb to temptation.

On our part, now that we are saved, the Bible tells us that we must continually reckon ourselves to be dead to sin (Romans 6:11). It is a conscious effort on our part, that we resist temptation, and realize that it can no longer have a permanent grip on us. This is the reformed life – one that has repented and no longer serves sin!

THOUGHT: Death is permanent. The old man is gone forever!

PRAYER: Lord, grant me the strength to resist temptation and reckon myself dead unto sin.

FRIDAY, OCT 17 *Romans 6:8-13*
Memorise 2 Corinthians 5:15

"dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Christ Jesus our Lord"

ARE YOU ALIVE UNTO GOD?

Following on from the idea that the old man that we once had has died, it is only logical that a new life begins. Just as our old man died together with Christ on the cross, we are now raised together 'in the likeness of his resurrection' to 'walk in the newness of life' (Romans 6:4-5). Simply put, as a believer, we now have a new life in Christ, and it is a life that we must live for God and not for sin.

This is a transformation that every believer has gone through. It began when we recognized that we were sinners who were lost and destined for hell. We then repented of our sins and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. From that moment on, our entire perspective on life was changed by God, for we were made a new creature. Our goal in life was no longer to live for ourselves, but to live for God, and for the Christ who died for us and rose again for our sakes (2 Corinthians 5:15).

This then is the new life that we have in Christ. It is a wonderful life that will be evidenced by our works and a life committed to serving the Lord. Everything about us has changed, from the inside out. We have new desires, new affections, new ideals, new motivations and new ambitions. We now know that there is a loving Father in heaven who created us, and a loving Saviour who died for our sins. We now know that we have eternity in heaven waiting for us, and fellowship with God to look forward to. We now also have a renewed perspective towards sin, knowing the seriousness of rebellion against God, and the judgment of hell that will be meted out against it. As such, our life's direction has also completely shifted, as we now move away from the sins and attractions of the world, towards a life lived for God.

Dear teen, is this the change that you have experienced? Do you realize that as a believer, you are dead unto sin, and alive unto God? If this is the transformation that we have seen in our lives, God's Word to us is that we must no longer yield our members to become instruments or tools of unrighteousness unto sin, but that we must yield ourselves to God, and wholly dedicate our lives to become instruments of righteousness unto God!

THOUGHT: Will I waste this new life that I have?

PRAYER: Lord, may my life be used as an instrument of righteousness for Thee.

SATURDAY, OCT 18

Romans 12:17
Memorise Luke 17:10
"We have done that which was our duty to do"

ARE YOU RENDERING A REASONABLE SERVICE?

Something that is reasonable is that which is fair, appropriate and within good sound reason. In a given situation, most logical and sensible people would come to similar conclusions. They would apply rational, equitable and just logic to their decision making, and come out with a verdict that would be pleasing to most.

When discussing the service that we are supposed to render to the Lord, Paul here in Romans 12:1 also appeals to our logic and fair reasoning. He begins with the phrase "I beseech you therefore". He argues that in light of all that we have learnt from Romans 1-11 about the salvation that we have, it really ought to illicit a response from us. He calls us to remember the mercies of God, and all that He has done to save us, to then think of what we ought to do in return. If we are reasonable and fair and sensible people, we would realize that it is such a huge debt that we owe to God, and nothing, not even our whole life would be able to repay him. After all, Christ, though He is God, gave Himself up to live as a man, and then die. But die for what? For us, these unworthy, sinful rebels who were enemies of God, who can now be made righteous by His blood. What an amazing sacrifice!

Therefore, it is most reasonable, and really not too much to ask, that we would present our whole lives, our entire being, to be a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable unto God. Just as Christ gave himself for us, now that we are saved, we ought to be willing to dedicate our whole life to Him. Every aspect of our life, no longer be lived for self, but as an acceptable sacrifice to God. Note that it means that we must serve God on His terms and not our own. It must be holy and acceptable to God, and not ourselves. We must ensure that the service that we render pleases Him, and not ourselves or anyone else. Only then, can it be considered a reasonable service – appropriate to us, and also appropriate to God.

Dear teen, do you realize the debt that you owe to the God who saved you? Are you living your life for God or for yourself? Do you think your life is one characterized by holiness, and one that would be acceptable unto God?

THOUGHT: Was it reasonable that God would die for me?

PRAYER: Lord, may you help me to understand the extent of Christ's sacrifice for me, and in turn to present my body as a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable unto God.

1 Peter 2:11-12
Memorise Matthew 5:16
"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles"

HOW IS YOUR TESTIMONY TO UNBELIEVERS?

When we are convicted of the idea that our lives ought to be lived as a living sacrifice unto God, then we would quickly realise that many aspects of our lives need to be changed. We will begin to see a great gulf between the principles of the world, and the teachings that we have in the Word of God. That is why the Bible sometimes describes Christians as strangers and pilgrims. We ought to feel like foreigners, out of place in this sin-sick world, and understand that we are but pilgrims travelling through, on our way to our eternal abode in heaven. Our life principles, values and ambitions will also be vastly different from that of the world around us. We may still at times be attracted to the fleshly lusts that we see all around us, but our new man that is in Christ will war against such inclinations, for our desire is to glorify God and not to please ourselves.

One of the ways which we can glorify God would be through the testimony that we uphold. 1 Peter 2:12 calls for us to have our 'conversation honest among the Gentiles'. The word 'conversation' here is an old English term that refers to our conduct and manner of life. It is important to maintain a good and honest conduct, for in so doing we demonstrate to the world the effect that Christ can have in our lives. We show forth the fact that we are new creations in Christ - that our sins have been washed and our lives have been reformed. This is the very basis of what makes our witness effective, for we show Christ to the people around us.

The result of this may sometimes be persecution. People might not like how different we are, and because of that they may ostracize, mock and humiliate us for our beliefs. They may even hate us, and try to harm us for the faith that we hold on to. They will 'speak against you as evildoers', and try to find fault against you, just as the jealous presidents tried to do against Daniel (Dan 6). Yet like Daniel, we must stand our ground and never compromise, and continue to hold firm to our testimony for the Lord. The result of this is that as we maintain this honest conversation and continue to strive to do good works, the very same people who persecute us may one day glorify God! They will continue to observe us, and realize that we are indeed different from other people whom they have bullied before. Who knows, they may actually make the first move, and come to ask you about the God you worship and serve!

THOUGHT: Can persecution ever be turned to praise?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to maintain a consistent testimony always!

MONDAY, OCT 20

Philippians 3:17
Memorise 1 Timothy 4:12
"but be thou an example of the believers"

ARE YOU AN EXAMPLE TO BELIEVERS?

As we endeavour to be an example to the unbelievers around us, we must also not forget the spiritual family of believers that we are now a part of. The Apostle Paul was always very conscious and careful of the need to be a good example to the believers that he was ministering to. In Philippians 3, he shared with them the testimony of his salvation, especially with regards to the new mind-set that he now has as a believer. He writes not to show off, or to claim that he is now perfect, but instead he shares with them his continual desire to become more and more Christ like, ever pressing on in his desire to know Christ. As he shares all these things with them, he then calls upon them to follow after his example, insofar as he was a follower of Christ. He also exhorts them to look for others who have his same godly focus in life, and follow them as examples as well.

As believers, we all need examples to emulate. As much as we are to be followers of Christ, the fact of the matter is that we will find it hard to see Christ in our day to day lives. We may not have the mature godly perspective to know exactly how to react and respond to the myriad of challenges that we face in our day to day lives. Therefore we learn from the more spiritually mature Christians around us, and pattern our lives after them.

I am sure that in your Christian walk, you have learnt through the godly testimonies of many around you. It could be your Christian parents, the church leaders, your Sunday school teachers, some of the older youths, or even your peers in church. You have been positively influenced by the way that they love and serve the Lord. Have you ever then wondered, how you too could be that positive influence to those around you? Granted, as young people, you may think that people do not take you seriously. You may fear that people look down upon your youth. That may very well have been the fear that young Timothy had as he took up the role as the pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul's advice through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was this: 1Timothy 4:12 "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity". Like Timothy, we too can strive to be an example in all these aspects of our lives, that we too can be that positive influence to those around us!

THOUGHT: Do I draw others towards Christ or away from Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be an example to all around me.

WILL YOU ASK THE LORD TO HELP YOU?

Christ instructs us to do 3 things: knock, ask, and seek of Him. These are three steps that guide us on how we should pray. First, a child must knock. To knock on a door is to make known your presence and to ask for access, permission to enter. We must go to God, humbling ourselves and 'knock' being persistent so that the door once closed will be opened! If you do not knock on a door, the person inside will not be alerted of your presence and thus not give you permission to enter. Secondly, ask –ask for things so that you may receive. Ask in order to find out what you do not know. Lastly, seek – search so that you can find, for things you may have lost, for something precious you need that is not obvious and in plain sight. These three actions embody earnestness, persistence and perseverance which should characterize our prayer lives. The promise to prayers is that they will be answered, with good gifts that are so much better than what our imperfect parents can give to us. Despite their imperfections and failings, no parent would be so wicked to give their child a stone when they are hungry, nor trick them with a serpent, instead of a fish. So imagine how much more willing and able our perfect Heavenly Father will be in giving to us, if we would only ask in prayer?

Do you look forward to gifts from your parents? A gift, even one you aren't terribly excited about is always good – it is worth something (however small the amount) and is intended to benefit, bring joy and fulfill your heart's desire. The best gifts are not necessarily the most expensive, but the most thoughtful ones. They usually come from someone who knows you well – your likes, dislikes, character, desires and needs. Is it foolish then not to desire and pursue the spiritual gifts from your perfect Heavenly Father who knows and cares for you? Seek and covet (in a positive way) by knocking, asking, searching. Christ promises to those who knock, it will be opened, ask and you will receive, seek and you will find. Spiritual gifts we will receive: wisdom, peace, blessings, guidance that enable us to live a reformed – spiritually rich life in accordance with His will.

THOUGHT: How often did Daniel pray?

PRAYER: Lord may I earnestly seek You daily, laying all my cares, worries, supplications and intercessions before You.

2 Timothy 3:16-17
Memorise 2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable ..."

WILL YOU STUDY GOD'S INSPIRED WORD?

The word 'inspired' in the original Greek literally means 'God-breathed'. This is the perfect quality that Scripture has, for it is God himself who breathed out these words directly to man. In studying Scripture, a person will gain by learning doctrine – God's teachings; be reproofed – where blame is given or disapproval expressed so that our sins will be exposed and corrected that we may know what is the right way and sin no more; and to be taught to be morally right, reflecting the sinless perfection and holiness of God. The ultimate result will be that we will learn how to be holy and righteous, and able to do good works for the Lord. The complete study of God's word, public and private will result in fruit – outward works that bless others and honour God.

As students, year after year we study hard, striving to increase our knowledge so that with good grades we may proceed to the next level of education. The hope of every student, is that the more educated we are, the better chance we will have of landing a good job, and with it the promise of a successful and prosperous life. Studying takes effort, time and sacrifice. Even after you begin working there is more studying and testing ahead in many fields. But we see it as beneficial and profitable, as something that we should do, though we may not always want to.

How about when it comes to God's Word? To maintain a reformed life, a child of God must be a lifelong student and practitioner of the Scripture. We cannot glorify God and live a holy life on our own limited strength and knowledge. God's precious perfect Word is written for you His child – each and every Word. Studying it should be an utmost priority and part of your life, which will enable you to apply its truths and wisdom as you face trials, tests and temptations along your entire life's journey. It will ensure that you continue to live a reformed life that is pleasing to God and not backslide into sin and cease having fellowship with God.

THOUGHT: What was Moses's instruction to Joshua as he took over the leadership of the Israelites?

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to love Your Word more each day, to read, study, meditate and obey.

Hebrews 10:23-25
Memorise Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12
"Two are better than one..."

WILL YOU AVAIL YOURSELF TO FELLOWSHIP?

When an item is precious and important to us we hold on to it tightly and always keep it in our sight. If you have professed, that is, declared faith in Christ, hold on to it with a firm and determined grip and keep on holding on to it strongly, focused, without hesitation. This is not something that is easy to do, to keep on living a life of faith not just now but to the end of your life. Many saw the miracles of Christ and professed faith but only for a short time, and then fell away. This is why fellowship is so important. There is strength in numbers. When Christians gather together there can be encouragement, correction, help and last but not least, friendship. As we 'consider' – look at one another, we will spur and prod each other to love and bear fruit – good works. Fellowship is to be taken seriously because through it believers can mutually strengthen one another in the faith. Sadly, many, even during Paul's time, had abandoned, and deserted fellowship, to their own peril and detriment. They are the opposite of those who have held on to their faith to the end. The need for fellowship is all the more important as the day of Christ's return approaches. As the need to stand fast increases, the pull and lure of sin to give in will also be all the stronger.

It is easy to have interest and be committed to something for a while. Consider how many hobbies, toys, pets that you were once so very interested in but now are no longer? Your faith cannot be like this. If we stand alone, it is all too easy to allow sin creep in and have a foothold in your life, such that you succumb to the temptations of the Devil and live a life that is no different from an unbeliever. You lose heart when disappointments and trials come our way and begin to doubt God and stop trusting Him. You grow to have more in common with unbelievers and you draw further and further away from living a Christian life. It happens all the time. So many friends who were once active and zealous for the LORD are now living disobedient worldly lives. We must place fellowship as a priority in our life. Recognise that is an essential and basic part of maintaining a reformed life. Good and sound Christian fellowship will challenge us to put away sin, overcome discouragement, know more of God and give us precious friendships that can encourage us in your Christian walk.

THOUGHT: What are your obstacles to fellowship? Are you a good Christian friend, or no better than an unbelieving friend?

PRAYER: LORD, may I love fellowship with Your people and may I be a spiritual friend.

FRIDAY, OCT 24

Hebrews 12:1-3
Memorise 1 Corinthians 9:24
"So run, that ye may obtain."

WILL YOU SET ASIDE BESETTING SINS?

To most people, running a short sprint would seem much easier than running a full 42km marathon. It takes him the fastest men in the world a little over 9 seconds to run 100 meters. On the other hand, the current marathon record holder, Wilson Kipsang takes just over 2 hours to run his race - 720 times longer! Our life is a race, likened more to a marathon than a sprint. The marathon is one of the most physically and mentally demanding events there is. Consider the physique of a marathon runner: long, lean muscles with very low amounts of body fat to impede his performance. His attire would be one of minimal weight, for in such a long race, every single gram matters! 'Weights' too hinder a Christian's race. It may be a possession, a hobby, or a habit – idols in our lives that distract us from our Christian purpose. To add to this hindrance, we get bogged down by besetting sins –persistent sins, that may be 'small', but we commit them regularly, habitually, and we refuse to put them away. To run the race it's not just about strength but patience - endurance. We must also remember why we run this race – it is for Christ! As we run, we must look to Christ for strength as we remember His great sacrifice for us bearing our sins. This reminds us of our responsibility to run a race that is worthy of Him.

An athlete not only trains hard but there is no room in their life for bad habits and junk food that will hinder their performance. For us, the goal is not a temporary record that will inevitably be beaten one day, or a perishable medal. Run your race for Christ, for what He has done to save you. Run for the eternal riches and life with Christ that is promised that will not perish and will far exceed what this fleeting world has to offer. Search your life for weights and sin that are affecting your race. Take steps to get rid of them that you may maintain a fully reformed life all the way to the finish line. Run patiently, for the race is long but the prize will be worth it all. Run to win!

THOUGHT: Do you need to train for your life's race as a Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, give me the strength and obedience to put away everything that hinders my spiritual life and live all my life with my eyes fixed on You.

Ephesians 5:15-16
Memorise Ephesians 5:17

"...be ye not unwise...understanding what the will of the Lord is."

WILL YOU TREAD WITH CAUTION?

Do you know that when you walk and stare at your phone, your field of vision is reduced to 5%. This is a recipe for an accident waiting to happen! Yet many choose to be reckless, believing nothing bad is going to happen to them. Sadly, this is very much like how some Christians choose to approach life – recklessly with no regard for their spiritual safety.

The Word of God instructs us to make sure we walk circumspectly, as one with wisdom rather than recklessly as fools. A circumspect person is one who is cautious of and unwilling to take risks. One easy way to understand the word 'circumspect' better is to break it down into its part. Literally it has the meaning of inspecting your circumference. It speaks of careful discernment of the things around us, such that the choices that you make and the actions you take are only done after careful consideration. This is the Christian's approach to the world – careful and discerning. He is wise, knowing the Word and applying it to a world that is full of sin. This then leads him to redeem time. This is a strange idea as redeem means to gain, get back. Its old English meaning is 'buy back'. How can anyone get or buy back time? We waste our time when we do things that do not honour God. But, when we do spiritual things we gain back time in the sense that these things will count for eternity – service, good works, witnessing. Remember, we live in evil times and so the need to walk carefully and wisely, not blindly. Time is precious and it is limited. In contrast, a fool does as he pleases, follows the world and wastes his life away.

The world will cajole you: 'You only live once, so live it up! C'mon – break the rules, just a little. Nothing bad is going to happen. Just one puff, just one sip... a glance or two at a sinful website'. Yet who knows best? Your Heavenly Father who is your creator, or sinful man – the creation? The world promises you fun, but to what end? Where will it lead you? No addict ever sets out to be an addict. It all begins with just one try... and then another... Keeping a reformed life is not easy. Studying the Word of God daily to understand what God's will is for you will enable you to walk wisely and not as a fool. It's your choice.

THOUGHT: If you do not have knowledge and wisdom to walk wisely now, nor time for God, what makes think you will have these in the future?

PRAYER: Lord, may I remember you now, my Creator in the days of my youth and enable me to live according to Thy will.

LORD'S DAY, OCT 26 *James 1:13-15*
Memorise 1 Timothy 1:15

"... Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

DO YOU UNDERSTAND TEMPTATION?

A temptation is something that attracts us, and to be tempted is to have the strong desire to do something wrong or unwise. God is holy and perfect and temptations do not come from God, neither can He be tempted nor does He tempt anyone. Temptations come from within us – from the sin that remains in us even after salvation. As long as we remain in our present corruptible bodies in this world we will always have to contend with our lusts – the strong desire and appetite for sin. There are 3 main catagories of temptations: the lust of the flesh (body, eg. gluttony), the lust of the eyes (mind, eg. envy) and the pride of life (spirit, eg. idolatry, self-esteem). We learn here that the origin is in our very own hearts as we are born in sin (Psalm 51:5). God is not the one who tempts us with evil, but it is out of our own lustful desires that we are drawn to sin. When we give in to this desire, sin is the result. Sin appears sweet, attractive and pleasurable. But it is destructive, for the end result, is that it brings forth death – the spiritual death of our soul.

How then does a Christian deal with temptation? First he needs to examine himself and acknowledge his sinful nature. To quote Matthew Henry "the Christian's security against sin is distrust of himself". He also needs to reflect and search his life for the things that are temptations to him. What is tempting to one person may not be tempting to another. Perhaps one is tempted and easily influenced by friends. Another may be tempted by material possessions. This process should be a continual and frequent one. As we change, what tempts us will also change. We need to be ever sensitive to sin and aware of our weakness and tendency to succumb to particular temptations. There are temptations that you can take active steps to avoid or rid your life of. And there are other ones that we may have no choice but to encounter. Purpose in your heart how you will overcome these. Have a plan. To be forewarned is to be forearmed! Prior knowledge of something enables you to prepare for it. And this will enable you, with the help of the Holy Spirit to resist and overcome them. Cling to Christ and the Word. Love holiness, remember that the pleasures of sin are so fleeting and temporary. It is not worth it. And of course, as always, we must pray!

THOUGHT: What are the sins you struggle with?

PRAYER: Give me the strength and the wisdom to know my own sinful self and not give in to my desires.

MONDAY, OCT 27 *1 Corinthians 10:12-13*
Memorise Proverbs 16:18

"Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

ARE YOU COMPLACENT ABOUT TEMPTATION?

Once a Christian has received salvation and has a certain amount of knowledge, there is a danger of thinking one is strong based on his own strength and goodness. He becomes confident and complacency sets in. But this foundation upon which he stands is a weak one, because it is based on self and pride, not Christ. This is Paul's warning which echoes the words of Proverbs 16:18, that pride comes before a fall. So, be warned and be aware, to not place faith in self lest you fall. However, with this warning, comes a twofold encouragement. Firstly, the nature of temptations that come over you, are ones that are common to all man – past, present and future. These are not supernatural and extraordinary in that it is impossible for you, as man to bear. Secondly, in the midst of temptation, God is faithful – He is there for you and will not suffer – allow the temptation to be more than you can bear. He will regulate it so that you can endure it and not give in, but instead to 'escape it' because you have not succumbed.

Perhaps you have been chosen to serve in a ministry or hold an office in church. You have been in the church for a long time. Your parents and family are well regarded. You have attended many Bible classes and are knowledgeable and well liked. Success, knowledge, popularity, good works and positions of authority – these can lead to pride. Always be on guard and sensitive to pride. Pride robes God of the glory and gives it to self. It also places us on a very precarious precipice, for it is from a position of pride and self-reliance, that our fall will be the greatest. Repent and pray that we will have a low estimation of our strength and inherent goodness, because we have none. Secondly, when temptations come and you wrestle with them, do not fall into self-pity or become despondent thinking that your trials are so great and unique that no one else in the world has ever had such temptations. Neither doubt God, that He has forgotten you or that your temptation is greater than Him. Take comfort and believe God's promise He is your omnipotent Heavenly Father.

THOUGHT: Read Luke 22:31-34: Remember Peter's prideful boast? Who was Peter adversary?

PRAYER: May I always remember my weak sinful flesh and not let Satan rule my life. Oh Lord, how I need Thee every hour, every day of my life. Temptations lose their power when Thou art near.

TUESDAY, OCT 28

Daniel 1:5-8
Memorise Daniel 1:8

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself..."

ARE YOU RESOLVED AGAINST TEMPTATION?

King Nebuchadnezzar set aside a portion of his meat and the very wine he drank for a select chosen children of Israel. The very best food and drink was to nourish them. The pressure on Daniel to submit here was twofold. First of all, it was the King himself who gave this command. What right did Daniel have, as a lowly captive, to defy the man who had absolute control over his life and death? Secondly, this meat and wine would have been the very best in the land. It would have been delicious and of the best quality. Daniel would have had to suppress his natural appetite and desire to eat it. It would have been all too easy to just obey Nebuchadnezzar, please the King and satisfy the appetite. After all, one has to eat right? You'd be a fool to disobey the King, risk your life and waste such good food! Instead Daniel purposes – actively resolve and determines in his heart – not to damage the purity of his body by eating the King's food. As a Jew, this would be unfit for him to eat, for it would have been slaughtered and offered in idolatrous worship to the Babylonian gods. Such food would also likely be considered unclean according to Mosaic law. Eating the meat and drinking the wine would not reflect a life given to God, rather one given to idols. We also see the wisdom in Daniel's testimony in dealing with this temptation. He 'requests' to the official, politely and firmly for permission not to eat the meat.

Daniel exhibited courage to defy the King's wishes. He also died to self – not worrying about his physical needs. He had faith. Not only did Daniel withstand temptation, but by doing so He glorified God and proved to the King and his people that God was greater than them and Daniel himself. How was he able to do it? It was because he had a firm conviction and resolved that he will not allow himself to be defiled, but that he will always stand on the side of the Lord. As a result, he was able to use the temptation and turned it around for God's glory!

To overcome temptations takes faith, and the exercise of faith requires courage and sacrifice. Are you willing? Are you resolved and determined? Will you too, like Daniel, purpose in your heart not to be defiled by the ways of this wicked world?

THOUGHT: Read Matthew 16:24-27

PRAYER: May I purpose in my heart not to succumb to temptation and have the wisdom to use temptation for Your glory.

Proverbs 27:12
Memorise Proverbs 27:12
"A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself..."

CAN WE PLAN AGAINST TEMPTATION?

A Christian who knows his sinful nature, has no pride nor confidence in his own ability to withstand temptation, and purposes in his heart that he does not ever want to sin. He is seen as a prudent man. A prudent Christian is a thoughtful and careful one. Whilst he must always depend on Christ for strength to withstand temptations he also knows he has a responsibility to win his battle with temptation against Satan. He is a planner – he plans against temptation. He looks forward and with wisdom can foresee – 'predict' the evil that lies ahead, and when he sees it, he hides – he actively takes steps to avoid it so that it will not 'see' him and harm him. He does not want to be found by temptation – this idea that temptations seeks us out. In contrast a simple man – who is a fool, who heads straight for temptation, succumbs and is punished.

Remember playing hide-and-seek as a child? We hide because we do not want to be found by the seeker who pursues and wants to expose us. We try to find the best place to hide. So this should be our attitude to temptation, to fear it discovering us, so we hide and hide well. Consider a time of war. If we know that we are outnumbered and surrounded by the enemy, the best thing we can do as a civilian is to seek out the best place to hide and stays there until it is safe, for our very life is at stake.

Sadly, for many Christians, instead of doing all he can to hide from sin, the opposite is true! We like to go as close to it as possible, or even immerse ourselves in situations, activities, bad company believing we can stand and not be corrupted? We expose ourselves to sin and all the corrupting influences of the world, and then proudly insist that we will not succumb to their temptations. We watch all sorts of TV shows and movies, play games and spend hours surfing the internet, and then we wonder why we keep sinning and struggle so much with sin? We do not seem to value our spiritual lives! We have more in common with the simple than the prudent. Remember what happened to simple fool? He was punished for his sin. Giving in to temptation has consequences. Do you fear punishment? Why then choose it?

THOUGHT: What are external (outside) sources of temptation in your life?

PRAYER: Give me the wisdom to foresee evil in my path and avoid it.

THURSDAY, OCT 30

Colossians 3:5
Memorise Colossians 3:1

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above..."

HOW TO DEAL WITH TEMPTATION FROM WITHIN?

As much as we are surrounded by corrupting influences in this world, we also realize that the greatest source of temptation comes from within. When I find myself in trouble I do often think, I am actually my worst enemy. I don't need Satan to tempt me, or others to sin against me, for there is already so much sin in me that causes my failings. Our earthly bodies are indeed the chief source of our evil desires. Thus we need to mortify sin in our members (bodies) – which is kill it and so destroy its power. Fornication is sex outside marriage; inordinate affection is an unnatural and degrading passion (e.g. bestiality, homosexuality, incest, paedophilia); and evil concupiscence is an evil strong sexual desire. These are all our sins which if we do not kill, but instead feed their appetites, will spread like weeds that spoil and consume a lovely garden or pests that multiply and spread disease. We must not only kill fleshy sins, we must also keep our minds in check. Covetousness is a sin of the mind and is spiritual idolatry because though we do not bow down and worship things, things have replaced God's foremost position in our hearts.

Yes, each and every one of us is born with sinful desires. We feel lust, envy, jealously, hatred, anger. Some desires so wicked we dare not even admit them to ourselves. However, God created man with a free will to choose. And you, as a child of God have been freed from the bondage of sin by Christ's death on the cross and given the will to choose: to sin or not to sin, to get rid of sin or to feed and nurture it. After salvation you are a new creature and old things have passed away. So, the choice is clear. Mortify sin: by self-denial – not doing what you want to do, and discipline, practically and spiritually. Stay away from people, activities, places that are sinful or give rise to sinful thoughts, and cultivate your spiritual life through prayer, fellowship and the study of God's Word. As believers, we can do so by the grace of God, and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Will you pray and ask the Lord to help you?

THOUGHT: The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

PRAYER: Lord may I hate the sin within me, repent, subdue it, and live a spiritually disciplined life.

Romans 12:14
Memorise Romans 12:19
"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves..."

HOW TO DEAL WITH PERSECUTIONS?

The most important person in our lives is 'I'. The world also emphasises this, it's about individual rights. My rights, what I deserve, what is owed to me. Therefore the temptation when someone wrongs you is to retaliate. It is instinctive and automatic. Your carnal old man's cry is that I must punish the wrong that has been done to me. I must get back what I have lost. I must express my anger so that I will not be taken advantage of again. Someone has to suffer and feel pain as I have. This is only fair and right!

Is this how Christians ought to react? Understand that retaliation is a sin. God's Word exhorts us to do the very opposite of what we would like to do, but to bless them and curse not. A curse can take 2 forms - it can be invoking a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on that person, or expressing one's anger by uttering offensive words. However, not cursing is still insufficient. As Christians we must go further and bless our enemies! Bless those who persecute you – someone who harasses and wrongs you not just once, but persistently. This is indeed difficult and note bless is repeated in this verse for emphasis.

Note that this is to be our response to those who persecute you, which is different from someone who is persecuting God. If it is just insults against use personally, then we respond with kindness and forgiveness. However if it is an insult against God, then we must take action, for the name of God is at stake!

So the next time someone persecutes you for the faith, remember that we cannot control what people do to us, but we can control how we react. We are accountable and responsible to God for this. It is God's will for you not to be tempted to sin but instead return kindness for evil. This is what sets you apart from unbelievers and is part of living a reformed and sanctified life. Take heart, remember that as a child of God, He will ensure justice is done, in His time and in His way.

THOUGHT: Consider what Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis 50:20-21.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. May I feed my enemy if he hungers, give him drink if he thirst for in doing so heap coals over his head. (Romans 12:20-21)

SATURDAY, NOV 1

Romans 12:1-2
Memorise Romans 12:2
"be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND?

A reformed life is only possible if you are a born again believer. We were all born with a natural, carnal mind. But once we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and repent of our sins, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who can grant us a renewed mind. This renewed mind is foundational to leading a reformed life. A reformed life is not merely turning over of a new leaf. It is a complete transformation whereby a person becomes an entirely new creature in Christ.

This renewed mind is one that must constantly be transformed. It is not a one-time event but a progressive change, whereby one is continually dying to sin and striving for more righteousness. This process is described as sanctification, where we start to think less and less like the world, and more and more like Christ. Whilst in the past we followed the ways and fashion of the world, now as a new creature in Christ, these things no longer have any appeal to us. We would want to flee the temptations of the world, and strive for more holiness and righteousness in our lives. Do you see this happening in your own life?

How is this transformation possible? Only when we read God's Word more, and yield to the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. With a renewed mind, we will also have the desire to know what is the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God". The natural mind is one that is entirely opposed to the will of God. But a renewed mind is obedient and submissive to God and His perfect desire for us. Thus we would want to know God better, and we would naturally have a desire to study His Word more. We would want to fulfil His will in our lives, and no longer seek just to fulfil our own sinful and selfish desires.

Dear teen, do you have a renewed mind? Have you begun to love the world less, and love God more? Are you being continually transformed to be more like Christ and less like the world? Do you have a desire to know God and His Word better, and desire to do His will? God's Spirit, dwelling in you, will change your way of thinking, and in turn change your life as well! Will you yield to Him, and allow Him to renew your mind?

THOUGHT: The believer belongs to heaven and to the age to come and no longer thinks like an unbeliever.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a daily renewal of my mind that my heart will constantly seek the things that are above, that are eternal.

DO YOU HAVE THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE?

A renewed mind will result in having the right perspective towards all things in this life, for we are constantly mindful of the life that is to come. Scripture has clearly revealed to us that the Lord's coming is imminent and one that will come suddenly as "a thief in the night". Indeed this world that we are living in is doomed for complete destruction when Jesus comes again. This destruction will be by fire which will burn all the elements of the earth with "fervent heat". All the works of man will be burned up.

We do not know exactly when this will happen, but we do know that it is soon! This truth that "all these things shall be dissolved" should therefore cause us to think soberly on what manner of life we need to live. We should feel that there is nothing permanent or of great value on this earth; that it is not our abiding home; that our great goal is in another better world above. It would lead us not to pursue the things that the world values – fame, fortune, power and prestige but the things of God and His kingdom.

Pursuing after God and godliness means that we must be diligent to study the Word of God. You must not only be faithful in keeping your quiet time but spend time studying it. In your Teens class, listen attentively to the lesson and meditate upon the verses taught. In this way, you will learn much and make good use of the time. Be serious, be humble and prayerful. This conduct ("conversation") is perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Dear teen, do you sometimes fear the coming of the day of the Lord? Do not fear for He is not coming as a Judge for you. The Lord Jesus Christ is your Saviour and He is coming to take you away from this sinful earth. There will ultimately be the destruction of the earth by fire. What a rescue it would be as the Lord snatches us away from the sufferings and pain that will come. Your duty now is to live for Him. Be a good testimony at home and in school. Shine for Jesus! Serve Him while you may and count it a joy and privilege that you are worthy to serve. Is this the renewed perspective of your life that you have as a believer?

THOUGHT: The brightest prospect in the future is the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, give me a mind that has eternity in view. Grant that I may occupy till You come. What a great day it will be!

DO YOU HAVE A BLESSED HOPE?

It is important for believers not only to have the right perspective of things in this world but also the right hopes for the future. This right hope must be based on the infallible and inerrant Word of God. To base our hope on any other sources is to stand on sinking sand.

After the destruction of the created present heaven and earth by fire (2 Peter 2:10), there will be the formation of new heavens and a new earth. This new heaven and earth will be holy. The Greek word for "new" here means fresh. It is not yet used and will always remain new. How wonderful! There is nothing, absolutely nothing on this earth that remains fresh. They will be the home of righteousness forever. This is in contrast with what has occurred on earth. This world has been almost entirely a history of sin, misery and great wickedness abound. In the future heaven and earth, there will be perfect peace and purity. There will be no contamination by sin. To the eye of faith, how blessed is the prospect of such a world!

We are told that this new heaven and new earth is where righteousness dwells. This is because God dwells there, whilst sin will be gone once and for all. Righteousness is there because the personification of righteousness is there. It will pervade every aspect of our life in this new home. Life there will be without any evil for hostility, greed, murder and jealousy will not exist there. We will have perfect rapport with people. Our relationships will be full and complete. Christians have a wonderful future. God made this promise to us. He is faithful who will keep all His promises.

Dear teen, only those who are clothed with the righteousness of Christ and sanctified by the Holy Ghost shall be admitted to dwell in this holy place. Will you be there? We would surely like you to go along. But you must first admit that you are a sinner in need of the Lord Jesus Christ who died for your sins. If you are a believer, then you would certainly have this blessed hope in you. You will no longer set your affections on the things of the earth, but will as Peter says, continually look and desire for our eternal abode with God!

THOUGHT: The new heaven and earth will be free from the power and pollution of sin.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, thank you for the sure hope of a new heaven and earth.

2 Peter 3:14
Memorise 2 Peter 3:14

"Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless"

DO YOU HAVE A BLAMELESS TESTIMONY?

A reformed life lives for Christ. This clear and noble vision or goal is also animated by the sure hope that a paradise of new heaven and earth awaits the believer. There also needs to be a right attitude of earnest diligence in the pursuit of Christ-likeness, in order that our testimony shines for the Lord.

Peter lovingly pleads with God's people, that in the light of the hope that we have, we should have earnest diligence to ensure that our lives are pure and holy in the sight of God. We must endeavour to live a life of peace without spot in our character and our dealings with those around us. We ought to seek to be blameless in our conduct, such that others can see Christ in us. Thus we are reminded that cultivating a Christ-like character is vital in God's eyes. In order to achieve this, we need to be systematic and make a conscious effort day by day as we examine our response to situations and also our conduct in our interpersonal relationships with others. For example, are we willing to forgive others and seek forgiveness if we have wronged another? Do we make sure that each day we live counts for God?

Men like John Wesley and John Knox were such men. They showed their great devotion to God and His kingdom in the way they ordered their lives. It was said of John Wesley that he would rise at 4 a.m. and work solidly through to 10 p.m., allowing himself brief periods for meals. This he did for the 54 years that was spent in preaching God's Word. Equally zealous and diligent was John Knox. Though weak and had to be held by his attendants, John Knox was so filled with divine passion that one of his friends said of his preaching, "So mighty was he in his yearning that I thought he would break the pulpit into bits!"

Dear teen, do you habitually and continuously examine yourself? Having been hurt by others, do you seek revenge? Did you counter a nasty remark with another? Were you willing to live in peace with someone who was irritating you? After examining your thoughts and actions, seek guidance from Scripture and obey. Through all this, we can have a testimony that is pleasing to God, and brings glory to His name!

THOUGHT: May the mind of Christ, my Saviour, live in me from day to day,
By His love and power confirming, all I do and say. ♫ ♪ ♫ ♫

PRAYER: My gracious, merciful and loving Father, may I continually examine myself so that my life can be a testimony for Thee each day.

WEDNESDAY, NOV 5

Ephesians 5:8-10
Memorise Psalm 19:14
"Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TO DISCERN?

As believers, we are required to walk as children of light. As such, we no longer walk in the darkness of this sin sick world. Instead, we allow the light of God's Word to shine in our hearts and lives, and to guide us to discern the things that are acceptable to the Lord. In all that we do, we must always first consider what conduct and behaviour is pleasing to Him. This is another result of a renewed mind – we will be able to discern things in accordance to God's truth, and be able to know whether anything is right or wrong, worthy or unworthy of those who are born again and renewed in their hearts and mind.

Those who walk in the light not only produce the type of fruit listed in verse 9 – all goodness and righteousness and truth, but also seek to find out what is acceptable to the Lord. They put every thought, word, and action to the test. What does the Lord think about this? Would He be pleased if I, as a child of God were to do this? Every area of life must be carefully scrutinised – our conversations, our lifestyle, our clothes, books, pleasures, entertainment, friendships, vacations, and sports. For example, some CCAs that we want to get involved in may require many hours of practice, especially during weekends and even on Sundays. This is going to impact your Quiet Time, your service for the Lord and even attendance at fellowship meetings and worship service. A discerning Christian would then realise that these are activities that he should not involve himself in. In every area of your life, you need to apply the right biblical principles to judge and determine what the wisest course of action to take is. This can only happen if we have a renewed mind, with the right priorities and focus in life. In all things, we would want to please God, and do only the things that are acceptable to Him.

It is good to follow David's example when he prayed a prayer that he would be pleasing to the Lord. "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer" (Psalm 19:14). It would be good to keep this prayer in our hearts to constantly remind ourselves of the importance of discernment.

THOUGHT: We learn what pleases the Lord though growing to understand His Word.

PRAYER: Gracious loving heavenly Father, may all that I think, say or do please You. Help me to be discerning and test all things, willing to submit to Your holy Word.

THURSDAY, NOV 6

Psalm 84:1-12
Memorise Psalm 27:4
"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS CHURCH?

King David was the most important man in all of Israel, sitting in all his glory in the royal court. Yet he longed to be found in the house of God. To him a day spent in the house of God is far better than a thousand days spent anywhere else. As a child of God, it was his greatest delight to be in God's presence. We who are but ordinary persons should prize the grand presence of the God of heaven and earth in His own House even more. There, together with all his saints, the child of God can enjoy the joy of sweet communion, worship and praise of his great and loving Father.

To be a doorkeeper in the house of God is better than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. The lowest station in connection with the Lord's house is better than the highest position among the godless. In Old Testament times, the sons of Korah, called the Korhites, were porters and keepers of the tabernacle. In modern times, believers can also serve God in kitchen duties, arranging chairs and hymnals for a meeting or even sweeping the car park which is littered with leaves every day. Such lowly and menial tasks are also honourable as we can be found serving our Saviour and King.

The tents of the wicked are here understood as that of the rich, the powerful - glorious and splendid tents. These are where the people of the world are, immersed in money making, sensual pleasures and senseless luxury. They ought to hold no attraction to the believer, not only because it is a godless life of sin, but also because a child of God finds it more precious to be spiritually fed, strengthened and revived with God's Word.

Dearest teen, do you drag your feet as you prepare to go to church on the Lord's Day? If so, perhaps it is time for some spiritual reflection. After being immersed in the things of the world for six days, how can a child of God not want to give due worship, adoration and praise to the God whom he had been walking close to the whole week? With regards to service, do we despise the lowly and menial tasks that are often required in the church? All work done for the Lord, with a faithful and sincere heart, is honourable. Realize that the humble who serve prayerfully and zealously behind the scenes are equally blessed with all others who serve in the forefront.

THOUGHT: God's house is where real pleasures and true honours are found.

PRAYER: Gracious heavenly Father, grant me spiritual understanding that I may treasure the days I spend in Your house.

FRIDAY, NOV 7

Luke 17:7-10
Memorise Luke 17:10
"say, we are unprofitable servants"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS SERVICE?

This parable likens the relationship between God and his children to that of a master and his bond slave. Servants in the days of Christ were slaves who toiled and lived completely for their master. After ploughing or feeding the sheep and cattle, he returns home to continue to serve his Master and wait on him. His work is never done, and cannot expect a moment of rest even though he had laboured in the fields all day. It would also be most unseemly for the servant to sit and eat on the same table as his master. Instead he is expected to be standing, waiting at his every beck and call. He has no rights of his own, and does not expect any thanks or reward for the services rendered.

Similarly, in Christ's service, there are no hours when we cease to be his bondservants. We are always His, always at His disposal, always ready to do what He wants us to do. He is a gracious Master and we count it a privilege to serve Him. At the same time, it is important that we should never think that our service is so valuable, and become proud of what we have done. When we have done all that Christ asks of us, we are still "unprofitable servants". Why is that so? This is because our best services are mingled with imperfections. We come short of the excellences that a great God merits. We do not serve Him as sincerely, as cheerfully, and as faithfully as we ought. In the midst of our service, we sin. We show our displeasure at others who are slow or uncooperative. We are impatient with those who make your work difficult. Where is our love and understanding?

Since we owe everything to God, it follows that God is not bound to pay us hire for any of our services. Saved and redeemed by God's grace and mercy, we are to serve Him all the days of our lives, never expecting gain and reward. After all, the greatest gift has already been given to us – salvation so rich and free!

Dear teen, are we able to serve the Lord with the same diligence and humility as shown by the servant in the parable? Do we see all that we do as the reasonable service that we render to the gracious God who has saved us and granted us eternal life?

THOUGHT: God is no man's debtor.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to realize how much I owe to You and may I always serve You out of a grateful heart.

Romans 13:1-7
Memorise Romans 13:1
"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS SCHOOL?

How can a child of God shine for Jesus in school? Paul tells us in this verse that we must first learn to submit to the authorities. In the broader context, the authorities can be the government ruling over us. It can also include the school authority which all students must submit to. This would mean that all school rules must be adhered to. We might be unhappy with some of the school rules e.g. regarding our haircut or the length or size of our uniforms. It all seems so unfair and restrictive. But Paul teaches us that all authority is established by God.

When we submit ourselves to an authority, we are trusting God, for He alone sovereignly rules over the affairs of all in this world and universe. We trust in His wisdom to direct our lives and to work out His purposes in His time. The right attitude for a believer is to pray and submit to the authority, no matter how unfair and unjust it seems. We are then setting an example of peaceful and godly living that influences the world. To organize rebellious petitions and protests, and marches is to stir trouble for the authorities.

God takes a serious view of those who organize rebellion to governing authorities as illustrated by Korah's refusal to submit to Moses' authority (Numbers 16:3). In the end, he and all his family perished as the earth opened up and swallowed them and their houses (Numbers 16:32). It was only because of Aaron's intervention to make atonement for the people that the entire congregation of Israel was not destroyed (Numbers 16:46-48).

Dear teen, there are times that we may have to contend with difficult and unreasonable teachers, seniors and persons in authority. How will you respond? Will you rebel and fight back? Will you bad mouth them and complain bitterly about it? Will you get angry and try to get even? Do you think these are actions befitting of a believer? We must humbly and prayerfully submit to the ones in authority, for we believe that God has put that person in your life for a purpose and that God's will is done in you through that person – even if you don't see it and don't understand it. In the end, God will give you the victory.

THOUGHT: God says, "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice" (Proverbs 8:15).

PRAYER: Lord, grant me spiritual discernment to understand the importance of submitting to authorities, for they are established by You.

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS PARENTS?

The 5th commandment tells us clearly that every child of God must honour their father and mother. Ephesians 6:1 gives a further exhortation to children to obey their parents. One clear hallmark of every Christian youth, is that he knows how to honour and obey his parents.

The instruction given to us in Ephesians 6:1 is clear and simple. It tells children to obey our parents in the Lord: for it is right. That is the one and only simple reason given as to why we should obey – for it is right! It does not say we obey because our parents are nice to us, or that we should obey because our parents are easy to get along with. It simply says that that is the right thing to do, and therefore we should do it. Therefore regardless of how difficult you perceive your parents to be, we must regard them as the God-given authority that has been set over us, and we must simply obey. In so doing, we show forth a good witness of filial piety and respect to our parents. If they are non-believers, they might be moved and encouraged by your testimony and come to see the value of Christianity.

It is a fact, however, that some parents are not good examples. If such parents require their child to steal, or lie, or cheat, or assist them in wrongdoing, then obedience to God takes precedence. Obeying your parents in the Lord means to obey in so far as their demands agree with those of God and no further. If unbelieving parents object to their child reading the Bible or attending church, there should be much prayer and waiting upon the Lord. In most cases, as children bear a good witness at home, parents will gradually relent and reluctantly allow the child to attend church and read the Bible.

Dear teen, to honour is to show love, respect and defer to the wishes and advice of our parents. To talk back, to argue and to ignore them are rude and are signs of disrespect for parents. How do you show your love to them? You would not only obey the house rules but also show thoughtful consideration by making a drink, bringing a cushion for their tired legs or just simply allowing them to rest without making demands of their time to serve you. Done on a daily basis, you would then have cultivated a habit that shows you think of them rather than focus on your selfish needs.

THOUGHT: Sin always robs us; obedience always enriches us.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me where I have disobeyed my parents and ever teach me to honour them for their love and care for me.

MONDAY, NOV 10 *Proverbs 27:9, 17*
Memorise Proverbs 27:17

"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS FRIENDS?

We all have friends. We describe them as people whom we are close to, and people that we care for very dearly. We spend a lot of time with our friends, and do enjoy doing things together. However, have you ever asked – what is the purpose of your friendships? As Christians with a renewed mind, we must also have a renewed perspective towards the friendships that we keep.

As Christians, one of our main purposes is to be a witness and testimony to the people around us – both believers and unbelievers. As Christians, we sharpen one another as we stir up one another to love and good works. As we converse and interact with one another, we learn how each show their love for the Lord and others around them. We discover that one has been visiting the sick, one has been giving generously and another has been spending time in God's Word. This is all very encouraging and uplifting. Hebrews 10:25 tells us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, ... but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching". God is showing us a way in which we can encourage one another to use the gifts that God has given to us. When you stir up the embers of a fire, a fire is rekindled. When you exhort or encourage someone it fires them up, love emanates from them and they feel they can take on the world in Christ.

With our unbelieving friends, our purpose is likewise to share the gospel with them, and through your 'hearty counsel', you can bring sweetness to their lives to rejoice their heart. This rejoicing is not just the temporal 'fun' that we can have through social interactions, but is true spiritual joy that comes through knowing God and His Word. As a good friend, we would try our very best to lead them to Christ, and provoke them to know more about God and His wonderful offer of salvation.

Dear teen, how are you being a good friend to those around you? Are you just selfishly looking for a companion to share a laugh with or enjoy common interests with? Do you care for the state of their soul, and their eternal dwelling place?

THOUGHT: As we provoke one another to love and good works, we make one another wiser and better.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, help me to be a true friend who cares for their soul.

TUESDAY, NOV 11

Romans 12:17-21
Memorise Matthew 5:44

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you..."

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS ENEMIES?

This passage of Scripture teaches us what is the right manner in which we ought to respond to the wrongs done to us. We are instructed not to render evil for evil but return evil with good. Don't let evil take hold of you. Instead, we are to coolly, calmly and prayerfully consider how we can control our temper and impulse so that good can come out of the situation. That is what "provide things honest in the sight of all men" mean. What we do, how we behave, will be seen by the people around us. As Christians, it is important that we show forth a good testimony in all that we do.

The phrase "if it be possible" implies that living peacefully with all men will not be easy. Yet we must strive for it, "as much as lieth in you", meaning as far as it depends on you. Peace is a two way street. We must do our part to live peaceably, though we have no control over the other's conduct. Verse 19 then assures us that it is God's part to take care of us when others mistreat or ill-treat us. God will see that justice is done. He has promised and we rest in His promise. God will straighten things out. The wicked will not get away with anything. We do not need to get even, for God will see to it.

Above all, God wants us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). God wants us to show our love for our enemy in practical terms. If our enemy is hungry or thirsty, we are to give what he needs. In our kindness to our enemies, they might be convicted of their sinful conduct, thus leading him to feel remorse and then to repentance.

Dearest teen, anybody can fight back. Anybody can curse and return. But if you do, what do you more than others? How can we glorify God? Do you remember how the brothers of Joseph hated him and threw him in a pit to die? They finally sold him to the passing Ishmaelite merchants, who took him down to Egypt where he toiled for many years as a slave. When he met them after many years, he was able to say, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life... And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity" (Genesis 45:5-7). Joseph certainly did not take revenge, for he could see God's sovereign providential hand in his life.

THOUGHT: Our Saviour being reviled, reviled not again.

PRAYER: Our Father in heaven, help me to glorify You with deeds of love and kindness, even to my enemies.

Ephesians 4:26-27
Memorise Ephesians 4:26
"Be ye angry and sin not"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS ANGER?

Do you the sort that gets angry easily? Do you have a temper that flares up uncontrollably? Do you have a rage that seethes within you every time things do not go your way, or you feel offended or wronged? The Bible warns us that there is a sort of anger that leads to sin, described by James as the "wrath of man" which "worketh not the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). At the same time, there is also a sort of anger that we can have and yet sin not. That is the sort of anger that we are justified in having.

In the Bible, we read of God's wrath with the children of Israel when they worshiped the golden calf that Aaron made. He was also angered by the murmuring and complaining of His people (Numbers 11:1) for they were faithless. Likewise there were many times that the Lord Jesus Christ was angry with the Pharisees for their hardness of heart (Mark 3:5). All these, were God's righteous anger against sin. Christians too, ought to manifest such godly anger, which is anger that is consistent with the holy and righteous character of God. It is not explosive or short fused that reacts rashly to a situation. Godly anger is always under control.

Yet we must be careful. Although anger is not always sinful, it can easily turn one to sin. When anger, even if it is justified, is not addressed, it can quickly become bitter and destructive. Anger may prompt one to speak to a brother in a way that causes more trouble. It should not lead to vengeance or a desire to take matters into one's own hands. Instead we must trust in God to resolve the issue, and seek resolution in a peaceful, God honouring manner. Paul here instructs us not to "let the sun go down on our wrath." While righteous anger is to be slow to react, it is also to be quickly dispelled. If not quickly dealt with, Satan will tempt us to have unkind thoughts among the brethren.

Dear teen, most of our anger is the "wrath of man" and not the "holy anger" of God. Anger is often selfish Are you angry because you wanted your way and didn't get your way? If you analyse your anger, I think you'll agree that most of it is due to simple selfishness. We must be honest and acknowledge our sin before God and be angry at sin in ourselves.

THOUGHT: We should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of our own.

PRAYER: Lord, may I search myself always for hidden sins in my life and deal with it before I point the finger at others.

THURSDAY, NOV 13 *Matthew 16:24-26*
Memorise Matthew 16:24
"if he shall gain the whole world, and lost his own soul"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS AMBITIONS?

The regenerate person with a renewed mind does not follow the world. The world is bent on seeking wealth, fame and celebrity status. Here Jesus calls us to deny ourselves and take up the cross. What does that mean?

When we come to Christ, there is a reordering of or priorities and aspirations. We begin to learn how to deny ourselves, and realize that in our lives, Christ must increase and we decrease. Christ must rule in our life. Jesus demands total commitment from all who follow Him. We must be prepared to give Him our all - all that we are and all that we have. This is a radical change from the way the world lives. We, who walk in the Spirit, are called to dethrone self and lay aside the pursuit of our "rights" and ambitions. Jesus also tells us to take up our cross. This puts practical action to the idea of self-denial. It should lead us to say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me "(Galatians 2:20). We are to be faithful and obedient unto death.

Jesus requires of us that we value our souls above the world. The people of this world value things of temporal value. In Luke 12:15 Jesus taught, "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." The foolish rich man in Luke 12:16-21 sought to build more barns for his worldly goods, hoping to protect and preserve his wealth. But God pronounced him foolish for in the process he lost what which was of infinitely greater value – his own soul. How much better to lose this whole world and follow Jesus instead.

Dear teen, your academic achievements are not the most important thing in the world. Whilst you must be diligent in all that you do and you have responsibilities as students and to your parents, remember to keep your eye on the things of eternal value. The things of this world will pass away. They will be burned up when God judges the world. May the Spirit remove the things from you that keep you from a whole-hearted devotion to Christ.

THOUGHT: "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." – Jim Elliot

PRAYER: Lord, help me, with my selfish ambitions, to daily die to self, take up the cross and follow You all the way.

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS POSSESSIONS? (I)

In this passage, Jesus is teaching us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, and not on earth. Treasures on earth are subject to decay and loss. Moths eat holes through our clothes. They can destroy the most expensive, elaborate clothes and shoes that you have. Cars and other electronics are most vulnerable to rust breakdowns. They are subject to wear and tear and their value drops with each passing year. Thieves and pickpockets are quick to pounce on carelessly unattended belongings. Have you ever had your phone or wallet stolen before? How frustrating was it? We realise that all these possessions that we value are so temporal and will all pass away one day.

Jesus is calling us to look on the possessions that we have with a renewed mind. They are always temporary and subject to loss and decay. They serve a purpose in enriching or adding convenience to our lives. However, hoarding them will only bring sorrow and disappointment. When we set our hearts upon them, we fall into the temptation of being worldly in our ways. We are committing idolatry if we put our riches above God. Jesus challenges us as He challenged his hearers then, to ask ourselves where our treasure is. If our treasure is on earth and the things of this world, our heart will be there as well. But if our heart is focused on God and on laying up treasures in heaven, your heart will be steadfastly fixed on the things of God and heaven.

Dear teen, God is not condemning us for being wealthy or rich. The question is, are you pursuing those things at the expense of your spiritual growth? Money is not bad; it is the love of money that is the root of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Many young graduates have been heard to say that they want to make their first million before they are thirty. That is a dangerous ambition if their thoughts are only of making lots of money in this world. Banish such thoughts and fight the temptation to lay up earthly treasures. Instead, seek the things that are above.

THOUGHT: We cannot serve God and mammon.

PRAYER: Our gracious loving heavenly Father, may I learn to faithfully tithe and give to missions for the spread of the gospel. May I be willing to use my resources to help the poor and needy to glorify Thy name.

SATURDAY, NOV 15

Matthew 6:31-34
Memorise Matthew 6:33

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS POSSESSIONS? (II)

As you seek to lay up treasures in heaven, you will sometimes be faced with fears and doubts concerning your physical need. How can your food, drink and clothing be provided for? You might also begin to compare with others who seem to have more than you. Jesus here assures us that such anxiety should be dispelled. Our daily provisions are in the hands of our heavenly Father who knows your needs. We can trust God to always give His best to those who put Him first.

Instead, our emphasis should be on seeking God's Kingdom, rather than getting anxious about our possessions and what others have. God has divine resources to make sure that your earthly needs are met. He can provide by giving us the ability to meet our needs. He can also send people to provide for us. Elijah was supplied food and drink by the ravens. The children of Israel were fed with manna from heaven and water flowed for them out of a rock. God has varied ways of meeting our needs.

It is sufficient (enough) to think and care for the needs of today. Today's evil (i.e. the issues you already know about), is all that we should be concerned about. There are enough problems to deal with day by day without ourselves worrying about what unanticipated evil tomorrow might reveal. We should not trouble ourselves with unnecessary anxiety. Live day by day, in 'day-sized' compartments.

Dear teen, if you value your soul, spend time caring for it. It is inconsistent that you who are born to a better and higher life should be spending your time engaged in material pursuits. Why turn down an opportunity to serve, just because you have lots of school work to do? Why skip a fellowship meeting just because you are tired? You will be energized by the love of God and the praise that surrounds you by your Christian friends. Why play computer games when you can learn more of the great saints of God in the Bible? Choose to walk by faith and humbly seek Him in prayer for strength and grace. It is a spiritual battle that you can win!

THOUGHT: God will supply all you need according to His riches in glory.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, give us grace that we might seek first Thy kingdom and its righteousness, in the sure and certain faith that all else shall be added unto us. AMEN.

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS POSSESSIONS? (III)

Paul was in chains in a Roman prison when he wrote this letter to the Philippians. He had truly learned to be content even in the state that he was in. The church at Philippi had heard about his situation and had sent a monetary gift to help him out and encourage him in his situation. He was writing to express his gratitude to them. At the same time, he also assured them that he was fine, and he was not asking for more gifts. In fact, he was perfectly content in the situation that he was in, for he was strengthened by the Lord, and was able to do all things!

Although God has promised us that when we seek the Kingdom of God first He will add the things we need, it does not mean that there won't be times when we feel poor and needy. Trials and hardships will come upon us when we serve the Lord, just as how Paul and the Apostles all suffered for Christ. However, the test of our faith will be how we respond to such difficulties. Will we murmur and complain, and feel that God is neglecting us just because we suffer lack and hunger? What then should our attitude be in times like these?

Paul had the right perspectives, as he shared with the Christians at Philippi. He assured them that he had learned contentment through his many trials. He had experienced both times of plenty and also times of need. Yet through it all, he was strengthened by his reliance on Christ alone, and was thus able to endure all those afflictions and trials. What was important to him was not the size of his bank account, or the emptiness of his stomach. He was content simply because He knew Christ was with him, and that was really all he needed. This is the faith that we must learn as well.

Dear teen, do you often complain and whine of the many things that don't go your way? Isn't that a sign that you are discontent with the way things are turning out for you? We are happy in times when we have all our needs provided for, and we live lives of luxury and comfort. However, if circumstances were to change, and all our creature comforts were suddenly taken from us, will we still be able to thank the Lord?

THOUGHT: Lord, help me not to set my heart on things that pass away; Make me content with what I have and help me stay that way.

PRAYER: Come what may, may I learn trust in You completely.

MONDAY, NOV 17

James 1:1-12
Memorise James 1:12
"Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS TRIALS?

A true Christian does not wilt like a fragile flower when faced with trials. He will have enduring faith. Trials and temptations are part and parcel of a pilgrim's journey on this earth. It is wrong to think that health and wealth are the lot of all those who trust in Jesus. James 1:2 tells us to consider it a joy when we experience the various trials of life. This is because these circumstances are opportunities for us to exercise our faith, and grow in ability to endure under adverse conditions. As we undergo such difficulties, we would be richly blessed, for they would drive us to our knees, and cause us to run to God and seek wisdom from Him to be able to overcome the trials that we face. Furthermore, James 1:12 tells us that having gone through the trials, and after we are tested and found worthy, we will be rewarded with a crown of life!

Every believer must thus have such a perspective towards our trials. When faced with difficulties, we ought to manfully strive through the pain and loneliness we experience, and discipline ourselves to overcome our slothful and sinful habits. Many of the great missionaries like Adoniram Judson who went to Burma (Myanmar) and John Paton who laboured among the cannibals in the islands of the South Pacific, were men who underwent horrendous hardships and privation, heartache and discouragement. But they persevered, because they had the right biblical perspectives towards trials in their lives. Likewise, we too should be willing to live a life of sacrifice, knowing that it pleases the Lord.

Dear teens, start cultivating this habit of tenacity and perseverance in your school work. When things get difficult, don't give up. Seek the Lord for wisdom and guidance. Slowly, you will have confidence to complete difficult tasks given to you. Whether in school, at home or in church, we must always rely on the Lord to grant us the determination to persevere. In so doing, we are laying the foundation of a good lifelong habit. We must not shy away from hardships in this life, but rather thank God for every trial that you face, knowing that this is a blessing from Him!

THOUGHT: True faith is enduring faith.

PRAYER: Our gracious heavenly Father, grant me a good understanding of the good that will result from enduring trials and hardships in life. Make me strong in the faith and live a victorious life for the glory of Thy name.

Hebrews 12:5-11
Memorise Hebrews 12:11
"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth"

DO YOU HAVE A RENEWED MIND TOWARDS CHASTISEMENT?

When we do something wrong, there will always have to be consequences to our actions. Because our parents love us, they will not allow our misdemeanours to go unpunished. To do so would be a dereliction of their duty, and make them irresponsible parents! Yet we acknowledge that they are fallible, and so there are times whereby they may over react or even punish us unfairly. However this is not so for our heavenly Father. He knows our every thought and deed, and will discipline and chastise us when we sin, but He will always do so in a most perfect and just manner, in accordance to His holy will. Why? Because He is a father who loves us, and desires that we may be pure and holy.

Discipline is hard and painful work, not only for the child, but also for the parent. No one likes it. Yet a parent would do it out of love for their children, wanting to guide them in the right ways. I am also sure we can all agree that discipline is certainly something that is necessary. If children were not disciplined, and wrongdoings were not punished, we would have a chaotic society of spoilt, selfish and unruly people. The Bible clearly tells us that the Lord will chasten His children out of love (Hebrews 12:6). Our response to such chastisement must be one of humble submission. We subject ourselves to His firm guiding hand, knowing that though the process may sometimes be grievous, yet it is for our own good. What God wants of us is a life of purity and holiness. When we are wayward, sometimes the only way to draw us back to Him would be to send a trial or setback in our lives, to wake us up out of our spiritual slumber, repent and turn back to him.

Dear teens, how do you respond when you are faced with some difficulties and trials in your lives? Do you take time to examine your lives, and see if God has a message for us? Perhaps He is disciplining you, prompting you to repent of a certain sin, and return to Him. We must always be sensitive to God's guidance, and ready to receive His rebuke. If we are living in sin, and nothing is happening to us, do not think that this means that God condones what you are doing. It could very well be that you are not yet His child (Hebrews 12:8).

THOUGHT: When a child can be brought to tears, not from fear of punishment, but because he has repented, he needs no chastisement.

PRAYER: Our heavenly Father, as I honour my parents, may I also honour You and accept all that Thy loving hand send to my life.

YOU ONLY LIVE ONCE (YOLO)?

The world cries YOLO! They say that our time is short on this earth, and we only have this one life. We must make the most use of our time, and so must experience all we can before we leave and vanish into oblivion! With this in mind, many seek to make the most of their lives by indulging in earthly pursuits. They develop this 'YOLO' mentality that wants to give anything and everything a try, not caring how dangerous, sinful or immoral such things are. This is evidenced by adrenaline junkies who recklessly engage in extreme sports in search of that elusive "high", and the many talent show hopefuls who approach their quest for fame and glory as if everything depended on their success. Because they have only one shot at life, they want to make it count, and enjoy as much as they can. This has led to people doing all sorts of ridiculous things, and then posting about it online with the hashtag #YOLO. Are we too sucked in by such a mantra? Have we stopped to ask, what is God's perspective of this?

Hebrews 9:27 says "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment". God shall judge our every word, thought and deed after this life. We do not simply disappear upon death, but rather, we shall have to face God and account for what we have done while we were still alive. Indeed we will all appear before Christ without exception who shall judge us for the things which we have done, both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5:10).

It is a sobering thought indeed that the things we do in the very short time spent on earth will have eternal consequences. Yes it is true that we only live once. So instead of living as if it would not matter if we die tomorrow, and try to derive the most carnal pleasure we can from it, we ought to live our lives circumspectly and decide to live for God. To live for God, we must take the first step of repenting before Him and asking Jesus to save us. Only then can we have God's wisdom and enablement to do that which will glorify Him. Indeed there is no hedonistic pursuit in this life that would make an eternity spent in torment and misery worthwhile. We only have this one life. We can either choose to waste it and live for the world, or to treasure it and live for the Lord.

THOUGHT: Contentment is found in a godly life that is blessed with peace, hope and joy, not in fame or fortune.

PRAYER: O Lord help us to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Jeremiah 17:9
Memorise Proverbs 16:25
"...but the end thereof are the ways of death"

SHOULD WE FOLLOW OUR HEART?

These very words, and their meaning, are found in many secular songs. They have become the mantra for those who may be feeling lost and directionless. People who are seen as wise say to those who are disillusioned with life – "just follow your heart". This is a reflection of sinful man's perception of himself, for he thinks that underneath all of his own imperfections and wretchedness lies a spiritual consciousness that is pure and true. To them, the best guide in life is none other than their own desires. They think that true happiness can only be found when you "Let your soul be your pilot", "let your soul guide you" or "listen to your heart". These are some lyrics found in songs that mislead people into thinking that they can trust their own feelings.

While it is not wrong to be passionate about life, human passion that is neither tempered by God's wisdom nor constrained by the love for Christ only leads to sorrow (Romans 8:12-13). This is because the heart of an unregenerate sinner is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It cannot be trusted. God's Word tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). To fear God is to have a deep reverence and awe for Him, and to consider all that He says with the greatest care. Only through salvation in the Lord Jesus can we have a heart that is receptive to God's Word that we may obtain wisdom and guidance.

Dear Teen, following the ways of the world may appear to be reasonable and correct. However, Proverbs 16:25 tells us that things that seem right may not be so. Granted that in many things the world has much to teach us, and many such things may not bear any spiritual significance either way. However, there will be situations in every person's life that he will have to choose between following Jesus or his carnal passions. Which will you choose to follow?

THOUGHT: He who serves himself or the world ultimately serves the god of this world, which is Satan.

PRAYER: Lord, grant us wisdom and discernment that we will not go down the broad way to death but the strait to eternal life.

FRIDAY, NOV 21

1 Corinthians 11:1
Memorise Philippians 4:4
"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice"

WHAT IS WRONG WITH POP CULTURE?

As the name suggests, pop culture refers to the trends that are popular in our culture in the present. This is something that constantly changes, as what is trendy and mainstream now, will probably not be as cool in 20 years' time. These trends would include things like fashion, lingo, music, media, internet culture, and other ideas, attitudes and mind-sets. Due to the widespread influence of mass media, youths today are very much affected by what is regarded as trendy and fashionable in the world today. They idolize celebrities and see them as examples that they would want to emulate. They admire the lifestyles of the rich and famous, and have this perverse fascination to know every little tidbit of gossip that they can find about them – the more scandalous the better!

Michael Jackson is a name that most people are familiar with. This megastar of the pop world, also known as the King of Pop, lived a life that most people could only dream of, or so it would seem. His unnatural death was shrouded in controversy and laced with rumours of drug overdose. Even in his life, there were signs indicating that his image of himself was warped and distorted by discontentment as suggested by skin bleaching and multiple facial reconstructions. Towards the end, Michael Jackson bore no resemblance to the person that he was before. The lives and deaths of Whitney Houston, Amy Winehouse and many other celebrities and pop stars are equally depressing and nothing but a sad story of sin and hopelessness. How do people who could have had everything their hearts desired end up in such tragic circumstances?

Despite all that, it is sad that Christian youths today also choose to follow the lives of these celebrities and immerse themselves in the popular culture of today, rather than to follow Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:11 clearly tell us that as believers, we ought to take faithful and godly men like Paul as our examples. Insofar as they follow Christ, we ought to follow them. How sad it is, when we see youths put up posters of all these 'idols' and pay so much to watch their concerts and buy their merchandise, and give little heed to the servants and followers of Christ. Their source of joy is from the entertainments of the world, and not from following Christ. We must realize that these celebrities and pop stars, though their lives seem to be so glamourous and enviable, are nothing without Christ. They live lives of sin headed to destruction. Will you follow them there?

THOUGHT: Do I follow Christ or the world?

PRAYER: Help us O Lord to put our trust in Thee and in doing so find true joy through our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

1 Corinthians 10:31
Memorise Galatians 5:22-23
"But the fruit of the Spirit... against such there is no law"

HOW IS MY ONLINE TESTIMONY?

Social media has become such a dominant presence in our society today. Almost every young person has at least some sort of exposure or interaction with it. Because content is posted in real time on these social networking services such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr or Instagram, it is not subject to the traditional forms of media censorship. This makes it possible to post or view undesirable content easily. Some individuals post anything that comes to their depraved minds and they do get much attention for doing so. Such attention-seeking individuals have probably never experienced the grace of God in their lives. Their actions reflect their lack of a sense of accountability to a holy and perfect God.

Christians, however, must conduct themselves in accordance to the standards expected of them by a thrice-holy God. This means every aspect of their lives must be lived in accordance to God's will and for His glory. God's glory is more important than even the very lives of believers. If we must, Christians would have to lay down their lives to defend God's reputation. How much more then should we be mindful of the things we post on social networking services? What sort of testimony and message are we sending to others when we 'like' or 'share' worldly and ungodly content? When we post vicious comments, baseless rumours, gossips, or even worse, lewd content, are we consistent with our Christian purpose to glorify God?

We can be stumbling blocks to others if our conduct is not consistent with our identity as followers of Jesus. Galatians 5:22-23 says that genuine believers are to exhibit fruits of the spirit such as love, peace, joy, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. In contrast, those who take pleasure in uncleanness, wrath and strife cannot inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:20-21).

Dear Teen, examine yourselves to see if you have exhibited fruits of the spirit in your conduct or if your conduct suggests that you are in danger of hellfire. If you have not behaved in a manner that is pleasing to Him, repent and ask God for forgiveness and continue in such a manner no more.

THOUGHT: Am I a different person when I assume a different identity on the social network?

PRAYER: O Lord help us as Your children never to cease to be holy as You are holy.

LORD'S DAY, NOV 23 *James 3:3-5*
Memorise Proverbs 15:1

"a soft word turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger"

ARE YOU ABLE TO TAME YOUR TONGUE?

Proverbs 15:1 says "a soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger". It may seem obvious that to speak in a polite, gentle and meek manner is often more pleasing to others than to be abrasive and confrontational. However, to put this into practice is not always easy. A review of the current state of political tension between Japan, Korea, China, Philippines and the U.S. demonstrates that even diplomats from various nations who are supposed to be skilled spokesmen and negotiators find this challenging at times. Going further back in history, the risk of an all-out nuclear war was a very real concern as cold war nations exchanged angry rhetorical words with each other, and as a result, people in Europe lived in constant fear of sudden nuclear annihilation.

James 3:3-5 tells us that the tongue's ability to cause much trouble is disproportionate to its small size. This is likened to how a rider can controls a large horse so easily with just a small bit in its mouth, or how a huge ship is steered at the helm by the pivoting of the small rudder. In the world's present fragile political climate, a nuclear holocaust could very well occur because of this one little organ. The Bible refers to the tongue as the organ that controls speech in a symbolic sense. Of course we know that the manner and content of our speech originates from and is controlled by our thoughts. Much wisdom and constrain is needed in our speech if we are to stand out as examples of Christ-likeness (Matthew 5:13-16) in a world that God describes as being in darkness.

Practical methods such as counting to ten before we retaliate angrily with our tongue or just simply walking away before we engage the offending person again do help. Indeed, there are many ways to say the same thing more tactfully. However a deeper change in our attitude towards people whom we may find disagreeable can only be achieved by God's grace and with His wisdom. We should therefore submit ourselves prayerfully to God and set aside our pride that we do not end up speaking grievous words that stir up anger even when provoked.

THOUGHT: Since we have 2 ears but only 1 mouth we should remember to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

PRAYER: When emotions threaten to boil over, Lord may Your grace be sufficient to calm my soul and tame my tongue.

Colossians 4:3-6
Memorise 2 Timothy 4:2
"...be instant in season, out of season..."

WHAT ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Whatever we feel passionate about will frequently be mentioned in our conversation with others. We will spend much time and energy cultivating that particular interest and yet do not easily tire from occupying ourselves with it hours on end. Far from considering it a waste of time, we look forward to opportunities where we can indulge ourselves with these passions. Likeminded youths will have their conversation preoccupied with topics such as their favourite hobbies, sports, fashion trends, songs, TV programs, movies or celebrities. We wouldn't hesitate to tell others about the latest gadget that we have, and may even get into arguments about the merits and faults of the various brands. We would almost certainly tell all our friends of the best online deals or new releases.

It is only to be expected that Christians should be passionate about Christ and speak often of the One who not only forgave us our sins but also accomplished the "Great Exchange" on the cross at Calvary. In the Great Exchange, Jesus swapped the eternal punishment in hell that sinners deserve for the gift of eternal life in Heaven, promised to every believer when He died on the cross. How trivial an expensive gadget is compared to the infinite riches He has bestowed upon Christians. All the riches of the world could not compare with the gift of salvation. No wonder God's Word asks us to consider what it will profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his own soul (Mark 8:36). Have you told anyone about God's free but priceless gift? We must do so if we are passionate about the One who saved us.

Today's Bible reference tells us that it should be our heart's desire for God to present opportunities for us to share the mystery of Christ with and to set a good example of Christ-likeness to those that are far from God (Colossians 4:3-6). Dear Teen, are the subjects of salvation, the Gospel and your love for Jesus made known to those around you? Have you shared your faith with unbelievers or your conviction towards faithful and God-honouring worship practices with backslidden or misguided believers?

THOUGHT: Labouring for Christ by being His witnesses should be a labour of love.

PRAYER: O Lord, grant me the right words and the courage to speak of You to others in season and out of season.

TUESDAY, NOV 25

Philippians 2:14-15
Memorise Colossians 4:6

"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt..."

HOW IS YOUR CHRISTIAN CONDUCT?

It is possible to be good witnesses for Christ even though we may not be speaking about things that are directly related to spiritual matters. God-honouring conduct can do more for Christ than even the most eloquent Bible teacher or the fieriest Gospel preacher who conducts himself badly. Indeed, Charles Spurgeon, arguably the most gifted preacher in recent times, understood this from a lesson he learnt the hard way. Though he was a fiery preacher and respected pastor, yet he was also a cigar smoker (the grave harmful and addictive effects of tobacco were not as well documented then, and did not have the same negative stigma attached to it as we have today). One day he noticed a tobacco store peddling "Spurgeon's Tobacco" and was quite disturbed by having his name used to promote this habit. He later chose to put down his Christian liberty and cease his smoking habit that others will not be stumbled.

Sadly poor conduct leaves a more lasting impression that good, as was the case with Spurgeon. Till today, there are many articles that can be found online that use the fact that he smoked to justify this habit among Christians. This is why Christians have to be especially careful with their own conduct. In biblical times, salt was a very valuable commodity. It was used not only to improve the taste of food. In an era when refrigerators and electricity did not exist, salt was used to prevent food from going bad. It was even used as a form of currency for paying Roman soldiers. Just as salt keeps food from rotting, it is grace that keeps our conduct and speech holy and free from corruption.

Speaking a kind word to someone when needed, taking on a polite and reasonable disposition and always being sensitive to the effect our behaviour has on others is to show forth grace in our speech and conduct. Even in school, at work or at home, we should fulfil our responsibilities with willingness, integrity and pure intentions (Philippians 2:14-15). This goes a long way towards making others notice that we are different from the world. Through this, God may grant opportunities to encourage fellow believers and to share the Gospel of hope and salvation through Christ with the lost.

THOUGHT: Witnessing can be passive (by our example) or active (by evangelism). Both are important.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us that our speech be always with grace and seasoned with salt.

Philippians 4:8
Memorise Isaiah 45:5
"I am the LORD and there is none else..."

IS THERE ANYTHING WRONG WITH SECULAR MUSIC?

When it comes to the very contentious matter of Christians listening to secular music, it helps to put forth the issues clearly for careful consideration. These would be (1) Is secular music inherently sinful or harmful? (2) How is secular music different from hymns? (3) Is it ever right to listen to secular music? Let us answer these questions one by one:

(1) Anything that creates a tendency towards ungodliness should be avoided. Much of the secular music that is available does this to people. The lyrics may promote rebelliousness, premarital sex, lust, drug use, crime or violence. Even the quality or style of the music itself can take on a life of its own and stir up carnal feelings from within. In such instances, secular music is indeed harmful and enjoying this is a sin. (2) Hymns do the opposite in a spiritual sense. The lyrics glorify God and still our spirit, making it conducive for fellowship with God. Some hymns are more "militant" in nature. They encourage us to reverence God, serve Him fervently and resist evil. (3) While secular music is not inherently evil, it is the lyrics and style of music that is the problem. Of course, not all secular music is bad and there are some songs that sing about wholesome virtues such as love, friendship, peace and faithfulness.

Note also that just because a song is wholesome does not make it appropriate for worship. Liberal Christians who love worldly music too much have a tendency to get confused over this issue and use secular-style music in places of worship. The so-called Contemporary "Christian" Music may not always have carnal lyrics, but their sentimental nature makes them more suited as love songs to one's spouse rather than to God reverentially. The words of the songs must also be theologically sound to be appropriate for worship. Philippians 4:8 serves to guide us on this matter, and any form of music that runs contrary to this passage must be rejected. Moreover, Isaiah 45:5 says that there is no other entity like God who is unique in His holy perfection. Any form of worship that does not reflect a sense of deep reverential fear is not God honouring.

THOUGHT: We should not sing unto our awesome God the way we might sing to our spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends.

PRAYER: O Lord, grant us much wisdom in the enjoyment of music that we do not sin against Thee in doing so.

THURSDAY, NOV 27

1 Timothy 4:7-9
Memorise 2 Corinthians 4:16

"...our outward man perish, ...inward man is renewed day by day"

IS IT WRONG TO BE 'OBSESSED' WITH FITNESS?

To be obsessed with something is to be preoccupied with it to the extent that it becomes all-consuming. This results in an individual becoming dysfunctional in other ways as a result of too much attention paid to a particular thing at the expense of others. Today, much emphasis is placed on external appearances. The saying "you have to look like you've made it in order to make it" is something that many youths believe, so they spend lots of time, energy and money to dress up and tone their bodies up. There is nothing wrong with wanting to be trim and fit but if the intent is to look good only rather than to stay healthy then it can become a problem.

Going to the gym to build up our bodies may be fun or give rewarding results. The image conscious society that we live today in push us to have fit, toned and slim bodies, and anyone that falls outside of the norm is mocked at. However we must realize that in the end it is futile as we all will eventually grow old and frail if we even live long enough for this to happen. At the same time, we must acknowledge that it is hard to serve God effectively if we do not look after our bodies and become ill. After all, the mind and body are largely dependent on each other for mutual wellbeing. Indeed, to neglect our own health is also to break the 6th commandment, but to be obsessed with fitness is to break the 1st commandment as we would be guilty of idolizing our own bodies.

What is important here is to prioritize our commitments correctly. This requires much wisdom and discipline. God's perspective on this matter is found in 1 Timothy 4:8 which says that physical exercise profits little whereas godliness is much more useful. Whatever we do is good, be it studying God's Word, improving our grammar or physical training, if it glorifies God and enables us to serve Him better. To only be concerned with the externals is investing our energy unwisely as our bodies will fail eventually. We can, however, continue to mature spiritually through the years if we walk close to God (2 Corinthians 4:16). Dear Teen, have you set your priorities right?

THOUGHT: It is best to exercise body, mind and soul, neglecting none. Let's do so in a manner that is pleasing to God.

PRAYER: O Lord, help us to faint not. Rather, renew the inward man daily even as the outward man perishes.

CAN WE GO CLUBBING?

Clubbing is not some innocent activity where good friends get together to catch up for a drink and a chat. The context in which such an activity occurs will shed light on the problems with clubbing. It is often said that one goes clubbing to see and to be seen. Therefore in such places, immodest and outlandish dressing is the norm. This occurs at a place where strong intoxicating beverages are served, smoking is common, the music is of a carnal nature, sex is solicited and sometimes illicit mind-altering drugs are taken. Quite clearly, it is a place where people indulge in disinhibited conduct and lasciviousness. The sins of the lust of the eyes and flesh, and the pride of life (as people assume a rebellious attitude without any sense of accountability to anyone but themselves) are rampant. Clubbing is so contrary to good Christian conduct that we are to separate ourselves from it. God's Word tells us that we, who are children of light, should not have anything to do with ungodliness (Ephesians 5:8).

There are many ways to have an enjoyable gathering with friends without resorting to activities like clubbing. Firstly, pick an appropriate environment where one is not tempted to sin. This means avoiding places where lewd behaviour and dressing is openly displayed. This will mean that the kind of people who are there will also tend to be more wholesome. Secondly, avoid staying out till late. Even though the streets of Singapore are usually very safe, molest and rape cases tend to occur in dark and isolated places. Also, there are places where the nature of the crowd changes with the time of day. It is prudent to keep these considerations in mind. Thirdly, we are told that all believers are the temples of the Holy Spirit. God redeemed us with the precious blood of Jesus not so that we can continue to sin but to live a sanctified life (1 Corinthians 6:19). We who owe God a Gospel debt are answerable to Him and should not defile ourselves with indecency and carnality.

THOUGHT: The world teaches us that bad things are good, but the Bible teaches us that bad things are bad.

PRAYER: O Lord, give us strength and courage as children of light to separate ourselves from darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5-7
Memorise 1 Corinthians 10:23
"...all things are lawful... but all things edify not"

WHY CAN'T WE DRINK?

Alcohol is not only a legal mind-altering substance of intoxication but also a poison. Harms of alcohol include damage to the oral cavity, oesophagus, stomach, liver, brain, heart, bone marrow, immune system and blood cells. However, some argue that godly men consumed alcohol in Biblical times. Even Jesus Himself turned water to wine. Others say that it is harmless when consumed in moderation. This issue must be examined closely and in the right context.

In biblical times, clean water was not readily available. Wine, which contained alcohol, was added for disinfecting the water making it safe to drink (1 Timothy 5:23). Climate control did not exist in those days to cool down wine cellars and prolong the fermentation process, therefore the alcohol content in wine was much lower. Distillation had not been invented yet, therefore the wine could not be fortified with the addition of pure alcohol. In short, the wine in biblical days was much weaker and greatly diluted in water for disinfection before consumption. Pertaining to Jesus turning water into wine, Jesus does not contradict His own Word. Drunkenness is condemned in the strongest terms throughout Scripture. By exercising our logic of faith, it would be hard to imagine Jesus providing people with a drink that could have resulted in drunkenness. Indeed it would have been the very best wine since Jesus made it, but it would also have been safe to consume with no risk of intoxication even in large quantities. In all likelihood, Jesus made the 'best wine', which was fresh grape juice, which is why it was so surprising to the guests who drank it, for it was rare to have freshly pressed juice in that time of the year. Finally, alcohol is known as a "gateway drug". People who progress to using other addictive substances often start from drinking in "moderation".

Dear Teen, for the above reasons and in today's context when strong drink is served and consumed to the point of intoxication by unbelievers, having an alcoholic beverage even in small quantities can stumble both believers and unbelievers alike. 1 Corinthians 10:23 says that Christians may be at liberty to do certain things, but if they are not edifying then they should be ceased. Do you care enough about being a good witness for Jesus and those around you who watch your conduct to totally abstain?

THOUGHT: The fruit of the spirit is edifying, but the spirit of the vine is not.

PRAYER: Give us, O Lord, a heart that loves to honour Thee and a sober mind to meditate on Thee.

IS IT WRONG TO PLAN?

The above question is asked as some of us find it hard to understand how to commit ourselves entirely to God and to have Him do His will in our lives. Does this mean that we should not plan as planning implies doing our own will and acting on our own desires instead? God does not prohibit us from planning and decision making using our God-given intelligence, sense of reasoning and logic. Indeed, He gave man a free will. We are not expected to be like robots and wait for His instructions for every little thing. We have the autonomy to plan ahead for the future. As Christians it is God-honouring to plan in advance, plan well, and to do so with due diligence. However, in all our planning, we must consider God and include Him in the equation willingly, not grudgingly.

James tells us that we can plan all we want, but only God can see the future and therefore direct our paths as He sees fit. Our life is fleeting and transient as a vapour; we do not even know if we will live till the end of today unless the Lord wills it so (James 5:13-15). This is the key to all our deliberations-if the Lord wills.

Dear Teen, have you included God in your equation as you plan for the future? In practical terms, it means making sure that whatever we decide to do does not result in us getting more distant from God, will not hinder our service for Him, is not inherently sinful and does not have a strong association with carnality. Also, we have to hold on to our plans loosely. If the Lord intervenes with a change of plans halfway through, how willing would you be to accommodate His new directions for you? Is it right to aspire to be an architect? Probably yes, but what if the firm is heavily involved in projects for temples and mosques? Should you stay? Definitely not! Is it right to work towards saving up for an iPad? Nothing wrong with that unless your job requires you to work on Sundays, or unless God sends a needy person your way and you decide not to help him and buy the iPad instead. If it is not vital, you can always postpone your purchase for the sake of another's welfare.

THOUGHT: We plan to fail if we fail to plan, but God's blessing is always needed in all our planning.

PRAYER: Lord, give us faith to trust You and acknowledge You in all we do that You may direct our paths.

MONDAY, DEC 1

Luke 18:9-14
Memorise Matthew 15:7-9
"But all their works they do for to be seen of men..."

ARE YOU A HYPOCRITE?

In the readings over the next few days, we will be considering common pitfalls and problems faced in leading the reformed life. Today, we consider first of all the sin of hypocrisy. All too often, we hear of damning accounts from non-believers criticizing Christians (or so-called Christians!) of this sin. Have we been guilty of such conduct in our lives too?

Today's first reading contains the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. Note who the intended audience of this parable was – Jesus taught this parable unto "certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" (Luke 18:9). This description given by Luke of this group of religious leaders is very telling indeed – they had a self-righteous, holier-than-thou attitude, and they looked down on others whom they deemed to be less upright than them! The Pharisee exhibited a judgmental spirit towards those they considered to be worse sinners than them, and they took great pride in their outward displays of religiosity. The parable illustrates this well – rather than coming before God in humble contrition and confession of sins as the publican rightly did, the Pharisee demanded God to take note of the fact that he was not as bad as other sinners! What hypocrisy, what self-righteousness!

Another aspect of hypocrisy is brought out in today's second reading. Jesus, again condemning the Pharisees, quoted from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 29:13). The words that they spoke and the message that they preached seemed to suggest a certain level of godliness and holiness, but the truth of the matter is that "their heart is far from me". Jesus made it very clear that it is not the things we say that can save us, but really only the state of our hearts that is the true test of whether we have a right relationship with God.

Dear teen, consider yourself – have you been living a life of hypocrisy too? Do you look with condescension on the behavior of others, when in fact you are no better, or perhaps are guilty of even worse conduct? Do you have an outward form of religiosity, perhaps especially in church or in front of your parents or Christian friends, when in fact your heart remains full of wickedness? Perhaps you are an entirely different person in school; perhaps your classmates would be shocked to know that you are a Christian! Consider your ways, and seek God's help in changing your heart.

THOUGHT: Am I hypocrite?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be consistent and humble in all my ways.

ARE YOU A PROUD PERSON?

Another sin which we commonly encounter is the sin of pride. It should come as no surprise, for this was the sin that caused the fall of Satan when he thought to exalt himself above God and to "be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:12-14). Pride can come in many different forms. In fact, and as you will see over the next few days, it is often the root cause of many other sins. Some people manifest pride very obviously by boasting publicly of their achievements. Others exhibit it more subtly, thinking silently in their hearts, "At least I'm not as boastful as that person even though I have achieved this too" – is not this a form of pride too? Still others who are more shy and self-conscious may be equally guilty, for when they worry so much about what others think of them, are they not taking pride in their own image or "face"?

But what is so wrong with being proud? Today's first reading gives us an interesting account of the downfall of King Herod. On a certain occasion, he had been seated upon his throne delivering a speech. As the people began to praise him saying, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man", he was immediately struck dead. Why? "Because he gave not God the glory". What a harsh condemnation! But the lesson for us is clear. God takes great issue with the man's pride, for it robs Him of His glory. God is fiercely jealous over His own glory, as He has said in Isaiah 42:8 – "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another". King Herod's heart was lifted up when the people praised him as such; he must have started to think of himself as a god! God Almighty is most displeased with such thinking, for there is only one God in Heaven and in earth.

We might not have gone to such an extent, of thinking of ourselves as gods. But there are many other instances when we have been just as proud. Think of the last time you had performed an act of service – did you catch yourself thinking, "what a good work I have done!"? When you completed a particularly difficult task, did you think to yourself, "how smart/strong/swift I was in completing that!"? Perhaps you spent some time to help a fellow brother in need – did you then think, "what a good friend I am, how selfless and self-sacrificial!"? In all these, whether we realize it or not, we are robbing God of His glory and taking it for ourselves. May we all be more conscious of guarding against the sin of pride, and strive to ascribe all glory to God alone.

THOUGHT: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

PRAYER: Lord, teach me humility and help me to glorify Your name.

WEDNESDAY, DEC 3

Proverbs 15:32
Memorise 2 Timothy 3:16
"...he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured"

DO YOU REJECT REPROOF?

One of the manifestations of pride (which we considered yesterday) is the rejection of reproof. Because of his pride, a person would refuse to listen to criticism and rebuke. He is too stubborn and full of self that he does not want to admit that he is wrong, or that he needs to be reproved by others.

Is that the attitude that one who is striving to lead a reformed life ought to have? We read in Proverbs that "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul". The understanding here is that the instruction pertains to spiritual matters. The word "despiseth" here is a very strong word that means to spurn, loathe or abhor. To a person who refuses to heed instruction, it is as if he utterly loathes his own soul and has no care or concern whatsoever for its state. That is why he would refuse to pay attention to instruction regarding things of God and things of eternity, to the detriment of his own eternal soul. On the other hand, "he that heareth reproof getteth understanding". A person who receives words of rebuke, not just with his ears but with true understanding and acceptance, will get understanding. He will gain spiritual enlightenment and instruction, and thereby grow and mature in his faith.

What is the best source of reproof? None other than the Word of God. We read in today's second reading that Scripture is profitable for, amongst other things, reproof. We need the Word of God to point out the sins in our lives and to show us the errors of our ways. Yet so often we simply turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the words of Scripture, being too stubborn and too proud to admit our faults and confess our sins before God.

Dear teen, are you a teachable Christian, or do you often reject reproof? When the Word of God reveals a certain sin in your life, are you quick to repent, or do you stubbornly ignore the warning? Or when a well-meaning brother or sister rebukes you, do you find yourself angrily brushing aside the rebuke? If the preaching from a particular sermon convicts your heart of some truth of God's Word, what is your response? Dear teen, may you indeed pay earnest heed to reproof, that you may get understanding.

THOUGHT: Am I stubborn or teachable?

PRAYER: Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!

Deuteronomy 8:11-14
Memorise Psalm 103:1-5

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits"

ARE YOU SPIRITUALLY COMPLACENT?

Do you think it is easier to be a Christian in times of prosperity, or in times of adversity? Most may think: in times of prosperity of course! How difficult can it be to love and obey God when things in life are going well?

How difficult can it be, you may ask. Well, God knows all too well how the problem of complacency can so easily creep in, especially in times of prosperity. This is why, in His great wisdom, He warned Israel of this very danger. Deuteronomy 8 is part of a series of messages preached by Moses to the children of Israel just before they entered into the Promised Land. This was a very exciting time for the people of Israel indeed, for they were about to conquer the land which God had promised their forefathers generations ago, a land that God had often described as being most glorious and beautiful. But in the midst of their excitement and eager anticipation, God also had a stern warning for them – "Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God". Specifically, the warning was for the future, when they would be housed in comfortable houses, and enriched with livestock and wealth. It is precisely in such a time of prosperity and abundance that they would be prone to forget God. They would look at the victories they had won over the inhabitants of the land, at the territories they had conquered, at the wealth they had accumulated, at the cattle and flocks they had multiplied, and their hearts would be lifted up, and they would forget the LORD their God. Again, we see that pride is the root cause of many sins – they took pride in their accomplishments, and so forgot the Lord.

Dear teen, have you fallen prey to this subtle sin of complacency? Perhaps things are going well in your life right now. Perhaps you are doing well in school, scoring As in all your subjects and winning medals in your CCA. Perhaps you have many friends and you are enjoying the popularity. Perhaps you may even be enjoying victory in your spiritual life. Perhaps you have recently overcome a certain sin. Beware, dear teen, for it is precisely in such times of prosperity that you may become most susceptible to the sin of complacency. Have you become prideful in your achievements, and have you taken God and all His blessings for granted?

THOUGHT: Prosperity must give rise to praise!

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to "in every thing give thanks", and forgive me for the times when I have failed to acknowledge Thy good hand in my life.

FRIDAY, DEC 5

Proverbs 24:30-34
Memorise Romans 13:11-14
"...now it is high time to awake out of sleep..."

ARE YOU A SLOTHFUL PERSON?

We are all given the same amount of time every day. We each have 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Yet, different people seem to be able to accomplish varying amounts of things in the time that is given. Some people seem to lead such fulfilling lives – they study hard in school, they are involved in many extra-curricular activities, and they still have time to serve in different ministries! On the other hand, there are some who don't seem to be able to get as much done in that same amount of time. What is the main hindrance towards making the best use of our time?

Today's first reading paints for us a stark picture of a person who is idle and slothful. In fact, through the use of a parallelism, a slothful person is equated to one who is void of understanding – he is foolish and ignorant! His life is depicted as a field that is overgrown with weeds and thorns, ruins and debris. It is a life that is unruly and lacks discipline, where weeds are given free reign to grow without any weeding and pruning being done, and walls are left to tumble down without any effort to keep them standing or to build them up again. Basically, his life is one big mess. He does not organize his time, he does not plan and prepare. He simply does as he pleases, without discipline and without order. Verse 33 reveals more of his slothful attitude – he is always asking for a bit more sleep, a bit more rest. I am sure you can imagine this picture – a person lying on his bed, refusing to get up even though the sun is already high in the sky and he has snoozed his alarm countless times! "Just 5 minutes more..." and another hour passes by, in idleness and lazy slumber. And what does such a person have to look forward to? His poverty will come swiftly and suddenly, and this is a sure end. Certainly if he will not be diligent in his labour, he will suffer poverty and want.

Dear teen, does this sound all too familiar to you? Perhaps it is an accurate description of your own life! Have you been diligent in your studies, in fulfilling your earthly duties? And more importantly, how diligent have you been in spiritual matters? Spiritual idleness will surely lead to spiritual poverty. If we are not willing to put in effort into our spiritual lives, it will come as no surprise when we find our spiritual "bank accounts" totally empty! Dear teen, if you have been idle in your spiritual life, it's time to wake up and serve the Lord while there is yet time!

THOUGHT: An idle mind is the devil's workshop.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be a diligent Christian and to lay up treasures in heaven.

Hebrews 5:12-13
Memorise 2 Timothy 2:15
"Study to shew thyself approved unto God..."

DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD'S WORD?

What are the five points of Calvinism? Do we believe in Covenant Theology or Dispensationalism? How many sacraments do our church practice? If you have been following the teenz RPG series diligently, these questions should at least sound familiar to you. In fact if you regularly pay attention to the Sunday sermons, these issues should not be new at all. But are you able to answer them, and are you able to point to passages of Scripture that contain the answers?

The writer of the Hebrews was, in today's reading, criticizing the Christians who ought to have possessed some degree of knowledge regarding the Bible. They had probably been Christians for some time already, and were in the position where they should have been shouldering the responsibility of instructing the younger Christians. But instead, they themselves needed to be taught the basic doctrines again! The analogy of milk vs meat is used here – they were compared to infants that could only drink milk, and they were not yet ready to digest the "meatier" things of God's Word, i.e. the more difficult or complex doctrines. Hence they were described as being "unskillful in the word of righteousness" – they lacked the ability to understand the Bible, to handle the Scriptures with maturity, to wield the Sword of the Spirit with skill and finesse.

How about you, dear teen? How long have you been a Christian for? You may have had the privilege of growing up in church, of going to Sunday School and learning all the Bible stories. Perhaps you are even an expert at Bible trivia and can answer the most obscure questions in a Bible quiz. But knowledge of God's Word is not about memorizing mere facts and figures. It is about really knowing and understanding the Bible, the teachings and the doctrines that are contained therein. Only when you are adequately taught in the Word of righteousness will you be able to put it into practice and to live it out in your daily life – to help you to mature and grow in your faith, to guide you in your decisions, and to guard against temptation. And then you would also be equipped to teach it to others, and to defend it when the need arises. It is not only theologians or Bible college students that need to know God's Word – it is the responsibility and privilege of every Christian to know it, and to love it!

THOUGHT: Am I a "workman that needeth not to be ashamed"?

PRAYER: "Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth Thou hast for me."

LORD'S DAY, DEC 7

Hebrews 5:14
Memorise James 3:13
"That I may know him..."

HAVE YOU REALLY EXPERIENCED GOD'S WORD?

Continuing on from yesterday's reading, we come to the other aspect of knowledge which we ought to have: experiential knowledge. Knowing the Bible refers not just to knowing and understanding it with our minds, but also with our hearts.

What is the difference between an "infant" Christian and an "adult" Christian? How do we progress from drinking milk to eating meat? The passage in Hebrews 5 goes on to tell us – "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil". It is "by reason of use" that we would grow in our spiritual maturity. Consider a sprinter training for a competition. He may diligently study the theory and techniques of sprinting, he may know all about the specific muscles that are required to power his legs to run. But until he goes down to the track and trains that particular group of muscles by running over and over again, he will never actually be able to become a better sprinter. Likewise in our Christian walks, we may know all there is to know about the doctrines of the Bible and we may be able to recite them by heart. But if we do not put this knowledge into practice, we will never actually grow in our faith. It is only when we go through different situations, trials and testings where our understanding of the Bible is put to the test, that we can mature and progress from spiritual infanthood to adulthood. Only then will we have our "senses exercised to discern both good and evil". This speaks of a state of spiritual maturity in which we have attained the ability to discern between right and wrong, truth and error. When we are faced with a decision, we will know, because of our [head] knowledge of the Bible coupled with our [experiential] knowledge gained from experiences, what the right decision is. Choices in life become simple, because we are well in tune with what the Lord desires for us.

Dear teen, is this a description of your life? You may be a teenager in age, but are you still a spiritual infant? May you seek to truly know God, not just in our head but also in our heart.

THOUGHT: What is my spiritual age?

PRAYER: Lord, lead me towards a true experiential knowledge of You and Your Word.

Proverbs 4:14-17
Memorise Psalm 1:1-2
"Enter not into the path of the wicked..."

WHAT SORT OF COMPANY DO YOU KEEP?

Who are the people whom you would consider your closest friends? Besides your parents and your siblings, your friends are probably the people who would have the biggest impact on your life; in fact, in some ways, they may influence you even more than your family.

That is why bad company can be such a danger to us in leading the reformed life. We may have all the right teachings and doctrines in our heads; we may know, in theory at least, how to guard against pride and hypocrisy and all these sins in our own lives. But when we are faced also with the external influence from the people around us, it can become all too easy to forget these lessons, and to follow instead the ways of our friends. Especially at an age where peer pressure can be such a strong force to reckon with, it really matters who you spend the bulk of your time with. Solomon therefore warns us in today's reading to avoid at all costs the way of the wicked. We are not to enter into their path, nor to go in their way; we are to avoid it, turn from it, and to pass over it. His repeated emphasis of our need to turn away from the wicked shows us how important it really is that we do so. For verse 16 tells us their intentions and desires – they are so preoccupied with doing mischief and luring others into sin, that they would even sacrifice sleep for it! Their lives are all about wicked deeds and wicked acts, things that are totally displeasing to God.

Perhaps you have already encountered friends who would invite you to go clubbing with them, or perhaps a friend has offered you a cigarette. Perhaps you have friends who love to gossip about others, or who often take God's name in vain. It could be in more subtle things too, such as the advice that they give you and the solutions that they offer to your problems. Whatever it is, it is only a matter of time before you succumb to temptation and join them in their wicked activities, engage in their wicked ways and and adopt their wicked worldly philosophies; you may even already have done so. What is the best way to avoid falling into sin? By not even associating yourself with them in the first place! As today's second reading describes it, such a person who walks not among the ungodly nor stands among sinners nor sits among the scornful is truly blessed. Would you therefore want to continue to mix with bad company, or would you want the blessedness of staying without?

THOUGHT: Do my friends build me up or tear me down?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me godly friends, and that I may be a godly friend!

TUESDAY, DEC 9 *1 Corinthians 1:26-29*
Memorise James 1:9

"...how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

ARE YOU CALLED TO SERVE THE LORD?

Who do you think deserves to be saved? If you could choose anyone to save in this world, who would you reward with the gift of salvation? Would it be the kindest person you know? Would it be the most hardworking person you know? Or would it be the person with the most degrees? The one who does best in school? Or the one who has achieved the most in society, or holds the highest paying job? Perhaps it would be the president of the country, or the boss of a very large company? This is how the world would choose to reward people with accolades.

However, today's passage tells us something very different. How God chooses is very different from how the world might choose. Verses 27 and 28 tell us that God chooses the foolish things, the weak things, the base things, the things that are despised. In fact, verse 26 tells us that among those whom God calls unto salvation, most are not the wise and mighty men of this world. Few noble men are called. God has a very different criterion for choosing who to save. God has not shown us what this criterion is, but we know what it is not. Verse 29 says that God does not save us because of our personal achievements. There is nothing that anyone has done that wins favour before God, such that God has to grant this person salvation because of what he has done. Salvation is not by our own merit. We also learn from these verses that the reason is because God wants to ensure that no man can boast of any achievement on their part.

If you are saved, count it all joy that you are among the chosen! Salvation is a great privilege, it is not an entitlement. It is only by God's great mercies and grace that we can be saved. We have to understand the infinite measure of our salvation, of how we are saved from eternity in hell and granted eternity in heaven. One day when we appear before Christ, we will understand more fully the extent of our salvation. But in the meantime, what should our response be? Is it not great unending humility and gratitude? We must be thankful and we must do what we can to serve Him in gratitude. This will be subject of our discourse in the weeks to come –Service.

THOUGHT: What if you were not saved?

PRAYER: Father, thank you for saving me, show me now how I can return a small part of Your great work in me.

1 Corinthians 1:30
Memorise James 1:17
"...God imputeth righteousness without works.."

ARE YOU READY TO SERVE THE LORD?

We have learnt that our salvation is not only priceless, it is also undeserved. There is nothing we have done to deserve to be saved by God from eternal judgment. Actually, what we do deserve is eternal damnation for the sins that we have committed against God, in mind, heart and action. All are dark and condemnable. We have been despicable, hateful, unjust and selfish towards all those around us. We have told lies, we have coveted and stolen, even if in thought. If we were to honestly examine our lives before God, we would be overwhelmed with shame. Yet despite all that, God chose us to save! Instead of judgment, he chose to make us His children and grant us an eternal inheritance in heaven. For our sins, He gave us His only begotten Son to pay in our stead. What Christ has done for us is hard to fully comprehend; yet, the gift of salvation is fully given and fully secured. It will never be taken away from us. Dear reader, should we not be ever grateful? Should we ever be mindful of what great work the Lord has done for us?

Our gratitude should then translate to action. This action is service. Life-long service, in any area the Lord calls us to. Never to shrink from any calling, never to fail our Saviour from any calling for the rest of our existence on earth. This should be the response. However, have you wondered if our feeble failing selves would be sufficient to serve the King of kings? Are we worthy to serve God? Actually no, there is nothing we can do that will be worthy of our God if we do it by our own strength. If we do it with our own might and wisdom, it will never be good enough for God. He is so high and we so low. How can anything we do be worthy of Him? But thank God, our merciful and ever wise Father, He has called us to serve Him. With this calling, He has also given us a way to make our service accepted unto Him. And not just that, our service is able to glorify and honour Him and bring Him joy. How is it possible? 1 Corinthians 1:30 gives us the answer: Christ! Because of Christ, God gives us godly wisdom, makes us righteous and accepted before Him, sanctifies our works and redeems us. Because Christ has paid for our sins, our works become accepted before God. God is willing to look to the righteousness of Christ for our sakes. Because of Christ, our service is accepted. Because of Christ we are qualified to serve God. If not for Christ, we are sinners rejected and condemned. Christ is our one qualification to serve God.

THOUGHT: Could Christ have chosen not to die on the cross?

PRAYER: Father, thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for Your love and mercy towards me.

WILL YOU BOAST ABOUT YOUR SERVICE?

We know that service must be our natural response to what God has done for us in saving us. However, how do we serve Christ? In particular, how much of ourselves should we dedicate to serving God? Do we dedicate only our Sundays? Scripture teaches us about this in Romans 12:1 "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Romans 12:1 makes reference to the sacrifices that were performed in OT times. In the sacrifices, an animal is given wholly as a sacrifice to God. The whole being, the life of the animal itself is presented. An analogy is drawn to the modern day believer. The believer's life is to be dedicated entirely for service, in similar fashion, albeit, as a living sacrifice, not as a dead one. In other words, as long as the believer is alive, his entire being, his very life is to be given over to the service of Christ. In such a manner, the believer no longer takes ownership of his own life. Every wish and desire is subsumed under the interest of the service of Christ. Wow! Is that really the standard required? Seems like a tall order doesn't it? Actually, the Bible describes it as nothing more than our "reasonable service". Hence, if a believer gives his life to be martyred for the name of Christ, he has only performed a reasonable service

This brings us to our passage for today in 1 Corinthians 1:31. If we can truly fulfil the standard given to us in Romans 12:1, which in itself is not easy, we would have nothing to boast in and of ourselves. It would only be reasonable service. However, it does not mean that we cannot glory. Sometimes, in service, we see the fruits of the work and it makes us glad. We should naturally glory, however, 1 Corinthians 1:31 tells that if there is anything that we can glory of, it should be in the Lord. Hence, even when there is something to glory of, we should take no glory of ourselves; indeed, we cannot take any credit for ourselves. Instead, we give all credit and glory to God, for saving us, for calling us to serve Him, for giving us the grace and strength to serve Him, for using us to bless others, for the privilege of being part of the bigger scheme of things in God's sovereign plan. All because God enabled us.

THOUGHT: We do not need any credit to be truly happy.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for choosing to use me to serve You.

2 Timothy 3:12
Memorise John 15:20
"...ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake.."

WHAT IS OUR REWARD FOR SERVICE? (I)

When you do well in school, what do you receive as a reward? Do your parents buy you something nice? Perhaps your teachers will pat you on the back and the school may even give you a special academic prize. If you have done a good deed, say given up your bus seat to an old lady, you should at least be expecting a "thank you" isn't it? That is how the world normally works. When something good is done, one would normally expect a good return.

However, as we see from God's Word in 2 Timothy, it seems that it is very different when it comes to the service of God. God's Word warns us that those who will live godly lives will suffer persecution. Not "may" but "will". When we live our lives according to God's Word, when we grow in grace and become more and more like Christ, God's Word in 2 Timothy tells us that we will suffer persecution from others. Does that come as a surprise to you? Were you expecting the opposite? Why is it that the believer who has been faithfully following God would suffer for his efforts? In John 15:20 Christ said that He Himself will suffer persecution and what more the servants of Christ? Do you experience this? If you continue to be faithful in your walk, if you continue to grow as a believer, you have to expect this to happen. The reason is simply. We are of the light and light has no fellowship with darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5). If you live a holy life, those that are in sin will not like you. The ungodly hates the godly. And in case you think only unbelievers will persecute, that is not true either. Some believers who live a life of sin can become our persecutors too. As long as we have to make the decision to live a godly life and if that decision offends those who are ungodly, we should expect persecution. Hence, the true and faithful believer will suffer persecution sooner or later. But, there are many encouragements for us in Scripture. In Matthew 5:11, Christ pronounced a wonderful blessing to all who suffer for His sake. Christ looks kindly and favorably upon those who suffer because they lived in obedience. If there are none to comfort, Christ Himself will come to comfort you in ways you cannot imagine. But why does one then choose to serve Christ even when we are told that persecution is for sure? Is it not because of what Christ has done for us? Is it not because He has already suffered greatly for us? If He has done so much for us, what little can we do for Him? If He has loved us so much, can we not serve Him because of this love? We can.

THOUGHT: How much did Christ suffer for you?

PRAYER: Father, give me strength and courage to continue my walk despite the persecutions that I suffer and will continue to suffer.

SATURDAY, DEC 13

2 Timothy 4:8
Memorise Proverbs 11:30

"...in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.."

WHAT IS OUR REWARD FOR SERVICE? (II)

After yesterday's reading, are you tempted to wonder about what then is the point of serving Christ? If by serving Christ, it means that I will suffer persecution, then why should I continue to do so? From the perspective of the world it is foolishness. Why would one voluntarily choose the path of suffering? For that matter, why would one want to serve Christ? What is your motivation for continuing to serve Christ?

Paul gives us the motivation for service in 2 Corinthians 5:13-14a: "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us". Servants of God voluntarily go headlong into the difficult path of service because of the love of Christ. We serve Christ because we love Him. Why do we love Him? Because He first loved us and gave Himself for us (1 John 4:19).

Paul wrote the book of 2 Timothy as his final words before he was martyred. He had every confidence that what awaited him in heaven was the "crown of righteousness". Because of this crown, we can enter into heaven accepted of God. The crown is costly, the price is the blood of Christ purchased for us. Yet it is given to us freely. It gives us Christ's own righteousness. It is a precious gift because it enables us to be reconciled to God and be given eternal life in heaven. This is what all believers can expect to see in heaven when they arrive there. Although on this earth we expect persecution and suffering while we serve faithfully, but in heaven, we can expect the crown of righteousness. Hence, our reward is in heaven. But is the believer's life on earth truly a life without comfort? It is not isn't it? Although many passages exhort us to endure hardness, as good solider of Jesus Christ, God does not leave us without consolations and encouragements. Our loved ones and brethren are always brought to comfort us. Sometimes, in an inexplicable manner, God Himself comes to us to comfort us in ways that often cannot be explained. God loves those who suffer for His sake and will never leave them without help. Instead, God will tenderly succor His own, especially those who suffer for His name's sake.

THOUGHT: Is there anything you suffer that will be more than what Christ has already suffered for you?

PRAYER: Father, help me to suffer for You expecting nothing more than what You have already done for me.

HOW IS YOUR SERVICE TOWARDS UNBELIEVERS?

In today's society, people like to talk about their rights. It is all about what I deserve, what people can or cannot do to me and what things I have the right to do and what things I refuse to do, all simply because I feel that it is my right. Then when one's rights are perceived to have been infringed upon, the first reaction is to protest and complain. Some may even go as far as to resort to violence just to reinstate one's so-called rights. A person's rights seem to be sacred. Rarely do you find someone who would voluntarily forgo his rights for any reason.

Today's Scriptural passage would appear very foreign and very opposite to this norm of society. In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul says that although he is not obligated to anyone, yet would he willingly become as a servant to all. Paul is willing to give up his personal rights. In verse 20 and 21 he says that if need be, Paul would be to the Jew as a Jew and to the Gentile as a Gentile. This means that Paul will try his outmost to appeal to the Jew or Gentile, to make him comfortable and accepting of Paul for the sake of the gospel. But, there are some very important things that need to be qualified. Firstly, Paul would not commit sin in order to do this. Secondly, the objective and purpose of Paul giving up his rights is very important; v19 tells us that it is to "gain the more". Paul's objective is so that more will come to salvation. We have to be very careful to remember that Paul does not say we would do anything and everything to achieve that. We must still remain true to every part of God's Word in doing so. What Paul is trying to teach is the attitude behind how we should treat unbelievers. For the sake of their souls, we should be humble to make whatever adjustments on our part so that the gospel can be shared whether in word or by our life example. There is the emptying of self for the sake of winning souls. If it means not pursuing an argument, if it means appearing weak and foolish, if it means personal loss or humiliation, Paul is saying he will be the servant and suffer what is necessary so that the unbeliever can come to know Christ. This should be the heart of the true servant of God towards unbelievers. We should have this love and willingness to give up whatever so-called rights that belong to us so that the gospel can be shared and perchance some come to trust in the Lord and Saviour. What should be in our hearts and minds is the salvation of lost souls and the willingness to make personal sacrifices while remaining holy for their sakes.

THOUGHT: The Christian is so different from the norm.

PRAYER: Father, help me to be always humble, especially with unbelievers.

MONDAY, DEC 15

Philippians 1:23-26
Memorise Philippians 1:26
"Let all your things be done with charity.."

ARE YOU WILLING TO SERVE SACRIFICIALLY?

While we are to be most concerned for the lost souls of unbelievers, what should our attitude towards the service of our fellow believers be? Yes, service is still necessary. They may be saved, but for the saved, the journey has only just begun. Paul describes this in Philippians 1:25 as the "furtherance and joy of faith". The believer's faith needs to grow and with it his joy as well. Paul also expressed his desire to depart and be with Christ in heaven, for it was "far better" than life on earth. This was his preference, his heart's desire. Yet he knew that what was far more needful, was that he remain and serve, for he knew that was God's calling for him at that point of time.

We all have our preferences, don't we? Some of us prefer to be quiet and unnoticed serving in the background. Or we prefer to serve in areas where we think we are stronger in and shun areas that we are weaker at. Some of us are even tempted to be lazy and take a more laid back approach to service if at all. Was this the response of Paul? Despite his desire to be in a far more blessed place, Paul was willing to stay that desire for the sake of the believers in Philippi. He felt that his presence was more needful for them and even though he might have preferred to be in heaven, he was willing to sacrifice that desire, at least for now, so that he can be of service to fellow brethren.

Some of you may think that service isn't for you. Service is for leaders only, you may say. How can someone like me be of service? The reality is that we are all called to serve one another in one way or another. In fact, we are "saved to serve". Hebrews 10:24 says that we are to consider one another and provoke one another unto love and good works. This is a form of service. It can take a simple gesture like a word of encouragement. Or it can be being part of the Exco of a fellowship group in planning activities that will edify members. We can serve in the simplest or even in the most mundane of things or we can serve in something on a larger scale. There are always opportunities for us to serve. The attitude of service is key. This is something the young of today have difficulty understanding. Paul's attitude is one of selflessness. It is not what I want but it is what benefits others the more that is more important. Paul is willing to give up his wants so that "your rejoicing may be more abundant". This should be our disposition as well. It should be something that sets us apart from the world. It is the attitude of a true servant of Christ.

THOUGHT: Do you expect anything in return when you serve?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be worthy of being Thy servant.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22
Memorise 1 Peter 4:12-13

"...For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost..."

HOW SHOULD WE SERVE?

Now that you understand what it means to be a servant both to unbelievers and believers, what are the instructions that you should hold to when you go about your business to serve? What must you know when you serve in the fields? Well, in service, all of God's Word is necessary for us but our passage for today does quite neatly cover some of the key points to note. God-willing, we will go through each of these instructions in the coming days in detail and in the process we may be better equipped to serve better.

Whilst serving the King of kings is a great privilege, it will not always be smooth sailing. There will be times when we may encounter discouragements from others. Other times, things may not seem to work even when we work hard. Some of you may think that since you are serving God, things should always be good and smooth. God should remove all hindrances that come our way. After all, aren't we doing the right thing? It is true, God does sometimes remove hindrances that block the work of God, but there are also times when God allows difficulties to come our way, even when we have sacrificed to serve. Why is it so?

Peter reminds us: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:12-13).

Yes there will be times of trials and these difficult times are allowed by God for our betterment. This is also true in the area of service. Our hearts need to be purified in our service. God needs to help us make our service better and this requires pruning and hence it can be painful. Hence, in our service, we have to be prepared for challenges. These challenges are allowed by God and are there to help us. Though difficult, they will pass and we will be one step closer to being more like Christ. Along this journey, God does not leave us helpless though. We must be prepared to serve and the only way to do that is to be equipped with the instructions; that is, God's Word. In the area of service, we will look at some of these Words of guidance in the coming readings.

THOUGHT: The instructions for service: God's Word.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me what true service means.

ARE YOU REJOICING EVERMORE?

The first instruction of service found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 is to "rejoice evermore". This is not a suggestion, but a commandment for God's people. "Evermore" means always. We are commanded to always rejoice, always be happy regardless of the circumstances that may befall us. Is that possible? The things that happen to us, don't they affect our happiness? Aren't we all affected by our circumstances? When we decide to serve, we put aside our own wants, we seek out the needs of others and see how we can help. Sometimes in the process of doing so, not only are we unappreciated, we may even be persecuted for doing so. So are we to rejoice even when that happens to us?

Remember, this is a commandment from God. God wants us to continue to be happy. But it is not a senseless kind of forced happiness. If it were so, then, it would be madness. God does not ask us to rejoice without good reason. God gives us the reason in James 1:2-4. In verse 3, we read that the trying of our faith creates patience in us. This "patience" means perseverance – the ability to withstand hardship and difficulties and not buckle under the pressure. This is the effect trials have on our faith and on us. When patience is built up in us, we will become perfect and complete, having no want, no lack. This is the reason why we should rejoice when we encounter trials and difficulties in service. Our faith would not grow otherwise. This growth that one experiences is special and comes only through difficulties that the Lord brings our way. Hence, because of the outcome of trials, we are encouraged to be happy about it, to rejoice.

We have to be careful though. Sometimes the difficulties we encounter in service are a result of the wrong that we have done. If problems arise because we have sinned, then we are not to rejoice. Instead, we are to repent. The difficulties are a chastisement from the Lord. We must differentiate the two or else we will become deluded and think the Lord is pleased with us when He actually is not. It is a good practice to always search our hearts upon every occurrence of a difficulty, whether it is due to the consequences of a sin or not. If it is so, then we should repent immediately. However, if after checking the depths of our hearts and you know you have not sinned against Christ and yet you suffer, then it is a trial from the Lord and you should rejoice! Know the difference.

THOUGHT: Believing we have not sinned when we have, makes us hypocrites.

PRAYER: Lord, if there be any wicked way in me, reveal it unto me.

ARE YOU PRAYING WITHOUT CEASING?

Throughout Scripture, there is the constant call for God's children to pray to Him for our every need. God knows our needs, and has appointed this method wherein God provides for us through prayer. Why has God appointed prayer as such? Why is it that God requires us to pray and to do so continually? And what does it really mean to pray without ceasing?

One very important condition about prayer is found in 1 John 5:15: "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us". Our prayers must be according to God's will. What we ask for must be what God has willed. If we ask for what He has not willed then He will not hear us and we may have also sinned in the process in desiring what is wrong, for anything that is not in His will is sin. Hence, taken in the light of our need to pray without ceasing, it means that our wills must be aligned to God's constantly. To pray without ceasing means that we have to live lives that require us to be constantly in the will of God. We cannot sway or depart from God. Only then is it possible to pray without ceasing.

In the context of service, we need God's help and this help is given through prayer. Serving God in spiritual matters is not possible if we just rely on our own human strength. Only God can give us the grace and wisdom necessary to serve Him effectively. For us to do that, we need to ask God through prayer to give us what we need for service and to do so, we need to ask God in accordance to His will. Therefore in asking God to provide according to His will, He will answer our prayers and we will truly find help in time of need. The tasks that we perform in service will also be aligned to His will. This should be the ideal state that we should all be found in when we serve. But what happens when this is not followed? What if one does not pray, or one prays amiss and yet continues to serve? This person will not be in the will of God. He will not have God's help and he will end up serving in his own strength and wisdom. Worldly methods will be used and even if there appears to be success, this success is built on sinking sand. The results will be worldly and unspiritual. Service is no longer a blessing but a curse. We must never be found in such a state.

THOUGHT: Do you consider if your prayer is in His will before you pray?

PRAYER: Father, teach me to pray correctly.

FRIDAY, DEC 19

Romans 8:28
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 5:18
"...for our light affliction, which is but for a moment.."

ARE YOU GIVING THANKS IN EVERYTHING?

As we have found in earlier readings, serving God will not always be a bed of roses. However, serving God does have its blessings, and often these blessings are sweet and over abundant. However there will be times when things are not easy. When difficult circumstances test our faith and even tempt us to murmur. These are times when we suffer. The suffering of saints can come in many forms. There are times when we are persecuted for Christ's sake. Other times, we may suffer because of our lives' circumstances that are beyond our control but nonetheless in the will of God. Some of us have unbelieving parents that make our walk as believers harder. Some of us may come from homes that are not so well off and we struggle just to pay school fees every month. There may be times whereby we wonder why we have fewer talents and often struggle with our school work just to pass while others excel ahead of us with little work put in. Or perhaps you may feel like you have been serving and following God faithfully and yet you don't seem to be rewarded for that. You feel discouraged and even tempted to murmur and complain. Is God unfair towards you? You may even be tempted to think what then is the point of your efforts to walk faithfully? At such times, we need to exercise faith. Our passage for today tells us that all things work for good. All things that happen to us in life, whether it appears to be good or not, are really all for good. They will ultimately fulfill the glorious purposes of God and although sometimes it seems tough at the moment, we will eventually find that God's good purposes are good. In fact, we will glorify Him with exceeding joy, as we are told in 1 Peter 4:13: "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy".

There are, however, some very important qualifiers, which must be fulfilled before this fact holds true. This only applies to those who "love God" and those who are "the called according to his purpose". In other words, this only applies to believers. All circumstances in life that occur to the believer are for the ultimate good of him. We need only to trust that this will be true in our lives. Thus when we come to such an understanding of God's sovereign providence in our lives, it will be possible for us to thank Him in everything. Every circumstance we face has been divinely appointed by God in accordance to His perfect wisdom, and the only logical response is to thank Him for all that He has done!

THOUGHT: There is a season for everything, even a time for rejoicing.

PRAYER: Father, teach me to be always thankful, regardless of suffering.

ARE YOU QUENCHING THE SPIRIT?

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit guiding you? New believers may have to learn how to discern the promptings of the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Spirit works in all believers. There is a real relationship and communication between God and His children. However, it is not in the fashion one might expect. It is not in how a man speaks to a man, as some Charismatics might claim. Neither is it usually in spectacular fashion. No lightning from above, no miracles. Mostly, it is through simple things. Things like the faithful reading of the Word of God, or the encouragement from a brother or sister in Christ, or the Word preached over the pulpit. It is usually, not forceful, it is usually very gentle. In fact, if one is not alert and careless, one might miss it. Hence Scripture often describes the good believer as being "watchful"; one who pays attention to the promptings of the Holy Spirit among other things. God often speaks to us in a "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) and with the Word comes an assurance of the heart from the Holy Ghost. But this does not mean that God will not speak to us in force and power. We read this occurring in Scripture. God can choose any way He deems fit to speak to us.

Yet the fact remains that the Holy Spirit does speak to us. What we should next ask ourselves is, do we obey when we hear? Do we obey the Holy Spirit when He speaks to us? When one disobeys the Holy Spirit, Scripture describes it as "quenching" the Spirit. Of course, mere man cannot quench the Spirit like putting out a fire. What is being referred to is the surpressing of the promptings that Holy Spirit gives us. When the Spirit guides us, we can choose to ignore Him. Scripture says that in so doing, we actually cause grief to the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). In service, God will guide us on how best to approach certain matters. Through the study of His Word, prayer and waiting on the Lord, God's will is revealed through the Holy Spirit. This is one aspect of the grace of God given to us. This helps us to serve correctly for His sake. However, when God's will is not what we expect or what we prefer, one can quench the Spirit too by rejecting God's revealed will and following our own way. This ultimately results in grief and misery upon us and yes, the Holy Spirit is grieved too. This is a sin. We need to be sensitive to the promptings of the Spirit and be prepared to obey God in all manner of life and not quench the Spirit.

THOUGHT: My life is not my own, but Christ's alone.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to be watchful and obedient to the Holy Spirit.

ARE YOU DESPISING PROPHESYINGS?

God's Word is central in the believer's life. This goes beyond just knowledge. The effect that God's Word has on a believer is spiritual in nature. It is not like any other book of literature. It is not just knowledge or emotional excitement, God's Word transforms the very soul of the believer, his spiritual being. The Psalmist in Psalm 119 describes how God's Word is a delight, a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his path. It is his meditation all the day! Then how is it a commandment is necessary to instruct believers to not despise prophesyings? The word "prophesying" refers to the proclaiming of God's Word in general and not just the foretelling of future events. It includes both the written Word of God, and also the faithful preaching of it. How is it then that believers can be even tempted to despise God's Word? It is of course possible or else there would not have been the need for such a commandment. The believer can fall so far that God's Word no longer holds its savour and may even become distasteful. How does that happen? How does the believer grow to despise the very milk and meat that his soul needs for nourishment? The answer is simple. Sin. When a believer has fallen into sin, the Holy Spirit no longer works in the believer and the believer begins to lose the grace to love and understand God's Word. Sin that is unrepented will fester in the heart of a believer. Sin is destructive. If the believer will not return from sin and turn to God in humble repentance, it will not be long before God's Word becomes something that is despised.

Another avenue where God's Word becomes despised is in false teaching. There are those from churches that do not teach God's Word faithfully. When such believers do actually hear the Word of God preached correctly and faithfully, some may reject it. The excuse is it is too strict, too extreme or even "fanatical" no matter how biblical it actually is. Hard commandments and doctrines require too much sacrifice and obedience. One has to correct so many areas of one's life when one hears God's Word taught in its whole counsel that one is put off. It is through no fault of the preacher, definitely. It is always the evil heart of man who seeks God only on his own terms. If God is too hard to follow, they are more ready to give up the walk and despise God's Word. For us as believers, God's Word must always be a delight and joy to our hearts, our greatest love. What a tragedy it would be, if we were to despise the words of eternal life!

THOUGHT: Have I ever despised God's Word?

PRAYER: Father, never take the love of Your Word from my heart.

1 John 4:1-4
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 5:21
"...for many deceivers are entered into the world..."

ARE YOU PROVING ALL THINGS?

Being in the fellowship and in the midst of believers is really a blessing. It is such a comfort and one can really feel a difference in the spirit when we are in the fellowship of saints. It is not therefore surprising to hear the often repeated phrase "heaven on earth". However, the reality is that, it is not truly heaven, at least not yet. We are still on earth and we are not free from sin in ourselves or in others around us. Even though we are sometimes tempted to put down our guard, Scripture frequently warns us not to do so. We are tempted to just accept everything whenever we are in the fellowship of saints, including what is taught over the pulpit. This is not wise and we are told in Scripture that we should really be doing the opposite. We are taught to prove all things. This mean that we are to test, discern all things to ensure if they are correct. Not just some things, but all. Even if your pastor is most trusted, or if you have known him for years, yet, we are instructed from God's Word that we must still prove all things.

How do we go about doing so? We are to compare what is taught against Scripture. God's Word as found in the Bible is our final word of authority. We are to compare God's Word to what we hear and check if it is consistent or not. Thank God that He has given us the perfect Bible. If not for the Bible, we will have no way of telling if something is true or false. The threat is real. 1 John 4:1 tells us that there are many false prophets that are gone out into the world. These are Satan's agents. False prophets do more damage than any other. They create confusion and falsehood. In 1 John 4:3 we are told that the spirit of the antichrist is already in the world. Just as we are in the midst of saints, we must not forget that the devil is also in our midst, seeing how we can be destroyed. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us that the devil is as a roaring lion that walks about seeking whom he can devour. This description is very severe and real. A lion is ferocious and strong and he means to devour believers and non-believers alike. Eph 6 describes the walk of the believer as a warfare in which we must be well prepared and protected against. Without the right spiritual weapons, we are defenseless. In other words, the Christian walk is never "a walk in the park". We should enjoy unity of brethren in Christ and godly fellowship among saints, but we must always be reminded of the necessity to prove all things whether they be of God.

THOUGHT: Do you know of those who have failed to prove all things faithfully?

PRAYER: Father, help me always to be vigilant.

ARE YOU HOLDING FAST TO THAT WHICH IS GOOD?

Today's statement of "hold fast that which is good" from 1 Thessalonians 5:21 follows from yesterday's passage of "prove all things". From yesterday we learnt that we should be very careful of what is taught, to check all of it against God's Word. And then, after we have found that which is good, that which has been correctly taught and that which is consistent with what God says, we are commanded to hold fast to it. The phrase "Hold fast" comes from a single Greek word meaning to hold with the hand, to retain, to grasp tightly and not let go. The thing to hold on is everything that is good. As and when we find things that are good, then we tenaciously hold on to them, whilst rejecting all the bad, sinful and wicked things.

This principle applies to all areas of our life of service. There are many things that we do, that are clearly under the category of 'good'. For example, it is good to worship God in a faithful church, to share the gospel with the people around us, and to serve Him in whatever area we can. These things that we know are good, pleasing to God and useful to our spiritual lives, we cling tightly to, and make sure that we will keep on doing them no matter what. Thus we are to carefully examine the things that we do in our day to day lives, and constantly seek to do things that are good, edifying and can be a blessing to others. This is a continual process of fine-tuning that we must do in our lives, that daily our service to him can become more and more effective and pleasing in His sight.

What is also implied in this statement is that when we hold that which is good, we must also let go of that which is evil. In the process of proving all things, we will also realize that certain sinful desire, destructive habits or evil inclination must be put aside. In order to be an effective servant for God, we must not only constantly seek to do good, but we must also actively ensure that nothing we do are sinful in the sight of God.

If we are able to do these things, then we can go a long way towards living a life of service that is pleasing and acceptable to God. Paul encouraged the Thessalonians in 2:15 to stand fast, and hold firm to the traditions (teachings) which they have been taught. This requires discipline, tenacity and a firm resolve. Will we pray and ask the Lord for strength to do so?

THOUGHT: What would prevent you from standing fast for God?

PRAYER: Father, give me godly courage.

WEDNESDAY, DEC 24 *Matthew 5:13-16*
Memorise 1 Thessalonians 5:22

"...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven":.."

ARE YOU ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL?

Christ says that believers are the "light of the world" (Matthew 5:14), and as "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). This truth has great significance. In God's plan for the world, the lights of the world are meant to lead the rest of the earth to salvation and to God. This has been the purpose of God since the beginning. This appointment once rested with the people of Israel. The nation of Israel was meant to be the great example for the rest of world. The Word of God was given to them first and they had a special relationship with God and through God's leadership, the nation would be God's evangelist to the other nations of the earth. However, Israel failed the Lord.

In Acts, we read how this testimony was then taken from Israel and given to the Gentiles. Individual believers now bear this role. If one considers the great importance of the gospel, one will realize how great a privilege and blessing it is to be given this responsibility. The gospel is what will save sinners from eternal damnation unto eternal life. There is no other way. Only the gospel can. I hope you understand your privileged position as a believer. You are a light to the world, meaning through you, unbelievers can see the truth and be saved. You are the salt of the earth, meaning because of you, the world is preserved from rot and evil. Salt has a preservative effect on raw food. Likewise, your life when lived in holiness has a positive preservative effect on those around you. If the salt is taken away, the world will decay.

With all this in mind, we can now try to understand why the commandment to abstain from the appearance of evil is important. Note that it is not the committing of a sin here, but the mere appearance that a sin is committed that is forbidden. You may think it is ok to go to a club so long as you don't drink or do anything that is sinful. But the mere fact that you appear to have done so is itself, a sin. As precious lights and salt of the earth, we have to protect our testimony before the world. The world has to look to us and see Christ and God-willing be led unto Him through repentance and acknowledgment of the truth. Our testimony is precious. If you do not shine, others will not have the opportunity to see Christ and risk being doomed for all eternity.

THOUGHT: What areas of my life have the appearance of evil?

PRAYER: Father, help me to be truly holy.

ARE YOU SERVING THE LORD IN YOUR YOUTH?

In his first epistle to Timothy, Paul writes to encourage his spiritual son as he was beginning his pastoral duties at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:1-3). Paul knew that as a young man, Timothy would have many challenges. One of that would be a prejudice against his youth from other Christians. He knew that many would question, whether inwardly or outwardly, about his knowledge of God's Word and his maturity as a Christian. Older Christians may even resent having a younger Christian preach to and rebuke them. Paul uses strong words to warn Timothy that they may "despise" his youth. However, Paul then exhorts Timothy not to let that affect his ministry but to continue in his service and to be "an example of the believers". Timothy should not let his youth concern him as a deterrent to serving God but should ensure that he serve "in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity", for these are what the Lord really cares about in your service.

Youth is a gift. Sadly, many only realise this after it has passed them by. The heart is willing but the flesh has become weak. One wants to serve in more church activities but age has worn away at their strength. One would like to devote more time to mission work but family commitments and responsibilities make it harder to leave the country. When one is older and more mature in the faith, one looks back at one's youth and regrets not doing more for God then. Why should you regret too, dear Teen? In your youth, God has given you boundless energy and enthusiasm as well as a fearless spirit and passion to pursue your ambitions. Many, however, choose to invest this in the pursuit of worldly things such as fame, wealth, hobbies, favourite celebrities, material goods, etc. Why not use your youth to serve your Heavenly Father who has redeemed you from sin and eternal death through the precious blood of His Son? Although you may be young in the faith but God can give you the wisdom to choose to use your youth to serve Him and not regret it when you are older. Pray and think carefully about how you should use your time and energy before just going after things that do not matter in Heaven. Do not think that you cannot serve God because you are too young or use your age as an excuse. As long as you keep a humble and teachable heart, God can use you to do His work, no matter what your age.

THOUGHT: Where do your youthful passions lie in your life?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, let not my youth deter me from serving Thee but instead enhance my service to Thee.

Proverbs 15:1-2
Memorise James 3:8-10
"but the tongue can no man tame"

ARE YOU SERVING IN WORD?

Have you ever been shouted at? What would happen if you shouted back at that person? Both of you would just become angrier and angrier, and your shouts would get louder and louder. If you instead use a soft calm voice and apologise to the other person, you will notice that he will eventually stop shouting and calm down as well. This is what Proverbs 15:1-2 is saying about using a soft answer to turn away wrath. When you encounter such a situation, it is wise to take a minute to calm down and pray before just reacting emotionally. Wrong "grievous" words that you do not actually mean but say in the heat of the moment can "stir up anger" and hurt the other person. They may be words that we will regret saying for a long time after. Likewise, this verse also speaks of how a wise person has control over his tongue and "useth knowledge aright". It is not the amount of knowledge the person has, but how he chooses to use it that makes him a wise person. He does not simply spout out what he knows or voice his opinion but considers the situation carefully first before choosing the right words to say. In contrast, a foolish person has no control over his tongue (James 3:8-10) and Proverbs describes how foolishness literally pours out of his mouth in a flood, hurting himself and the people around him.

Service is not just what you do in church on Sunday. Service to God involves surrendering your whole life to Him every second of everyday. Therefore, every word you speak should be God-honouring. Jesus said that, "not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man" (Matthew 15:11). What we say reflects what is in our heart. Will we be like the wise man who carefully chooses what words to use in each situation? Do we say a comforting word to a brother or sister in church who is grieving? Do we encourage and edify others with God's Word? Do we speak a word for Christ to an unbelieving friend? If we learn to use our tongue in a God-pleasing way, God can truly use our words to do His work. Conversely, if we fail to tame our tongue like the fool, we may end up damaging our relationships with our loved ones as well as undermining our witness for Christ.

THOUGHT: What are ways you can use "knowledge aright"?

PRAYER: Lord, guard my tongue and help me use it for Thy glory.

SATURDAY, DEC 27

1 Peter 1:15-16
Memorise 1 Peter 2:9
"when people look at us, they should see Christ"

ARE YOU SERVING IN CONVERSATION?

We must remember that we are different from the rest of the world. We have been called personally by God to be His people. We are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people", chosen to "shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Therefore, we cannot act like the rest of the world but must stand out as God's chosen people. In this world of sin, we must stand out by being holy and reflecting the light of our Heavenly Father in our lives. When people look at us, they should see Christ. 1 Peter 1:15-16 says that we must be holy in "all manner of conversation". The word "conversation" here does not mean speech but encompasses all types of behavior and conduct. We are therefore to behave as how Jesus would behave. Of course, holiness is not about being perfect but it is a desire to be godly and to avoid sin with God's help. We should be holy because the One who called us is holy.

How is your "conversation"? Will God be pleased with it? It begins when you wake up in the morning to get ready for the day. When you put on your clothes, are you dressing like the world by choosing clothes that bring attention to yourself or are designed to seduce the opposite gender? Or do you make the conscious effort to honour God in the type of clothes you choose? One can still dress well but in a modest way. In school, do you put in effort in your studies to be a good student for Christ? Or are you more concerned about impressing your friends or teachers than God? Are the leisure activities you take part in honoring to God? Are you spending more time pursuing these activities than spending time with God? Will God be pleased with how you interact with your parents and family members? Do you honour God and your parents in the way you speak to them? How about how you interact with your friends? Can your friends see Christ in you? Our sinful nature makes it hard to naturally be holy in our behaviour. We need to make a conscious effort to do so. Thankfully, we do not need to do this on our own effort. It is God who is holy who will enable us to be holy like Him as He continues to sanctify us in this life.

THOUGHT: What other aspects of your "conversation" can be improved on so that you can be "holy in all manner of conversation"?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me to honestly examine my life and submit to Thee the areas of my life where I need to be holy.

1 Corinthians 16:14
Memorise 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
"we need to serve with love and out of love as well"

ARE YOU SERVING IN CHARITY?

1 Corinthians 13:13 says that "the greatest of these is charity". Indeed, charity or love is the greatest Christian attribute of all because our God Himself is love. 1 John 4:7-8 says that "for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love". He performed the greatest act of love when He sent His only begotten Son to die for us. 1 John 4:10 says, "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins". When we do something in love, we are imitating God. Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to do all things with love. Not some things but all things. He encouraged them to conduct all church affairs in love and not in strife or vainglory. This would include worship service, interacting with one another, church meetings and all types of service in the church. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 explains exactly how to do all things with love. We should be longsuffering, kind, not envious, not proud, not selfish, not easily provoked, not thinking evil of others and rejoicing in truth.

We need to serve with love and out of love as well. What happens when we do not serve in charity? If love is not the motivating factor behind our actions, it will not take much to stop us from serving. If we only serve out of a sense of duty or obligation, we will very soon burn out and lose our desire to serve. We need to serve out of love for God and for our fellow brethren. If we do that, we will find that we will never find service burdensome or lose our patience with others. On the flip side, if we find that we have lost our joy in serving and start to become frustrated with others, we need to take a step back and reexamine our hearts. We may have forgotten why and how to serve. Let us then always be led back to charity and realign our motives for serving again. Let us remember that love is not just a feeling but it requires action on our part and effort to keep it in our hearts.

THOUGHT: Do you practise true charity as described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 when you serve in church?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to love as Thou love and help me to bring this love into my service to Thee.

MONDAY, DEC 29

Proverbs 16:32
Memorise Proverbs 25:28

"it is easier to conquer cities than to control one's temper"

ARE YOU SERVING IN SPIRIT?

Proverbs 16:32 describes a very interesting contrast. It compares a mighty warrior who conquers a city to a man who is in control of his anger and spirit. Amazingly, it is the latter who is proclaimed as better by the word of God. This means that it is actually easier to conquer cities and be powerful in warfare than to control one's temper. Alexander the Great is a good example of a mighty conqueror who won many battles but in a fit of anger, killed Cleitus, one of his best friends, after a quarrel. Proverbs 25:28 describes further that a man who has no rule over his own spirit is "like a city that is broken down, and without walls". Without control over his own temperament, he is ruled by his emotions and his actions erratically follow his passions. There are no boundaries or guards against his moods which are thrown back and forth like the wind. As a result, he becomes like a city without walls which are the stronghold of protection for the city. He is left exposed to every temptation and sin by allowing his spirit to rule him.

God does not want us to be ruled by every whim and fancy of our temperament. He wants us to practise self-control and act according to His Word instead of just acting out an emotional response. It is not easy to learn how to control your spirit, especially in your teenage years as this usually takes years of maturity and experience to learn. However, by acknowledging the need to control your spirit and actively watching out for times when you might lose control of your spirit, you start out on the right foot to learn self-control. Such times would include disagreements with your parents where you may feel anger and a rebellious spirit welling up inside you. An alarm should go off in your mind and you should quickly quench this anger before it explodes into hurtful and dishonouring words to your parents. Another example would be when feelings of jealousy or envy arise in your heart when you compare yourself with others and covet what they have. You may covet someone's possessions and their ability to afford them. You may also covet someone's qualities and popularity. It is important then to prevent these emotions from going out of control such that it leads to sin. As you slowly learn about how your spirit reacts, you can stop it from going out of control earlier and therefore, serve God better.

THOUGHT: Can you identify certain circumstances where you may lose control of your spirit? What can you do to help yourself control your spirit better in these situations?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help me to learn to control my spirit better.

Hebrews 11:6
Memorise Matthew 17:20
"without faith it is impossible to please Him"

ARE YOU SERVING IN FAITH?

Hebrews 11:1 speaks of how faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen". It then goes on to cite examples of Old Testament saints such as Abel, Enoch, Abraham and Moses who exercised faith even though there was no concrete and visible evidence of what they believed in at that moment. For example, Noah built the ark in faith even though no one had even experienced rain at that time. He just obeyed God's instructions and acted in faith. Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith it is impossible to please Him". Without faith, we would not even seek for God and would not "believe that He is". God is pleased when we believe in Him as He is glorified as Creator and Almighty God. He is magnified when we place our faith in His providence and trust in Him to provide our every need. When we do not exercise faith in Him, it is as if we are proclaiming that He as God is not strong enough to help us. A lack of faith is unbelief in God's sovereignty, power and wisdom. It undermines His name, nature as well as His Word when we do not believe what He says. Therefore, it is not enough to just know God's Word but we need to sincerely believe what it says. This type of faith in spiritual things can only come from God Himself.

When we serve God in whatever avenue that God has placed us in, we need faith. Faith means that we are trusting in God to enable us to serve Him, instead of relying on our own strength. All we need is "faith as a grain of mustard seed", the least of all seeds (Matthew 17:20). For this, we need a humble spirit that acknowledges our need for God. We need to ask Him to help us even in areas of service which we may think are easy and can be handled on our own. For example, we may think handing out bulletins for worship service is easy and does not require God's help. However, without God's help, we may grow tired of coming early to serve and slowly lose our enthusiasm for greeting people. We may also fail to recognise newcomers and miss out specially welcoming them. Eventually we may even just give up this area of service. God does not want us to just serve for the sake of serving. He also does not need us to do His work. Instead, He chooses to use us to do His work so that we may exercise faith in Him and grow closer in our relationship with Him. Is that what you desire too, dear Teen?

THOUGHT: Are you exercising faith in your service to God?

PRAYER: Dear Lord, grant me more faith to trust Thee in all things.

WEDNESDAY, DEC 31

1 Peter 1:22
Memorise 1 Timothy 2:22-26

"when we serve, we must serve with a pure heart"

ARE YOU SERVING IN PURITY?

Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." Who are the pure in heart? The heart of sinful man can never be pure on its own. By right, we can never see God and can never come into His holy presence. However, 1 Peter 1:22 explains how we may purify our souls. It is through "obeying the truth through the Spirit". This truth is God's Word, His precious Gospel which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16). By obeying His Gospel and accepting Jesus Christ as our Saviour through the Holy Spirit, the impurity in our hearts is washed away by the blood of Christ and His perfect righteousness is imputed in us. Our hearts become pure and we can then "see God" and "come boldly unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). After having our hearts purified, we should then obey Jesus' commandment to love one another; as He has loved us (John 13:34). This love for our fellow brethren in Christ should be "unfeigned" which is not a false selfish love, as well as fervent. It comes forth from a pure heart which has pure intentions. It loves not for anything in return or for selfish gains like popularity. Through our love for one another, Jesus tell us "by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples" (John 13:35).

When we serve, we must serve with a pure heart. A pure heart is, first and foremost, a regenerated heart which has received Christ into it. We need to check our salvation to ensure that we are truly saved. This is the prerequisite for serving in purity. Secondly, we need to make sure our hearts are not entertaining sin. We need to "flee also youthful lusts" by purging sin and worldliness from our lives, and "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). Lastly, to serve in purity, we need to check that our love for our brethren is "unfeigned" and is pure in motive. All these steps can be done by studying God's Word as it is "sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). We need the Word of God to purify our hearts for service.

THOUGHT: Is your heart pure in its love for your fellow brethren?

PRAYER: Purify my heart with Thy Word, O Lord.

Notes

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