

July to September 2021
Teenz RPG Series on

Christ our perfect example

Is Christ your Perfect Example?

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

DO YOU TAKE CHRIST AS YOUR PERFECT EXAMPLE?

It is our natural human tendency to always want to look to others as examples for us to follow. From young, children look to their parents as examples and emulate them. As they grow up, they begin to look to their friends, famous people and celebrities, or other people that they respect in their lives and try to pattern their lives after them. However, of all these role models that we have, none of them would come even close to the perfect example that we must all follow, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone lived a blameless, sinless life, died for our sins, and then calls on us to take Him as the supreme standard to strive towards.

1 John 2:6 tells us that if we claim to abide in Christ, if we have a close relationship with Him, then we would walk just as He walked. Who abides in Christ? Every single Christian! John 15:6 warns us that anyone who does not abide in Christ is not a believer, and he is as a branch that is fit only to be burned in the fire. Therefore if you have repented of your sins and truly confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then you must abide in Him, and pattern your life after his life. We must walk, that is to conduct our lives in the same manner that He conducted His. This ought to be the natural inclination of every true believer. Just as a child would very naturally and even subconsciously follow after his parents in everything, from their way of thinking, speaking, and even the small quirky mannerisms, so should our lives emulate that of our Lord and Saviour.

Dear Teen, is this the desire that you have for your life, that each day you will become more and more conformed to the image of Christ? Or do you even have a personal relationship with Him to begin with? If you do, then you should look upon Him as the perfect example that you ought to strive towards. Realise that He was indeed a real historical person who lived a life on earth, the details of which are recorded for us in the 4 gospels. Over the next three months, we will look at various incidences and accounts in the life of Jesus, and draw lessons that we can apply in our lives. As we study each passage of scripture, we must constantly examine ourselves, and ask if we have been walking, even as He has walked.

Thought: To walk as Christ walked is to follow in His footsteps.

Prayer: Lord, may You help me to look upon Christ as the perfect example to which I can pattern my life after.

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW CHRIST?

When young people idolise a certain pop star or celebrity, they would do all they can to know as much about the person as possible. They would spend hours reading up about them on the internet, watch their shows, buy their merchandise, and even spend hundreds or thousands of dollars just to see them in person. They do all this, just to know more about a fellow sinful human who is probably not even a good role model to follow.

As Christians, we know that it is wrong to become so enamoured with these media personalities such that it becomes idolatry. Instead, there is one person whom we must focus on knowing much better, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. For Paul, his life's goal was that he be able to put aside all the things of the world that he used to seek after, but strive only for the '*excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus*'. Therefore he made the wonderful declaration in Philippians 3:10, that this desire for knowledge is not just an intellectual knowledge, but an experiential one. One commentator has paraphrased the verse in this manner: 'In order that I may personally know Him, that I might both experience His resurrection power and share in His sufferings, and thus I will be more and more conformed to His death'. Indeed this ought to be the goal of every Christian, that our knowledge of Christ be not just a cursory understanding of a few major events of the gospel and that's it, but a true in depth relationship with Him that results in identification with not just his life but also his suffering and death.

As we endeavour to have Christ as our perfect example, we must begin with a right knowledge of Him. It is only when we know a person more intimately, that we can think more like him, act as he acts, walk as he walks. This knowledge can only come when we grow in our relationship with Christ. Thus we must sincerely ask ourselves this question – how well do I know Christ? Is He just an interesting character in the Bible, or perhaps do we regard Him as perhaps this kind and benevolent but rather distant benefactor? We must learn to cultivate a close and personal relationship with Jesus. As we trace the footsteps of Jesus through the gospels, may He come alive in our hearts and minds, as we draw closer and closer to Him

Thought: How can I take Jesus as my perfect example if I know nothing about Him?

Prayer: Lord, help me to know more and more about Jesus everyday.

IS CHRIST YOUR EXAMPLE IN HUMILITY?

As we desire to take Christ as our perfect example, we need to know Him better. The best way then, is to put on the mind of Christ, or as Paul put it, to ‘let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus’. But what does that mean? The passage before us elaborates on this thought, and zooms in on the idea of the great humility of Christ as He came to this world. This was God becoming man. Jesus put aside heaven’s glories and became like you and me, limited by time and space. He was ‘in the form of God’, meaning that he was fully God in heaven, with all the divine glory and power that is associated with being God. He was all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present, perfect in all His being. Yet when He came to earth, Jesus willingly emptied himself of his divine glory and was made in the likeness of man. He ‘thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ meaning he did not think the idea of ‘being God’ was something to grab hold of, or something too difficult to give up. He was willing to set aside some aspects of his divinity for a season, in order that He may come this world to save man. That is what it means by ‘made himself of no reputation’ - he emptied himself of the divine glory of being God, of the rights and privileges of being in heaven, and instead subjected himself to become weak, helpless, mortal man. What an amazing thought this is.

But not only that, verse 8 tells us of this purpose for which he came to the world – to die! The description of his extreme humility continues, as it describes how he, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself even further, and submitted himself to become obedient unto death! Realise that it was not because Judas outsmarted him, or that the Roman soldiers were too strong. Jesus knew what was coming, and he willingly submitted himself to the hands of wicked men, to be put to death in the most humiliating way possible – being crucified as a common criminal on the cross. There, he faced the penalty not for his own sins, for he was perfect, but for the sin of the world, for the sin of mankind.

When we realise the magnitude of what Christ has done for us, our petty accomplishments and pride really count for nothing! Instead, let us take the example of Christ’s humility, and pattern our lives after Him. We must realise that nothing we suffer can ever compare to the great sacrifice that He has made for us.

Thought: Am I willing to suffer for the Lord?

Prayer: Lord, help me to see Jesus as my example for humility.

HOW DO YOU HANDLE REJECTION?

When a famous person, a world leader, celebrity or VIP visits a certain place, his arrival is normally met with great fanfare, the ‘red-carpet treatment’, and surrounded by much media coverage. This is the sort of attention that the world gives to people that they respect and love.

Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us. He was the Messiah whom the whole of the Old Testament looked forward towards. Every faithful Jew should have known about the prophecies concerning Jesus, and looked forward to His coming with the eyes of faith. We would expect that Jesus, having left heaven’s glories to come to this earth to save sinful men, would have received a hero’s welcome. He above all should be the one highly exalted and praised. Yet we are told that when Jesus finally did come to earth, ‘he came unto his own, but his own received him not’. How sad! Nobody, besides a few faithful Jews (like John the Baptist, Anna and Simeon) recognised for who He was. For the rest of the Jews, they largely ignored this great event. Not only that, we will go on to see how throughout his life and ministry on earth, he was hated, despised and mocked at. The scribes and the Pharisees, who were supposed to be the most religious Jews, were the very ones who persecuted Him and constantly tried to find fault with his every action. Ultimately, Jesus was completely rejected by His own, and was sentenced to death for crimes he never committed, by the most humiliating and painful possible – a shameful death on the cross. However, all these did not discourage Jesus, neither did they cause him to deviate from his purpose in coming to earth, that is to save the very people who were rejecting him. What love!

How about us? How do we handle rejection, persecution and difficulties in life? How will we respond when we get ostracized by the people whom we try to witness to in love? How will we react when we try to do the right thing, but get persecuted instead? Always remember the example of Jesus, and how he faced the greatest rejection of all, but he never capitulated in the face of adversity, but persevered on, knowing that His purpose was not to please man, but only to please God the Father who had sent him.

Thought: The sort of rejection that we face is pittance compared to the way the world rejected Christ.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the courage and perseverance to handle rejection in my life.

HOW SHOULD WE RELATE TO OUR PARENTS?

Strictly speaking Jesus only had one biological parent and that was Mary, for he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, as the Bible is careful to distinguish (Luke 2:43 describes them as *‘Joseph and his mother’*). Nonetheless in terms of relationship, we know that Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly in honouring them and submitting himself to them. In Luke 2:41-49, we read of how Jesus was brought to Jerusalem by his parents for the feast of the Passover. At the end of the feast, he stayed behind and was perhaps missed because of the huge crowd that would gather at Jerusalem. His parents had actually started on the journey back for a day, assuming he was within the group they had come with, before they realised he was missing. Straightaway, they began to backtrack to look for him, and you can imagine the fear and anxiety that they had knowing that their 12 year old child was missing! They found him three days later in the midst of the temple, listening to the ‘doctors’ (teachers) and asking them questions. When they questioned him, he answered with this profound statement: *“how is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?”* (Luke 2:49). Such a response might seem like a rather rebellious and wilful one at first. Was Jesus being disobedient and irresponsible in leaving his parents and not informing them about his whereabouts? We must understand the unique circumstances of this situation. Jesus when He stayed behind, and then made that statement in Luke 2:49, he was signalling clearly to Joseph and Mary that He was the Son of God, and His purpose on earth was to do His Father’s bidding. He was certainly not disobeying them, but He was obeying a far higher authority and that is God the Father. It is important to note that verse 51 further adds how after all this, Jesus returned with them to Nazareth, and was subject (meaning to be subordinate to, to obey, as how a child would to a parent) to them. This would be for the next 18 years of his life until he began his public ministry.

Likewise for us, our foremost authority in our life would be God and the Word of God. But God has also given us parents to guide us, especially in the early years of our life before we reach adulthood. We are told to obey and honour our parents in the Lord. Some of you may claim lament about generation gaps, or claim that your parents don’t understand you. Yet no matter what, we too must be subject to them, even as Jesus, who though He was God, also obeyed his human parents and was subject to them.

Thought: Is our ‘generation gap’ real? Or just an excuse?

Prayer: Lord, teach me to always love, honour and obey my parents.

HOW SHOULD WE RELATE TO OTHERS?

As we saw yesterday, Jesus spent his years growing up under watchful and dutiful parents. We realise also that he would have interacted with people around him in his home town of Nazareth. Are you curious as to how he was as a boy growing up? Luke 2:52 gives us a few clues, a glimpse into the childhood and growing up years of the Lord Jesus Christ. It simply states that as he grew, *“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”*. This is indeed a wonderful example for our learning, especially as we too are growing up, moving from youth to adulthood.

We want to focus especially on the second part of the sentence, where it stated that as Jesus grew mentally and physically, He also increased in his favour with God and man. This is not to say that there was a time where Jesus was less in favour and then he increased in it. But what we can understand from this phrase is that as Jesus grew and matured, He was constantly perfectly in favour with both God and man. He behaved and acted as a person of His age would have, but in a manner that always pleased God and also the people around Him. He never offended them, never had any reason to find fault with anything that He said or did. Basically in all His relationships, he was blameless! He can be said to have been the perfect example of an obedient child, one that every parent would love to have.

Dear Teen, this verse can be a description of you as well. If we take Jesus as our perfect example, and strive to pattern our lives after Him; if we seek the Lord and abide in His Word, then we too will certainly increase in wisdom and maturity, and also gain the favour of those around us. Most importantly, we will always have the favour of God in our lives. Is this something that you desire in your life? Do you care for the favour of God and the people around you? As we begin to become more independent, and meet different people through the different phases of life that we will experience, we must always be careful to ensure that we relate to others in a Christ-like manner. We must always be mindful that our purpose on this earth is to bear a good testimony for the Lord, and in so doing, be in favour with God and man.

Thought: I'm growing physically, but am I also growing in wisdom and in spiritual maturity?

Prayer: Lord help me to increase in favour with God and man.

DO YOU USE THE WORD OF GOD WHEN TEMPTED?

Right after Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led him into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The verb *'tempted'* is in the present tense, giving the idea that it was not just 3 specific incidences that he was tempted, but that continually throughout the 40 day ordeal he was continually assaulted by the Devil. It was at the very end of the 40 days that the Devil appeared to Him one final time and made one final push to try to cause Jesus to sin.

The threefold temptation that Jesus faced was the same temptation that the Devil tempted Adam with in the Garden of Eden – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Unlike Adam, Jesus was victorious. He defeated Satan with the Word of God, and in so doing he achieved righteousness through a perfect obedience to the commandments of God. Christ alone was able to fulfil the covenant of works which Adam failed in, and in so doing, through this active obedience, he fulfilled all righteousness that enabled His death on the cross to be worthy to atone our sins. Thus it is important to note that our salvation was wrought for us not just through the sufferings of Christ on the Cross, but also through his active obedience throughout his life on Earth. This event is but one which exemplifies the perfection of Jesus while he was on Earth.

Throughout the temptation of Jesus, He only used one thing to resist the attacks of Satan, and that was the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. This continues today, to be the one and only thing which we have to counter the attacks of the Evil One. We must know the Bible well if we are to be successful in our Christian walk! The question we should ask ourselves is how well do we really know the Word of God? We may read it for a few minutes every day, been in church for years, and attended Sunday School, and many Bible studies. But do we really know the Bible well enough to stand against the Devil? Remember that Satan is far smarter than we think, and knows the Bible far better than many Christians. Temptation can come any time, any place, and we must be prepared! Remember that when temptation comes our way, we must always be quick to brandish the Word of God as our sure defence against any attack that Satan can send our way. Is this your response to temptations?

Thought: How can I use the Word of God if I don't know it well?

Prayer: Lord may You grant me the faith to be more diligent in my study of Thy Word, and be able to use it in times of temptation.

HOW SHOULD WE ADDRESS OUR PARENTS?

There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus went there together with his mother to celebrate at the marriage feast. Halfway through the festivities, they ran out of wine. Mary then turned to Jesus and told him so, perhaps worried that this would bring disgrace to the family hosting the feast. Possibly implicit in her statement, was also a request for Jesus to demonstrate his miraculous ability, to somehow provide wine for them. However to this Jesus replied, *“woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come”* (John 2:4). At first glance, this reply seems a bit surprising. In our present lingo, to call your mother ‘woman’ is most disrespectful, and the phrase ‘what have I to do with thee’ sounds even confrontational! However we know for sure that Jesus, being sinless, was not addressing His mother in the way that we think He is. Examining the phrase in the original, we would realise that the word translated as ‘woman’, is actually a term of respect, of one which you would use to lovingly address an older lady. The next phrase is an idiomatic expression in Greek that literally translates as ‘what is it to you and to me?’ Through this verse, Jesus is expressing the fact that as God, this issue is of his concern and not Mary’s. But within it is also an exhortation for her to dismiss her fears and anxieties, and to trust in Him, not as her son, but as God. We can see that she understood, for in the next verse, she gives instruction to the people to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. But through this small incident, we see the love and patience of Jesus in addressing Mary, always with respect and with a good purpose. Although Mary was mistaken in trying to tell Jesus what to do, he never got angry, but instead encouraged her faith. Of course the circumstances were rather unique, as He was the Son of God and knew all things.

For us, we must ask ourselves how our relationships with our parents are like. Oftentimes they may ask you questions out of love and concern, being interested to know more about your life. What sort of responses do you give them? Do you snap back with impatient indignation? Even when your parents might have said something wrong, remember that they too are human and can make mistakes. Do not be so quick to correct them or berate them for their errors, but instead to take the example of Jesus to respond in love, desiring to encourage, comfort and strengthen. Realise that your parents are people too and need encouragement as well!

Thought: Has familiarity (with parents) bred contempt (from you)?

Prayer: Lord, help me to always honour my parents.

DO YOU SHOW HIGH REGARD FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD?

Jesus was furious. It was near the feast of the Passover. He entered into the temple at Jerusalem, expecting to see all the preparations in order for the great feast that remembers how the Lord brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt. It was to be a memorable celebration, whereby in the killing of the Passover lamb, they would be able to look forward in faith to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. However, upon entering into the temple, what He saw instead was a scene no different from a common market place! People were buying and selling and making profit from their wickedly devised scheme of ‘temple currency’. These money changes had made His *“Father’s house an house of merchandise”*! Upon seeing all these terrible corruptions committed in the house of prayer, the place of worship, Jesus made a whip of small cords and drove them out of the temple, poured out the changer’s money and overthrew the table! In Mark 11:17, it is recorded how Jesus described this scene as *“a den of thieves”*. It was indeed a very passionate response that showed how jealous He was for His Father’s house. Because He knew the significance and importance of the worship of God, He reacted in such an explosive manner. We often remember Jesus to be gentle and mild, meek in spirit and all-loving. However in this scene, we also see the courage and strength of Jesus exhibited, as He had righteous anger against the people that had profaned the house of God.

Dear teen, do you care about the state of the house of God? Do you have a high regard for worship? We must first cultivate within ourselves the right attitude towards worship. If God does have first place in our lives, then all that we do and say will be to His glory. When we come to church on the Lord’s Day, that ought to be the highlight of our week, where we can join in together with the people of God to sing praises to our Lord and our King. If we see people who claim to be worshipping God, but not doing it in the right manner, or in a way that would instead tarnish the name of God, then we do have the right to be angry about it, because God’s glory is at stake! For us, we can do what we can to encourage our Christian friends to seek to worship the Lord in a manner that is most pleasing in His sight, and not to pander to man’s fleshly desires.

Thought: High regard for the worship of God can only come if we have a high regard for God himself!

Prayer: Help me to worship rightly and encourage others to do so.

DO YOU Evangelise TO OTHERS?

Central to every Christian ministry, is the preaching of the Word. If a ministry does not extend the work of the gospel in some way or another, it is not a useful ministry to have. Whilst Jesus was on earth, He was also very much involved in the work of evangelism. He was constantly on the move, going from city to city to preach the gospel, and also training his disciples to be the ones to carry the gospel to all the ends of the earth. The message preached by Jesus was an urgent one. It was a call for action! Jesus told them that the kingdom of God is at hand, meaning it is very near, and all who want to enter into the kingdom must repent and believe the gospel. There is no other way. Today the gospel has been so twisted and warped, that we lose sight of what true evangelical faith really is. In order for one to be saved, he must show the following evidences in his lives – repentance to God, and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21). It is not possible for one to claim that he believes in Christ and acknowledges his sin, and yet have no desire to evidence any change in his life. If one says he believes, but still consciously clings tightly to his sin and never repents, then he has not truly received the gospel. A true believer would and must definitely have both repentance and faith in order to be saved. Only that is true conversion, and the only conversion that the Bible speaks of.

For us, we must take the example of Jesus and likewise impress upon our hearers the urgency of the message, for Jesus is coming soon! Some ministries would be directly involved in this, for example evangelism or preaching or Sunday school ministries, fellowship groups, literature ministries. Others would assist them, for example the PA ministry is much needed in order for the message on Sunday to be heard, or the transport ministry that would bring people to church to hear the gospel, or the kitchen ministry that would foster a good environment in which the gospel can be shared or Christians edified in fellowship. Whatever the case might be, we are all in this gospel ministry together, endeavouring to help in whatever way we can for the preaching of the gospel. Thus our whole life, everything that we do and every area of service we involve ourselves in, must be for the furtherance of the kingdom of God! Dear teen, is your life one that is useful to the cause of evangelism?

Thought: To share the gospel, I must first exemplify the gospel through my life.

Prayer: Lord, may You make me an effective witness for You!

ARE YOU PREJUDICED AGAINST OTHER RACES?

The Samaritans were looked upon by the Jews as a 'mongrel' race. They were of mixed heritage, not pure Jews like themselves. Ever since Samaria had been conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC (read 2 Kings 17), the people were dispersed and had intermarried with other races; the city had been under foreign rule, and the people had engaged in a form of syncretistic worship, combining the worship of Jehovah with that of other false idols. Through the years, a great hatred and animosity had begun to develop between these two people, such that the Jews took a huge detour when they travelled down to Jerusalem from the north, just so that they would not have to pass through Samaria. This was why it was so surprising to the Samaritan woman at the well when Jesus, being a Jew, asked drink of her for she knew clearly that "*the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans*". In this we see that Jesus showed no prejudice. He looked upon the woman of Samaria with love and compassion. He saw her coming to the well and asked her for water to drink, not because he was helpless to get his own water or that he so desperately needed a drink, but he did so in order that he would have an opportunity to strike up a conversation with the woman and share the gospel with her. Through the verses that follow, we see how Jesus would lead her to understand that He was indeed the Christ, and as a result she became a most effective evangelist who spread the good news to the whole city!

In our society, there are many different races and people that have congregated in cosmopolitan Singapore. Are you prejudiced against anyone? Do you have this sort of racial or nationalistic pride that looks down upon other races or nationalities? Realise that we are all fellow sinful humans who all need the saving grace of our Lord. God is the one who has made all of us, and there is no difference, between you and the people around you. In the eyes of God, there are only two real types of people – the saved and the unsaved. If you have the gospel and are headed to heaven, then your responsibility is to bring this wonderful truth to those around you, like how Jesus preached to the Samaritan woman, and how she in turn shared this great news to the people in her city!

Thought: Colossians 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

Prayer: Lord, grant me love and compassion, not prejudice and hatred.

ARE YOU EASILY DISTRACTED WHEN SERVING GOD?

In the account of our passage today, Jesus spoke those words to his disciples after His encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. Jesus had departed from Judaea on His way to Galilee and in order to reach there, He went through Samaria. The total journey was 3 days long and it was entirely on foot. Jesus arrived at the well at the 6th hour which is noon where the sun is at its highest. We are told in John 4:6 that Jesus was tired from the journey and so he took a rest at the well. We can also glean from verses 7 and 8 that Jesus must have also been both thirsty and hungry. This is also evident from verse 31 where the disciples pleaded for Him to eat. The reply that Jesus gave when asked was rather puzzling at first. He said *"I have meat to eat that ye know not of"* (v. 32). The disciples were puzzled and thought that Jesus had already eaten. Jesus explained that His *"meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* Just as meat is needful and necessary for our physical nourishment, something we cannot do without, Jesus was saying that doing the Father's will was just as necessary and in fact more needful. Christ continued to explain in verse 35, that the fields were white, meaning the crops in the fields were ripe and ready for harvest. Christ was showing them that there is much of God's work to be done, for the field of human souls is vast and ready to be harvested. Christ was ready to forgo food and water to share the good news with that Samaritan woman. It was clear that Christ was weary and needed physical nourishment, yet He endured the hunger and tiredness and focused instead on fulfilling God's will.

How hard do you work for the Lord? Were there occasions where you had to miss a meal so that you could serve the Lord? When was the last time you felt really burnt out in service for the Lord? Or are you one who gets easily distracted and sway away in your service soon after starting? One day you make a great commitment and another you change your mind. Or are you willing to go the extra mile in your service? Such should be our service for the King of kings. He who saved us and made us His children has also given us the privilege to serve Him. He certainly deserves our utmost efforts and attention. Are you willing? May the Lord give the grace to serve Him faithfully.

Thought: A faithful servant is one who continues to serve until God tells us that our job is done.

Prayer: Father, help me to be a good and faithful servant.

DO YOU SHARE THE GOSPEL WITH YOUR FAMILY?

At the early part of the ministry of Christ, Jesus spoke to the people of Nazareth. Nazareth was where Jesus was brought up. The people of Nazareth knew Him and His family. They were His kinsmen. On a Sabbath day, Jesus went into the synagogue and read from the book of Isaiah and revealed unto the people there that He was the promised Messiah that was foretold in Scripture. One has to take a moment to understand the significance of this act. God came into their midst and they could not recognise God. Hence, God, in His mercy and grace decides to reveal the truth about His deity to them. The people in the synagogue were familiar with the promised Messiah of scripture. They have been waiting for His coming for thousands of years and Christ was gracious enough to reveal Himself unto them. The Messiah is here, before their very eyes! But their response was sadly not one of joy and praise. Instead, they were angry and ready to drive Jesus out and cast Him over a hill to kill Him. This is recorded for us in Luke 4. It was with this context that Christ uttered the words in our passage for today. Jesus knew that this was going to be their response before He even stepped foot into the synagogue. Being God, He had all knowledge of all events even those that have not yet happened. But one has to wonder why did Christ still persist to speak to the people of Nazareth knowing well that He will face rejection? Jesus' own kinsmen were among the first to be offered salvation. Jesus did not neglect them knowing that they would reject Him. The people of Nazareth were blessed to have Christ in their midst. As believers, we are in a similar position. Our family members, particularly those not saved, are blessed by our presence in their midst because we hold the truth to eternal life. We hold the greatest good news of all ages that Christ can save them from their sins unto the utter most. We have the gospel. Like Christ, we must share it with our family, even if we know that we would likely be rejected by them. What a great tragedy if while we live so close to them and yet the gospel was never made known to them by us. The great news, this great treasure and a pearl of great price, is really no further than in the very same house that they live in. While you think of your friends who need salvation, never forget your very own family!

Thought: Do I know how much time we have with our family?

Prayer: Father, give me the courage and the urgency to share the gospel with my family.

DO YOU PRAY FOR STRENGTH WHEN YOU ARE TIRED?

Jesus was very much a human being like you and me. He had a normal human body that needed food and rest. There were times when He was thirsty and was hungry and other times we know Jesus was physically tired. When Jesus assumed the form of a man, He took upon Himself a completely human body so that His eventual sacrifice on the cross would be perfect. In our passage today, we read that Jesus rose up very early in the morning and went to a solitary place to pray. To better understand the context of this passage we should read the passages before it. In doing so, we learn that the day before, Jesus was brought many who needed healing and healed many of them. In Mark 1:33 we read, “*all the city were gathered together at the door*”. This would mean that there were hundreds if not thousands of people seeking Jesus’ attention and healing powers. They came in the evening after the sun set, and so they probably would have been there late into the night. We must remember that Jesus had the constitution of an ordinary man, and would have been very exhausted by the episode. It is in this context that we read that Jesus then awoke very early the next day to pray. If you were Jesus, what would you have done? Probably we will just take the day off and rest. Instead, we are told that He rose up very early in the morning! Sleep was not on His mind though He must have been tired. Instead his priority was to pray! What do you think would have been the content of Jesus’ prayer? I think He would certainly have asked for God to restore His physical strength. He would have asked for grace for the coming day so as to glorify God yet again.

Do you often feel tired after a long school day? I’m sure there are many challenges to wear you out. What do you think to do when you feel weak and exhausted? Do you yearn for the time when you can rest, just lay in bed? Or, do you think to pray? Christ gave us the example. Christ through His actions showed us as believers what we should do. When tired, pray. Christ took it very seriously. He set aside the very early hours of the day and spent time alone with God the Father. He knew the importance and necessity of it. We too should do the same, so that we too can glorify God in the coming day.

Thought: In prayer, ask for things that will honour the Lord, not ourselves.

Prayer: Father, help me to pray without ceasing.

WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY MINISTRY ON EARTH?

Mark records for us that Jesus began His ministry in Galilee. His message was very simple and clear. He taught that the time is now fulfilled, the promised Kingdom of God is at hand. What this means is that the time is now here that the Messiah is now come, and that all man must repent and believe in the gospel, the good news of salvation. Jesus went into the synagogues to teach and His authority in the truth astonished those who heard Him. Jesus also healed many and cast out demons. The people had never seen anything like this before and naturally, a great multitude of people followed wherever He went. When the disciples found Jesus praying alone, they told Him that many people were seeking after Him (Mark 1:37). Instead of responding that He would return to them, Jesus gave instruction to leave and go into the next town. He explained that this was so that He could preach there also and that that was His ministry, the reason He came forth. Healing was not the only ministry of Christ. Christ had many important ministries to fulfill. Other than preaching the gospel, Christ was also preparing the disciples to be the Apostles of the Church. The most important ministry of all was that Christ's came to Earth so that He could present Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

What do you think is your primary ministry as a believer? The Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Our primary ministry is to glorify God. To glorify God we have to obey Him in all aspects of our lives. We have to live lives unto “sanctification and honour” (1 Thessalonians 4:4). We have to faithfully fulfill the callings of service that He has called us unto. We have to fulfill the Great Commission of sharing the gospel and being His witness. There are many duties we must fulfill to glorify and honour our Lord. With the help of the Holy Spirit we can do so. But we must be vigilant and diligent to do so (1 Corinthians 9:27). It is a constant battle and a marathon. We need God's help every single day of our lives to fulfill our ministry.

Thought: Prayer is the means that God has given us to obtain grace and strength to glorify Him.

Prayer: Father, help me to recognise my need for You daily.

“...He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked”

DO YOU SHOW COMPASSION TO THOSE IN NEED?

As you study God’s Word more and grow in your faith as a believer, you will also learn more about what God is like. Scripture reveals many aspects of God to us. God is certainly a God of judgment. God can be angry and we know how He hates sin and will not spare judgment until the sinner repents. We should fear God. Scripture also reveals to us a patient longsuffering God who is gentle and kind. He withholds chastisement and gives the sinner opportunities to repent. Today’s passage teaches us that God is a God of compassion. His heart aches when He sees someone suffering. The leper came to Jesus, knelt down and begged for Jesus to heal Him. In the day of Christ, lepers were considered unclean by the people and this was understandably so, because leprosy is a disease that is contagious in nature. Most people would have responded with disgust and shunned the leper. However, this was not what Christ did. We read that, Christ was moved with compassion by the leper who knelt before Him. Mark recorded that not only did He not shun the leper, He did a thing that was most repulsive and unthinkable to the Jews – He *“put forth his hand, and touched him”*. Knowing that lepers were deemed unclean and had a very contagious disease, Christ nonetheless touched the leper. What love!

Do you feel for those in need? How far will you go to help someone who is in trouble or is in pain? It’s easy to help someone that you like. How about someone you do not like? Will you still extend your hand to help if he or she is in need? Christ loved the leper who was so repulsive to the common folk. In fact, in many ways, as unbelievers, we were completely undesirable ourselves. Yet Romans 5:8 tells us that God commendeth his love toward us while we were sinners. We were enemies to God and yet He loved us and saved us. Likewise, if Christ can love us sinners, we too should learn to love and show compassion to those who are not so loveable. If we recognise our true state and remember how Christ loved us despite that, it should humble us to feel more compassion for others. We are, after all, just sinners saved by grace.

Thought: We ought to love as Christ loved, to show compassion as He showed compassion.

Prayer: Father, help me to love others as Thou hast in Thy mercy loved me.

"...I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

DO YOU SHOW LOVE TO SINNERS?

As Jesus passed by a toll booth where the tax-collectors sat to collect customs (taxes), Jesus called Levi (also known as Matthew) to follow him. He was a publican, one who was despised by the Jews. They were widely regarded as sinners, and the scum of society. The Jews considered them traitors, for they were under the employ of the Roman rulers, helping to collect tax on their behalf. Invariably they would be corrupt, often over-taxing and then keeping a large part of the profits for themselves, stealing and extorting money from their own people, like Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Yet it is to this particular despised and rejected group in society, that Jesus chose to minister to. He approached Levi who was sitting in the tax-office, in the very midst of engaging in his corrupt practices, and said unto him: *"Follow me"*. Jesus was calling him to forsake his sinful life, to leave the life of a publican, and to become a disciple of Christ. Jesus had no wealth, no job prospects in the worldly sense, and not even a place to lay his head. What Jesus was offering was a chance to repent and follow Jesus. Levi willingly accepted, and straightaway arose, left his post, and followed Him. Jesus and his disciples then joined him in his house and at with other publicans, much to the chagrin of the Pharisees.

To those who acknowledge their sin, Jesus patiently and lovingly sits with them, preaches to them, disciples them. This was the mission of Jesus - to seek and save those who are lost. The publicans and sinners knew their sinful state and need for a savior. They knew full well that by themselves, based on their own works, they would never be able to attain the righteousness needed for salvation. Therefore, they willingly joined Levi to sit and eat with Jesus and his disciples, and hear the message that He was bringing. This should be our pattern for outreach and church ministry as well. Our doors must always be open, and declare that whosoever will may come. When we go out to evangelise, we must never think of anyone as a 'lost cause', and pre-judge them as one who would probably not want to receive the gospel. Jesus sat with these 'scum of society', and even called one to serve as his disciple. Likewise, we too are called to go out to not just the 'decent' people of society but to all walks of life, and to show love by bringing them the best news ever - the gospel that saves!

Thought: I am saved, because God loved me, even while I was a sinner.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love you more, and to show the love of Christ to all around me, for they all need the gospel that saves!

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH?

Jesus and His disciples went into the cornfields on the Sabbath day to pluck corn for food. The Pharisees saw this and condemned Jesus and His disciples for doing so. The Pharisees said that they were not doing that which was lawful according to God's law, or at least their own erroneous interpretation of it. The Pharisees were a religious group who were originally formed to help ensure that the people of Israel kept to God's Word in the Old Testament. However, over time, the Pharisees became fanatical and corrupt. They enforced God's law without understanding and even created laws of their own. Although these extra laws were man-made, the Pharisees expected the Jews to follow them like they were to follow God's law. This was the case for the Sabbath-keeping. For instance, one of these laws required the Jews not to travel more than a certain distance on the Sabbath or else they would have broken God's law. The Pharisees distorted the meaning and purpose of the Sabbath. Christ's response in verse 27 was that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. What Jesus meant was that God gave man the Sabbath for his spiritual and physical benefit. The Sabbath was not intended to enslave man into following after strict laws to the point where it no longer benefited man but instead became a burden. We are expected to obey God's law with understanding. God gave us the Sabbath so that we can set aside 1 day in 7 to focus on worshipping and serving God. If not for the Sabbath, many of us would have probably continued working or indulging in some leisure activity and forgot God altogether. God knows our forgetful nature. Of course, we are not to serve and worship God only during the Sabbath either. We are required to do so every day of the week. God wants us to lead spiritual lives everyday and it is for our own good. Our problem is that we don't keep the Sabbath spiritual or holy isn't it? We go for morning worship service and the rest of the day is no different from any other day. That is not keeping the Sabbath day as we should. Our activities on Sundays should revolve around serving and worshipping God. It is the day we dedicate to the Lord and not to ourselves. If we cannot keep 1 day in 7 in remembrance of God, how are we to keep all 7 days as we should? Let's try to improve the way that we keep the Sabbath.

Thought: The Sabbath day is given to us for our good!

Prayer: Father, help me to learn to keep Your Sabbath day holy.

DO YOU DO GOD’S WORK ON THE SABBATH?

John records for us an incident where Jesus healed an infirmed man who could not walk. It became a problem with the Jews because Jesus performed this miracle on the Sabbath. The Jews accused Jesus of breaking the 4th Commandment. Jesus’ reply was extraordinary. In essence, he claimed that He was doing His Father’s work, a divine work. The Jews were ready to kill Jesus for not only breaking the Sabbath but for also claiming that God was His Father. Did Christ say or do anything wrong? Certainly not! The 4th Commandment reads, *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy”*. What does it mean to keep it “holy”? It means to keep it spiritually pure, separate, sanctified unto God. It is a day dedicated to the worship and service of the Lord. We are not allowed to do work that we normally do on other days, but does it mean we are to do no work whatsoever? Christ answered this clearly in our passage today. He was doing the work of God and it was right to do so.

God never intended for us to do no work whatsoever on the Sabbath. Instead, He wants us to continue to serve Him on Sundays. Sundays are set aside for the study of God’s Word preached over the pulpit or taught during Bible Studies. Worship services allow us to spend the Sabbath to pray, praise and worship Him. Some fellowship groups and ministries take the opportunity to meet or to perform ministry duties on Sundays. Others give out tracts to unbelievers. Many end their Sabbath by attending an evening worship service. God has provided us with many means of grace to spend our Sundays in a manner that is holy.

However, the problem is that many of us do not avail ourselves of these activities. Many go home after morning worship and spend the rest of the day unprofitably. Some go to shopping centers to surround themselves with worldly attractions, while others pursue leisure activities of various kinds. Some students use the time to catch up on their homework or study for exams. In so doing, we make the Sabbath no different from the other 6 days. This is not keeping the Sabbath holy.

Remember that the Sabbath is for man, for our benefit. By performing activities that please God, we are actually benefiting ourselves spiritually. If we choose to disobey God, we only hurt ourselves. May you seek to spend your Sabbath in a manner pleasing to God.

Thought: Not keeping the Sabbath holy is breaking God’s law.

Prayer: Father, help me to dedicate my Sundays to You.

WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE OF READING THE BIBLE?

After Jesus healed the infirmed man on the Sabbath and called Himself the Son of God, we read in John 5:18 that the Jews were ready to kill Him. It was in this context that Jesus spoke these words in our passage for today. Christ was rebuking the Jews for not heeding the numerous witnesses that God sent to them throughout history. These witnesses came in the form of the prophets of old (v. 38) and John the Baptist (v. 33) the *“burning and a shining light”* (v35). Christ Himself was also a witness. In verse 39, Christ asked the Jews to search the Scriptures because the Scriptures themselves testify of Christ. The Jews had possession of the Word of God in the Old Testament and took pride in their belief that they had eternal life because of that. But Christ told them in verse 40 that they still rejected Him despite knowing the Old Testament. The Jews were very familiar with the contents of the Old Testament, but that did not save them. Their hearts were so hardened that they refused to see Christ revealed as the Messiah in the Scriptures. Instead, they sought to kill Him.

The complete Bible is available to us today. Most of us can read it without fear of persecution. It is easy to obtain copies of it. Many of you are frequently encouraged to study the Scriptures by your church teachers and leaders and many of you dutifully do so. But what do you see in the Scriptures? What do you understand in God’s Word? Are they simply interesting stories like any other literature novel? Do you read it for intellectual stimulation? Or do you read it because you are forced to do so and are simply fulfilling an obligation?

The Bible is the Word of God. That means that every word, jot and tittle is the very Word that comes from God through the Holy Spirit. It is the God of the whole universe speaking to each of us. Philippians 2:16 tells us that this is the Word of Life. It is the Word that can give us everlasting life. It is the Word that can lead us to God, teach us more about His character and teach us how to be like Him and to abide in Him and enjoy Him forever. If you believe this, then God’s Word will come alive for you. Your purpose for reading God’s Word would be discovering more about your beloved Saviour and how you should live life here as pilgrims. God’s Word must be precious to you!

Thought: Why were the Jews unable to see Christ in the Scriptures?

Prayer: Father, help me find joy in reading Your Word.

“...Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do”

DO YOU COMMEND THE TRUE FAITH OF OTHERS?

Christ made an extraordinary statement in our passage for today. He commended the centurion for having faith that is greater than any other in all of Israel. This meant the centurion had faith greater than even Mary the mother of Christ and even His disciples. Why was the faith of this centurion so great? Firstly, the centurion was a Gentile and that meant that he did not possess the knowledge of God’s Word that the Jews of Israel did. The Jews had the Old Testament, whereas the Gentiles did not. Hence the centurion’s faith must have been based only on the brief encounters and opportunities he had in the presence of Christ to hear Him speak. He knew little about God, but yet he believed that Christ was the Lord and was somehow able to save his servant. Secondly, the centurion did not ask for a sign like how the Jews often did. He did not ask for Christ to prove His power. Christ’s Word was sufficient for him. In fact, he didn’t even need Christ to come with him to heal his servant. All the centurion needed of Christ was a verbal assurance and the centurion believed that that was sufficient for Christ to heal his servant. Truly, the centurion had great faith in Christ. He believed that Christ was the Son of God. Christ commended the faith of the centurion openly. Christ praised Him.

Unfortunately, many of us are not forthcoming in giving praise to others. We are quick to judge and condemn, but our commendation of others tends to be few and far between. Christ has set us the example. Christ did not keep back the honour that was due unto the centurion. Christ is never reluctant when it comes to commending those who deserve it. Likewise, Christ will not withhold any praise that is due unto us if we are faithful ourselves. James 1:12 tells us that there are crowns reserved for the faithful. These are crowns and commendations that will last for all eternity. Just as God commends us freely, we too should be generous in our praise of others. When we see others living faithfully, we should praise them and even speak well about them to others too. Such commendation encourages them in their faith, especially when they are experiencing some trials. Praise lifts their hearts. However, praise must be based on truth. We must never praise when there is no reason to. That is called flattery and God condemns that.

Thought: When was the last time you praised someone for his faith?

Prayer: Father, help me to be generous to others like You.

“...Not by might, nor by power but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts”

ARE YOU READY TO FACE HARDSHIP?

Sometime, some teens feel that they would rather serve in church than have to go to school. In church everyone is so nice, and doing God's work seems so pleasant compared to doing other work. However the reality of serving the Lord, whether as a full-time church worker or as a believer in the world, is not easy.

In our passage today we read about a certain scribe who was eager to follow and serve Christ wherever He went. Scribes were normally known for their pride, and also their hatred for and jealousy of Jesus. It is encouraging to read of this scribe who humbled himself before the Lord and called Him 'master'. Jesus welcomed him, but He had a warning. Jesus explained that following Him would be a hard life. Jesus, who is our best example of service, explained that even the foxes and birds have a place to rest, but He did not. In this sense, the animals are better off than those who serve Christ. We can also see this exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul. Paul suffered a great deal for the sake of the gospel and was eventually put to death for Christ's sake.

The hard life of a believer is not confined only to those who serve full-time. All who will trust in Christ and serve Him, that is, all believers, must be prepared to suffer for His sake. In 1 Peter 4:12 we are exhorted not to think of fiery trials as something unusual in the life of a believer. Expect it. However, it is not without its blessings. Each trial brings us closer to the Lord and makes us more like Him. As we grow as believers, so will our peace and joy in the Lord. Despite the difficulties, we actually become happier. Besides that, we are told that eternal crowns await us (Revelation 2:10). Paul also encourages us in 2 Corinthians 4:9 that although times may be hard, we will never be forsaken and lost. God will never leave us without help. 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds that no temptations will be too much for us to bear.

With all this in mind, we should never be discouraged from serving the Lord. If the Lord calls you into full-time service, you should go in faith, trusting that the Lord will provide. Likewise, the Lord calls all of us to serve Him wherever we may be. As students, we must always strive to serve the Lord as a witness and testimony to Him, and do all we can to extend His Kingdom. Are you ready?

Thought: Only God can keep us faithful and from giving up in our callings.

Prayer: Help me to be always faithful whatever Your calling may be.

“...let us see other people as lost sheep who should be won for Christ...”

DO YOU HAVE COMPASSION FOR THE LOST?

Jesus' fame had spread far and wide as He continued preaching the Gospel and performing miraculous acts to authenticate His status as the Son of God. Everywhere He went, multitudes of people followed Him. The blind yearned to see, the lame hoped to walk and the sick needed Christ the Great Physician. Everywhere He turned there was someone trying to get His attention and someone in need of His healing touch. If we were in the same situation, many of us would likely be stressed or irritated with the crowd. However, Jesus never showed any impatience with the crowd and healed *“every sickness and every disease among the people”* (Matthew 9:35). He thought not of His own tiredness or physical needs but saw the great need of the multitude as *“they fainted”*. He saw that they were lost and scattered, and were as *“sheep having no shepherd”*. They were not only in need of His physical healing but were even more in need of His spiritual healing and the eternal life which only His blood could give. The heart of the Shepherd throbbed with love for His lost sheep.

We often encounter big crowds in our small city of Singapore and many people complain of the lack of space. They get irritated when others jostle for space with them on public transport and even curse and swear at them. Let no Christian be found guilty of that. Let us instead be as Christ and see other people, whether in a big group or alone, as lost sheep who should be won for Christ. See the greater crowds as greater opportunities to witness for Christ. Pray that the Holy Spirit will enable us to have spiritual eyes to see people as they truly are – souls in need of Jesus' saving blood. Look past superficial appearances of arrogance and masks of meanness that others may put on. They may offend you or hurt your feelings but look past that. Determine in your heart to consciously see people as Jesus' lost sheep and find opportunities to win them into the fold. Not only that, Jesus wants us to pray for more labourers to help win His lost ones back to Him for indeed, *“the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few”* (Matthew 9:37).

Thought: Do you see the unbelievers around you as lost sheep who need to know Christ?

Prayer: Dear Lord, please give me a heart that feels as the Shepherd does for His lost sheep.

ARE YOU AFRAID OF CONFESSING CHRIST?

Jesus had just named His twelve disciples and was instructing them on how they should go about their ministry. He especially warned them that the road before them would not be an easy one. He told them that He was sending them forth *“as sheep in the midst of wolves”* (Matthew 10:16) and that they would be *“hated of all men for [His] name’s sake”* (Matthew 10:22). The people who opposed them may even be of *“[their] own household”* (Matthew 10:35-36) but Christ clearly stated that if they loved their family more than Him, they were not worthy of Him (Matthew 10:37-38). If they denied Him before men, He too would deny them before God the Father in Heaven. However, if they remained true to Him, all the blessings were theirs. If they confessed Christ before men, He too would confess them before the Heavenly Father. He promised them that the Holy Spirit would instruct them on what to say when they were *“brought before governors and kings for [His] sake”* (Matthew 10:17-20). He urged them not to fear men who could only kill the body but not the soul, but instead to commit themselves to God who loves and cares for them so much that *“the very hairs of [their] head are all numbered”* (Matthew 10:28-31).

Dear Teen, are you afraid of confessing Christ? It is not enough to just say that you are a Christian but then talk and act exactly as your nonbelieving friends do. Confessing Christ means living a life that is worthy of His name – A life that demonstrates that Christ is your Lord and Master, and is governed by actions and speech which seek to please Him. We must live a life that is noticeably different from the carnal lifestyles and activities of the world. Do you dare to be a Daniel in sinful Babylon? This requires standing apart from the world and its distorted sense of morality where sins like rebellion against authority and homosexuality are applauded and viewed as “cool”, while God-pleasing attitudes like abstinence from sex before marriage and filial piety are scorned as prudish behavior. Oftentimes, it is peer pressure which makes us follow the majority and deny Christ. Jesus never said that confessing Him would be easy. He experienced the full hatred of the world. But He promises to be with us and assures us that the reward of Him confessing us before His Father will be more than worth all our suffering.

Thought: Does your life confess Christ?

Prayer: Give me the faith and courage to confess Thee, Lord.

“...Submission to Christ will give us true joy, peace and rest for our souls...”

ARE YOU WILLING TO SUBMIT TO CHRIST?

A yoke is a wooden beam that is placed across the heads or the shoulders of oxen or other animals to enable them to pull a load. It is often used metaphorically in the Bible to represent a burden. In this passage, Christ uses the term “bearing His yoke” to refer to submission to Him. This means to accept Him as our Lord and Saviour and to live according to His will. It involves a spirit of meekness and humility fashioned after Christ Himself as our Master is *“meek and lowly in heart”*. The servant is not above his Master. Jesus then makes a seemingly paradoxical statement when He calls His yoke easy and light to bear. However, we realise that this is not a contradiction when we consider how submission to Christ actually frees us from many grievous burdens. Firstly, we are freed from the slavery of sin and can now choose not to sin when once we could not do anything but sin. Secondly, we are freed from being under the law and God’s judgment. The Pharisees in Jesus’ time had burdened the people with countless laws that were like weights that were too heavy to bear. Thirdly, while previously we had to bear our burdens and sufferings alone, we now submit to God’s will; and because of that, He will enable us to overcome our sufferings and will not let us go through anything that we cannot bear with His help (1 Corinthians 10:13). Jesus promises us *“rest unto our souls”* if we submit to Him. The rest He gives is a true, refreshing rest that will strengthen and nourish our souls.

Submission to Christ may seem like a yoke or burden on the surface but if we think about it, we can see that Christ is right in saying that *“His yoke is easy, and His burden is light”*. Consider the yoke of not submitting to Christ; this yoke is far heavier to bear. If we do not believe in Christ as our Saviour, we suffer under the burden of trying to perform good works to earn our way into salvation, instead of being free to do good works to please God and show love to our fellow men. If we do not submit to God’s approved way of doing things, we find that the consequences and guilt of sinning will weigh us down, like a millstone around our necks. Submission to Christ, on the other hand, will give us true joy, peace and rest for our souls.

Thought: Ask yourself truthfully whether you are willingly submitting to Christ in your life.

Prayer: Grant me meekness and humility to submit to Thee, Lord.

“...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief...”

DO YOU THINK ANYONE IS BEYOND SALVATION?

The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the Jews in Jesus' time and they prided themselves on the enforcement of God's law. However, they also invented many other extra-biblical rules which they enforced just as strongly. They were self-righteous and liked to be seen praying loudly, giving alms and fasting (Luke 11:43-44, Matthew 6:1-6). They also liked to associate themselves with popular men; we see this when Simon the Pharisee invited Jesus to his house for a meal. Jesus was very popular with the people at that time because of the miracles He did. We can see the Pharisee's self-righteousness from his thoughts of disgust when Jesus let the woman, who was well-known to be a sinner – likely a prostitute, clean his feet with her hair. Jesus knew his thoughts and rebuked him with a parable of how the debtor who owes more will love the creditor more when he is relieved of his debt. This shows that the one who understands how great his sin is, and how great a forgiveness he or she has received, will love God that much more. There is thus no limit to God's salvation and no sin so great that God cannot forgive. Conversely, all Man have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Simon failed to realise this and thought that he did not have sins as great as this woman. Realise that just one single sin will make us guilty of breaking all of God's law (James 2:10). Therefore, all of us are equally guilty of God's judgment and eternal death. How can we then think that anyone is beyond salvation if we ourselves are guilty as well?

Have you ever fallen into the same self-righteous trap as Simon the Pharisee? Do you ever find yourselves thinking that you are not as bad a sinner as someone else? You could be thinking of the people around you or even criminals you read about in the newspapers. Do you pass judgment on them like Simon and think that they can never be saved? Or worse, you think that they do not even deserve to be saved? If you find yourself thinking this way, repent and humble yourself. How can you a sinner worthy of death condemn another sinner when both of you are on the death row? Instead, recognise that Christ came to this world to save sinners, even those we consider the “worst” sinners. Should we not pray for them and preach the good news to them instead of condemning them to hell?

Thought: *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Timothy 1:15).

Prayer: Teach me to see sinners as You do, Lord.

HOW DILIGENT ARE YOU IN YOUR EVANGELISM?

John 21:25 says that *“there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written”*. Jesus worked tirelessly while He was on this earth. In the three years of His public ministry, He did so many works for His Father that if you recorded them all down, there would be no space in this world to contain them. Luke 8:1 shows how Jesus *“went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God”*. He did not skip over any city or village and ensured He went to each one so that no person would be unreached. In every place He went, He preached the Gospel. He esteemed the preaching of the Gospel and doing God’s will as more important than His physical needs as seen in His testimony in John 4:34. He said, *“My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”*. Jesus was entirely focused on completing God’s work and fulfilling His Father’s purpose of sending Him to this world. He evangelised the good news of salvation and then completed the work on the cross.

In just three years, Jesus’ ministry would fill the world with all His acts and words. We have been or probably would be, by God’s grace, Christians for a longer period than that. Have we been evangelising in every place we go like Christ did? Have we put preaching the Good News as our number one priority when we interact with others? Do we have the same focus as Christ in doing God’s will and trying our best to win souls to Him? Or maybe we have been too busy with our school work and activities to even think of evangelising? Perhaps we have let the fear of others’ perception of us dampen our courage to tell them of Christ. If so, our aims for this life have been misplaced. As God’s children, we should not just be living for our own physical or academic gain. We should be busy helping to expand our Father’s kingdom in the time which He has given us on this earth.

Thought: Pray for the unbelievers in your midst and think of how you might be a witness and testimony to them.

Prayer: Lord, grant me a love and fervency for Thy Kingdom, to diligently win souls for Thee.

“...One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all...”

WHO DO YOU COUNT AS YOUR BRETHREN?

Jesus was surrounded by a great crowd of people who all wanted to hear Him and be healed by Him. His mother and brothers stood just outside the crowd but could not battle their way in to see Him. When others told Him that His family wanted to see Him, Jesus took the opportunity to teach that his family consisted not only of His biological family on earth; it included everyone who *“hear the Word of God, and do it”*. In the parallel passage in Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus even gestured to His disciples and called them His brethren. He proclaimed that *“whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother”*. How wonderful it is that Jesus calls us His family. Indeed, the moment we accept Christ as our Saviour, we become part of a large family with God as our Father. This family transcends age, race and country. Ephesians 4:4-6 shows how we are all one in Christ when it says, *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all”*.

This is a great lesson to learn. Many of us may feel friendly with other Christians and treat them as good friends. However, Christ calls us to go further than that. He wants us to see other Christians as family. This means truly loving them as your own flesh and blood, and treating them exactly as you would your own family. Just as you watch over your younger sibling at home, you should protect and defend the younger Christians in the church, not just physically but spiritually as well. As you treat your parents with respect, so should you treat the older members in the church as well and look to them for godly guidance and counsel. As you confide in your older siblings about problems in your life, so should you share your life and struggles with your fellow Christian family. The bond between Christians is truly unique and unlike any other earthly bond. It is a bond that is not just for our time on earth, but will also extend through to eternity, for these are the people we will be together with in heaven. It is a bond forged by the blood of Christ and maintained by God in Heaven.

Thought: Can you truly love and treat your fellow Christians as your family?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for the spiritual family You have given me on earth.

DO YOU ENCOURAGE OTHERS WITH THE WORD?

This passage in Matthew 13 shows Jesus describing the kingdom of Heaven through a series of parables. The kingdom of Heaven is the most precious treasure one could obtain, infinitely worth more than any physical luxury. Jesus likens it to *“treasure hid in a field”* – so precious that if a man found it, he would sell all that he had to buy the field. He also says it is like a precious pearl – again, so precious that one would sell all that he had to possess it. (Matthew 13:45-46). It is priceless and of more value than anything in this world. Jesus teaches that not everyone will truly be received into the kingdom of Heaven. When a net is dragged, it gathers both good and bad sea creatures but in the end, the bad, which represent unbelievers, will be cast into *“the furnace of fire”* (Matthew 13:47-50). The good or the true believers shall *“shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:43). Not everyone can understand the truth of God’s kingdom except those *“who hath ears to hear”*, with the Spirit’s enabling. Therefore, to his disciples who had heard all this, he considered them *“scribes”* or believers who understood God’s kingdom. They were urged by Jesus to be like a generous and hospitable householder who does not hoard his treasures but shares them with all who come to his home.

Jesus is urging us to share the eternally precious treasure of the kingdom of Heaven to everyone around us, irrespective of whether they end up as wheat or tares in God’s great harvest of souls in the end. This includes sharing the Gospel with unbelievers as well as encouraging believers with God’s Word. We should not be selfish and keep the blessings we have obtained through God’s Word to ourselves. Instead, we should share it with everyone around us. You can do this by sharing with your fellowship group what you learnt during quiet time or by writing a Bible verse to comfort others in their need. Always turn to God’s Word to spur our fellow brethren along in their walk. Our words may fail to encourage but God’s Word will never fall short in lifting up the downcast heart.

Thought: Can you think of anyone you can encourage with God’s Word today?

Prayer: Lord, thank You for helping me to understand Matters regarding Your Kingdom through Your Holy Spirit. Help me to actively share what I learn with others as well.

DO YOU HAVE TIMES OF SPIRITUAL RETREAT?

At the beginning of Luke 9, Jesus sends out His twelve disciples to preach the Gospel to the surrounding towns. They labored hard and did many miracles of healing and casting out devils as they preached the *"kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:1-6). After their hard work, they returned to Jesus and confided in Him all they had done. Jesus then led them *"privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida"* (Luke 9:10). They *"went aside privately"* or, as the Greek words describe, retired quietly or withdrew to be on their own. Jesus wanted them to quieten their busy hearts before Him and spend time in His presence reflecting on all that they had gone through. Throughout His time on earth, Jesus truly valued these quiet moments away from the crowd as He often retreated to a deserted place where He would spend long periods of time praying to His Father. We see this in Matthew 14:23 where He *"went up into a mountain apart to pray"*, and in the garden of Gethsemane where He cried out to His Father before His death on the Cross.

Through Jesus' example, we learn that quiet time away from the hectic lifestyle and pace of the world is crucial. Jesus and the disciples worked hard in preaching the Gospel and serving the people through miraculous healings but they found time to withdraw themselves from the hustle and bustle and spend time with God and their fellow believers. This may seem very hard to do in our busy lives but we really need to make an effort to set aside time with God. We cannot say that we have no time for this! There is no such thing as "no time"; rather, it is how we choose to use our time. We need to understand that spending time alone with God is vital for strengthening our relationship with God. Christ considered it important, and so should we. Daily we should set aside time to read God's Word and pray to Him. Yearly, we should endeavour to go for church camps which provide the perfect opportunity to, physically and spiritually, get away from our busy lives and immerse ourselves in God's Word and sweet Christian fellowship. Truly these are *"times of refreshing"* that come from the *"presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19).

Thought: Why do you think it is important to retreat from our busy lives?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to desire to find quiet moments with Thee.

DO YOU ALWAYS GIVE THANKS FOR YOUR FOOD?

We have here the example of Jesus giving thanks for the “five barley loaves and two small fishes” (John 6:9) before He performed the miraculous act of feeding the five thousand men and many other women and children with this small portion of food. By doing this, Jesus was acknowledging that His Heavenly Father is the provider of this food as well as the miracle. Jesus shows us that we should thank God for our daily bread. He alone is able to provide for all our needs and even far more than what we ask for, as shown in this miracle. The great multitude of people was filled and there were even twelve baskets full of fragments left over. Jesus shows us the importance of being grateful to God for the little things that sustain us physically as well. We should *“in every thing give thanks”* (1 Thessalonians 5:18) as *“every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”* (James 1:17).

We pray in the Lord’s prayer, “give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11) and indeed, God provides. Many of us have never needed to worry about our next meal for we live in abundance. But some can only live day by day with no certainty that their stomachs will be filled. Yet for all who call God their Father, we can unanimously give thanks to Him for providing for us, His children. He *“knoweth that we have need of all these things”* (Matthew 6:32) and will take care of us. We should thus be grateful to Him for all things. Always remember to thank God before each meal you partake of and do it with a truly thankful spirit. Do not just treat it as a routine without meaning what you say. Do not also try to hide from unbelievers that you are praying before you eat because you feel embarrassed. Let it instead be a consistent testimony to others that you acknowledge your God who provides for your every physical need.

Thought: Do you really thank God for your food with a grateful heart?

Prayer: Thank You for providing for my every need, Lord.

DO YOU TEND TO WASTE FOOD?

One would think that if Jesus was able to multiply the five loaves and two fishes to feed the five thousand men, He would not be concerned about the leftover food as He could easily have produced more if more had been needed. Instead Christ instructed His disciples to *“gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost”*. There remained twelve baskets of barley loaves left after the crowd had eaten their fill. This shows us the full extent of Jesus’ miracle as He was able to provide more than enough for the crowd’s need. Gathering up the leftover food shows us that Jesus was not wasteful. He did not want the leftover food to be thrown away. Perhaps He gathered it up so that it could provide for another meal; perhaps it could be given to other needy people they might encounter on their travels. Jesus shows us the perfect example of how to live practically. Even though He could easily have anything in abundance, yet He lived simply and did not have a wasteful spirit. He knew that all things are from God and should be used fully and not wasted.

Do you tend to waste food? If so, let this example from Christ be a rebuke to you. If your own Lord and Saviour does not waste food, why should you? He is the One who has provided for you and you should not throw away what He has given you. Wasting what God has provided for you also shows an ungrateful spirit as well as a lack of stewardship in what you have received from God. You may think that wasting food is a small inconsequential matter but God has commanded us that *“whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him”* (Colossians 3:17). There is no small matter to God as every act we do should be to His glory as His children. If you realise that you often waste food, then be more aware of what you buy and do not buy or take more than you can eat. It is greed to take more than you need. Besides, there are many people in this world who are in desperate need of the food we so carelessly throw away. Let us take more thought for them and follow Jesus’ example in our lives today.

Thought: What are practical ways to prevent yourself from wasting food?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to be thankful for all that You have given me and not waste any of it.

“For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.”

DO YOU REALISE THE POWER OF CHRIST?

After Jesus had fed the 5000 men (beside women and children), He constrained his disciples to get into a ship and sail to the other side. While their ship was being tossed about by the winds and the waves in the middle of the sea, He went to them walking upon the sea. When the disciples saw Him, they were troubled, supposing that they had seen a spirit. Jesus immediately spoke to them and the moment they received Him into the ship, the wind ceased. *“They were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.”* But why were the disciples so exceedingly amazed? Did they not realise the power of Christ?

Earlier that same day, the disciples had just witnessed the miracle of the loaves. If they had fully understood what the miracle proved about the power of Christ, they would have reacted differently in this trial. What Christ had done was a miracle as: (1) it was an extraordinary event, one that goes against the natural physical laws, (2) it was an event which caused the observer to consider a super-human personal cause, that Jesus is God Himself; and (3) it was an event which constituted evidence (a “sign”) of implications much wider than the event itself, for those who witnessed it would realise the power of Christ and would be prompted to contemplate, “Who is Christ?”

However, the Bible tells us that in this instance, the disciples’ “hearts were hardened.” This does not mean that they were unbelievers, but that they were not quick to learn of the power of Christ. Their minds were dull to perceive the true implications of what had previously occurred. They should have realised that Christ had the power not only to feed 5000, but also to walk on water and even calm any storm. The disciples had already witnessed many miracles of Christ, including a similar incident in Mark 4:35-41 where Jesus calmed a great storm, but yet in this incident, they were slow to realise and remember the power of Christ.

How about us? As Christians, is our response to difficult situations worse than that of the disciples? We now have a record of all that Christ has done and we have the opportunity to consider and know that truly Jesus is the Son of God. But have we taken the time to meditate upon the power of Christ, who He is and all that He has done for us? In times of trials and difficulties, do we have faith to believe that God always has the power to save us and guide us?

Thought: Have I realised the power of Christ to save me from my sins?

Prayer: O Lord, help me realise Thy power and trust Thee in all things.

“From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”

DO YOU DOUBT THE PROVISION OF GOD?

At times in Jesus’ ministry, great multitudes came to Him and stayed with Him for many days. In Mark 8:1-9 (and Matthew 15:30-38), the Bible tells us that a very great multitude of four thousand men, beside women and children, had come for healing and had been present with Jesus for three days. Jesus showed great compassion for the people and did not want to send them away hungry, knowing that some might faint on the long journey home. But when the disciples heard Jesus, they doubted Him and asked, *“From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”* (Mark 8:4)

Why did the disciples ask such a question? They were wondering where they would be able to source for the great quantity of food required to feed everyone. They were out in the wilderness and the multitude was hungry! From what the disciples said, they believed Jesus was not just intending to feed the people by supplying a bit of food in order to sustain them for a brief period of time. The disciples were actually questioning how food would be supplied in such abundance so as to fill and fully satisfy the hungry multitude. The need of the situation was great and dire. How were they going to provide for the hungry multitude? Had the disciples forgotten that the One who was showing concern and care for the multitude, truly knows their needs? This was not the first time this had happened. Could the disciples not remember that Christ had previously fed a multitude of five thousand men, beside women and children? Did the disciples doubt that Christ could once again provide for this very great multitude?

Let us not have any doubt that our God knows and can provide for our every need. Christ had only seven loaves and a few small fishes, yet through the provision of God, the hungry multitude all did eat and were filled, and there was even an overabundance of food as seven baskets of fragments were collected. Christ had repeated a miracle and showed His power to provide for all our needs. So let us not doubt the provision of God, but remember all that He has already done and will continue to do in our lives.

Thought: Do I believe in the continual provision of God to provide for my every need?

Prayer: O Lord, help me have faith and not doubt Thy provision.

"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

ARE YOU AFRAID TO SPEAK THE HARD TRUTH?

During this time, a great multitude followed Jesus not because they believed in Him as their Messianic Lord and Saviour, but because they desired free food and health care. So Jesus said unto them, *"...Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you..."*, *"...I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst"* (John 6:26-27, 35).

Jesus then further explained, *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you"* (John 6:53). This is a hard truth, and the multitude found it difficult to accept. The truths Jesus gave them were not spoken to please the itching ears of the many hearers. It was spoken as it was absolutely needful, even though it offended many. The multitude, at this point in time, could only think of physical flesh and blood, thinking they literally had to eat and drink Jesus, and failed to see the spiritual truths in the doctrine that He was illustrating. Jesus then even indicated that He would physically ascend into heaven and His body would no longer be on earth. But this is a hard truth which they did not believe. If only they had realised that they could not live by bread alone! It is this Living Bread (the Lord Jesus Christ) that was able to quicken (make alive) and give them life eternal.

Jesus knew that these men would not believe. He knows the responses of all men: that they will be blind to the truth except for the grace of God which, thorough the Holy Spirit, opens spiritual eyes. Yet Jesus told the hard truths to the multitudes even though they were only interested in earthly and not spiritual things. He knew that they needed to know these things, for there is nothing more important than for every soul to know the truth about everlasting life! As a result of their disinterest in spiritual things, many *"went back, and walked no more with him"* (John 6:66). Likewise, even if we think that the hard truth may offend or we fear the response of unbelief from our friends or loved ones, let us not be afraid to preach the hard truths of the gospel; to tell sinful men of their depravity and their need for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We must speak up against sin, warn of the eternal judgment in hell, and also share about the wonderful blood of Jesus that can wash away all sins. Will we have the courage to do so?

Thought: Am I afraid to lose a friend or a loved one temporarily or eternally?

Prayer: O Lord, help me speak the hard truth that leads to eternal life.

“... Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.”

SHOULD YOU WORRY ABOUT OFFENDING OTHERS?

The Pharisees, especially in the time of Jesus, were known for their hypocrisy. They showed an outward display of religiosity but had no spirituality. They were men who thought of themselves as being far more pious (holier-than-thou) than the common folk, professing faith but not possessing it. For this very reason, Jesus had to point out their hypocrisy and their errors in teaching the wrong doctrines. Jesus described them as people who *“draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men... Hear, and understand: Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man”* (Matthew 15:8-11). These were strong words! The disciples came to Jesus and asked Him if He knew that His words caused the Pharisees to be very offended. Do you think Jesus was worried that He offended them?

The answer is no! The disciples had to be reminded of the purpose Jesus came to earth. He was not on earth to please men, but God. He had come to do the will of His Father and it pleased the Father that Jesus exposed the errors of those false teachers. Jesus used the picture of a plant to represent a doctrine, and every doctrine which was not from God needed to be uprooted – they needed to be exposed, opposed and rejected by all men. Jesus then told His disciples that they should not be troubled that the hypocrites were offended – it should be expected! There was no need to be worried about offending others is because *“if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”* There is a need to expose people and their false teachings; else both they and their followers will be destroyed.

Therefore, let us not worry or let the fear of man hinder us from speaking up for God. The truth may offend, but it our duty that we expose, oppose and reject all doctrines which are not of God. This means that even if our friends or family sincerely hold to a belief which is not based on God’s Word, it is our duty to speak up out of love and correct them. We know that when the blind follow the blind, the truth will be hid and the gospel corrupted, and there is only one dreadful destination for those who are deceived – eternal judgment in hell. May God help us to speak up for Him even if the truth will offend.

Thought: How many times have I not spoken up for God when I should have?

Prayer: O Lord, help me have the courage to speak up for Thee.

“Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready.”

ARE YOU IMPATIENT WITH GOD’S TIMING?

All the Jews were now preparing for the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem which had to be kept as part of the ceremonial law. Jesus’ brethren, who did not understand the purpose of His first coming, told Him that this was the time that He should present Himself as their all-conquering Messiah. This was what they had always been waiting for! But Jesus replied unto them, *“My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready”* (John 7:6). Jesus had to reject His brethren’s suggestion to go to Jerusalem openly. It was not because He feared the Jews and lacked the courage to confront them or be confronted by them. It was because Jesus’ time was not yet come and He always awaited God’s timing. He never did anything of His own will.

Jesus’ brothers and disciples were able to go to Jerusalem openly at any time, for possibly no one would take notice of them. Their lives were not in danger. But for Jesus, *“the Jew sought to kill him”* (John 7:1). [This had started one and a half years before, during the second Passover of Jesus’ ministry, when the Jews sought to slay Him. The reason was because Jesus had healed a man at Bethesda on the Sabbath and, at the same time, He claimed to be equal with God (John 5:16-18).] However, it was still about six months before the predetermined time of His death. God had His divinely appointed time and Jesus could not place Himself in such a perilous situation when it could be avoided. His time was not yet come. Therefore Jesus had to be careful, for He was on a mission – He was out to fulfil God’s will. He exercised His human responsibility by not risking premature arrest and death at the hands of His enemies before God’s appointed time. Jesus later did fulfil all righteousness and attended the feast, *“not openly, but as it were in secret”* (John 7:10).

Jesus sought only to do God’s will, and we must follow His example. We may want many things in life to happen instantly; yet, though it may be in God’s will, now may not be His divinely appointed time. Our impatience and lack of diligence in seeking God’s will may make us question God and ask why He has not allowed or granted our heart’s desires. But let us not question and instead be more like Christ. Let us always actively seek the Father’s will and pray that ours may be the same as His.

Thought: Am I actively seeking God’s will and timing in all aspects of my life?

Prayer: O Lord, help me be more like Christ and seek Thy divinely appointed timing.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

ARE YOU WILLING TO TAKE UP YOUR CROSS?

Simon Peter, one of the twelve disciples, confessed that Jesus was the Christ (Greek for "the Anointed One"), the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16). He believed Jesus to be the Conquering King that would deliver the Jewish nation from Roman bondage. He wanted the kingdom of Israel to be restored! However, it was from this time forward that Jesus started to speak in clear terms about His impending death and resurrection. Jesus said that He would be killed, and be raised again the third day. Peter then rebuked Jesus, thinking that death meant defeat (Matthew 16:21-22)! However, Jesus replied in much stronger terms, "*Get thee behind me, Satan*", for Peter was now going against God's will. Jesus needed to suffer and die for the sins of man. This was the Father's will. Peter should have known for Isaiah 53 prophesied the Messiah's (Hebrew for "the Anointed One's") death and even John the Baptist, whom Peter was once a disciple of, declared that Jesus is "*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). For this reason, perhaps Peter did know better, but refused to accept. Jesus needed to fulfil His mission as a Lamb, before He could fulfil His role as a King. So Jesus told his disciples, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*" (Matthew 16:24).

This was something that Peter had to learn. Peter had to deny himself and be willing to take up his cross, and follow Christ. He had to put aside his current desire for the kingdom of Israel to be restored and surrender to God's will, instead of opposing it. Then upon denying himself, he would be able to accept and bear the burdens of the cross which God had appointed for him. Then and only then would he be truly following Christ, imitating what He had to do by suffering and enduring in this present world. This same lesson is also applicable to anybody who truly desires to be a follower of Christ – a Christian – bearing the name of Christ and being willing to take up his cross. Jesus set the perfect example for us by bearing His cross and fulfilling His Father's will (Philippians 2:5-11). Therefore we now likewise must surrender our own selfish desires and pursuits, in order that we may also bear the cross which God has appointed for us, and then let us be willing and prepared to suffer for His sake.

Thought: Am I willing to deny myself and take up my cross to follow Christ?

Prayer: O Lord, help me put away my selfish desires and pursuits to do Thy will.

DO YOU TRY NOT TO STUMBLE OTHERS?

When Jesus returned to Capernaum, His Galilean headquarters, Peter was approached and asked if his Master paid tribute money. This was an annual temple tax of a didrachma (double-drachma – a Grecian coin) which was required by law from the time of Moses (Exodus 30:11-16). But why was Jesus in question? Was it not compulsory? Well, according to extra Jewish laws, “a man must be twelve months in a place, before he is liable to tribute and taxes”. And “a doctor, or a teacher for the Jewish doctors, wise men, and scholars, were freed from all tributes and taxes” (quoted from John Gill). So it is possible that Jesus may have been exempted. However, without hesitating, Peter answered the question with a yes as he assumed that Jesus always paid all His taxes and tributes.

Then when Peter entered into the house, Jesus anticipated that Peter was going to speak to Him. However, before Peter could say anything, Jesus asked him an interesting question relating to that of an earthly king. Peter did provide the correct answer, but the reason Jesus asked was because this was His way of teaching Peter. Jesus was implying that He is the Lord of the temple and thus there was no need for Him to pay any tribute. Nevertheless, in order to not stumble those who are weak in faith and knowledge, Jesus instructed Peter to pay the didrachma which is equivalent to two days’ worth of wages. The exact amount of tribute money for both of them was then miraculously found in the mouth of a fish which Jesus directed Peter to. This miracle then authenticated the implicit claim of Jesus as Lord.

So through this account, it is seen that Jesus not only displayed that He is God through His omniscience, but that He is the Lord of His temple. Jesus made a point that He did not need to pay the tribute. However He did pay the tribute in the end, for this was in fulfilment of His active obedience as Man’s Representative, being beyond reproach and sinless in all areas. Jesus kept the law perfectly because of His love for His fellow men, ensuring also that He would not stumble them in this matter. We likewise must follow in the steps of Jesus, having sensitivity to those around us and ensuring that we try our very best to not stumble others. The Apostle Paul also wrote, *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”* (1 Corinthians 10:23). Let us do our best to not stumble others.

Thought: Am I aware of the people around me and whether I may stumble them?

Prayer: O Lord, help me be sensitive and make the effort to not stumble others.

“Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein”

DO YOU LOOK DOWN ON LITTLE CHILDREN?

Matthew 18:1-6 describes Jesus teaching His disciples an important lesson about the Christian’s spiritual attitude. The disciples were more than just expressing mere interest in who would be considered more important than others. They were competing or vying for the position of being ‘greatest in the kingdom of heaven’! It is here that Jesus then summoned a little child to illustrate His point to the disciples.

The disciples thought that those who were more mature or capable would be considered more important in heaven. However, Jesus explained that it is wrong to serve God for selfish and vain objectives. What really mattered to Jesus was that they laboured for God with the right intention and that they conducted themselves in a humble and meek manner. They were to always have a teachable attitude and not assume that they could ever be mature enough to have no further need of improving themselves and growing spiritually. Children are teachable because they do not know much and need guidance from others, and they know it. Indeed, it pleases Jesus that those who are spiritually immature receive the guidance they need to grow in the faith. However, Jesus issues a stern warning to those who intentionally mislead or stumble those who are vulnerable.

To proudly consider oneself to be a “mature” believer or to be “strong in the faith” is actually a sign of immaturity. Sometimes, we get bored with hearing the same fundamentals being preached over and over again. However, just like a good athlete always ensures that he does his warm-up and routine physical drills during every practice session and before every competition to perform well, so must believers always have the basics of Jesus’ teachings reinforced to them time and again. Far from looking down on the young, weak and feeble, Jesus says we ought to not only emulate their attitude of humility and teachability but also to help them grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought: Being the “least” in heaven is still infinitely better than being the “greatest” in hell.

Prayer: O Lord, instill in me a teachable, humble and submissive spirit that my spiritual growth shall never be hindered.

ARE YOU VINDICTIVE TO THOSE WHO REJECT YOU?

In Luke 9:51-56, Jesus entered a Samaritan village while making His way to Jerusalem. He had wanted to stop by this village to spend the night and rest before continuing with His journey with James and John. However, the Samaritans knew from their intention to get to Jerusalem that they were Jews. Simply because of this, Jesus, James and John were not welcome to stay.

At that time, the Jews and Samaritans considered each other as enemies. The Jews looked down upon the Samaritans as half-breeds who were “impure” as they originated from Israelites who married foreigners. They were also looked upon with disdain by the Jews due to their idolatrous practices. The attitude in those days was that no decent Jew would have any dealings with the Samaritans. In response to this, the Samaritans hated and resented the Jews. Of course, this did not stop Jesus from coming into contact with them. Indeed, Jesus desired to share the good news of the Gospel with them in spite of this culture of mutual hatred between the two peoples.

Angered and vengeful, James and John wanted the village destroyed. However, Jesus rebuked them for having such an attitude and taught them that His purpose was not to destroy those who opposed Him but rather to save them.

Quite naturally, most people would respond towards hostility by reciprocating it. They have a tendency to be unkind to those who had treated them unkindly. In contrast to such behaviour, Jesus taught His disciples not to retaliate against those who reject them. In the example above, He simply chose to walk away.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke against retaliation and during His crucifixion He even prayed for the forgiveness of those who tortured and tormented Him. If we are to follow His example, we would not take a vindictive attitude towards those who despise and abuse us but rather we should glorify God by behaving lovingly and with kindness towards them.

Thought: Turning the other cheek would be impossible but for the Holy Spirit's enablement.

Prayer: Forgive me Lord for the times when I have been vengeful towards others.

HAVE YOU COUNTED THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP?

Jesus explains to a man who wishes to become His follower the harsh reality of deciding to take this step. Jesus had no permanent home and enjoyed few, if any, creature comforts. Those who wished to be His disciples had to forego such things in order to follow Him.

There were 2 other men who also had the same intention to follow Christ but requested to have some of their affairs settled before making the decision to commit themselves to Him. One of them wanted to bury his father before leaving while the other wanted to bid his family farewell. In both instances Jesus disapproved of their procrastination because He understood their heart condition and knew that those earthly concerns would eventually dissuade them from joining Him.

Here, Jesus not only demanded immediate and unreserved commitment to Him but also considered those who look back with yearning upon the life they had before knowing Christ, to be people who are not genuine believers in the first place (Luke 9:62).

Counting the cost before making any important life-changing decision is absolutely essential if one is to be prepared to stay the course and follow their decision right through to the very end. Here, Jesus wants us to have a reasonable faith rather than a blind faith. He does not desire anyone to confess Him frivolously without very careful consideration and honest self-evaluation.

Far from the popular clichés of taking the “leap of faith” or “taking the plunge” which have undertones of impulsivity and recklessness, becoming a disciple of Christ is an act of faith in the truthfulness of the Gospel as taught in the Bible. It is based upon a careful and detailed consideration of the facts as proclaimed in God’s Word. True saving faith is one that involves both the mind and the heart. There is no place for thoughtlessness and rashness.

Thought: It is better to debate over God’s Word in order to better understand it than to accept any of it without proper understanding.

Prayer: Let me see, O Lord, the folly of placing anything above You.

WHOSE GLORY DO YOU SEEK?

John 7:18 explains that those who serve God with pure intentions would not be motivated by the prospect of personal gains in any way. Here, Jesus teaches us to tell the difference between religious leaders who promote Christ versus religious leaders who promote themselves. Those who are motivated by selfish reasons will ultimately glorify themselves even though they may appear to be trying to promote Christ. Such people will find ways and means to enrich themselves either materially or to boost their own image or reputation. Genuine servants of God seek only to glorify Jesus and point others to Him and not themselves. Indeed, Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist said it well in John 3:30 when he spoke of Christ in the following manner: *“He must increase, but I must decrease”*.

I once attended a worship service in a Charismatic church during which the pastor started off by talking about how God singles out certain “specially appointed” people to do His work here on earth. He referred to Jesus as one of them but later on also referred to himself as one such person whom God has called to service. He then proceeded to ask the congregation to encourage and show support for him by giving him a standing ovation. Who do you think received the glory in this service? Was he right to say such things?

Perhaps many of us have similar tendencies to seek for self-glorification. One such example is the way we portray our salvation story with others. We tell them how we sought out Jesus and decided to accept Christ after having carefully considered God's Word. This may seem pious and God-glorifying on the surface but in actual fact it is self-glorifying because it fails to mention how it was God through the Holy Spirit who drew us towards Jesus and that it was He who first gave us the faith to believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No one has done more for us than Jesus and if that does not come through in our sharing with others we have not sought His glory.

Thought: In our present sinful state we tend to glorify self rather than God, sometimes unknowingly so.

Prayer: O Lord, guard my heart against vanity and self-glory. Help me to remember that all glory must go to only You.

DO YOU JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY?

Jesus detests prideful self-righteousness. This account in John 8:1-11 not only illustrates how He deals sternly with the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees but also how He deals mercifully with repentant sinners.

Here, the scribes and Pharisees identify a woman guilty of adultery and bring her to Jesus’s attention. They did this not because they were genuinely concerned that the woman had sinned and that God’s laws had been transgressed. Rather, they wanted to make use of the woman whom they caught in the act of adultery to trap and discredit Jesus publicly.

The scribes and Pharisees knew that the law clearly called for the woman to be stoned. They wanted to see Jesus Himself make that decree, and if he did not, they would be the first to accuse Him of being a lawbreaker. However Jesus gave a most wise reply. He said that only those who were sinless would be allowed to stone the woman. Not one stepped forward, for not one of them could claim to be sinless. Jesus’ point was that the scribes and Pharisees were every bit as guilty of sin as the woman, but demanded that she be harshly dealt with while being blind to that fact that they were just as deserving of punishment as the woman. In the end, the scribes and Pharisees quietly disappeared to avoid embarrassment, and Jesus forgave her, seeing that she had repented and believed.

Indeed, the only person who had the right to cast stones upon the woman in clear conscience was Jesus Himself, but He chose to be merciful while not condoning sin in any way. While we must never turn a blind eye to sin or regard it casually, we are at the same time no better than those who commit gross acts of wrongdoing and are in need of forgiveness as much as they. Hence, we do not react to the sin of others by self-righteously demanding that punishment be meted out. Rather we should speak the truth about a person’s sin in love to him, counsel him and pray for him to repent while considering disciplinary action only as a last resort to turn him away from sin.

Thought: If we saw ourselves the way God actually sees us there would not be a shred of spiritual pride left in us.

Prayer: Lord, give me the wisdom to judge righteously that I may turn someone away from sin and to turn him to Christ.

ARE MATERIAL OR SPIRITUAL THINGS MORE IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Today’s title is especially relevant to the spiritual climate at present. Luke 10:38-42 gives an account of Jesus who pays a visit to Martha and Mary. Martha is described as being “cumbered about much serving”. This is to say that Martha was busy with the non-essential formalities and niceties in Jesus’ presence. Furthermore, Martha was displeased with Mary who sat with Jesus and did not offer any help. Obviously, Martha thought that Mary should have made herself busy and even went so far to suggest that Jesus should have done something about Mary’s apparent negligence.

Jesus responded by saying that Martha was too concerned over those things which were superficial and irrelevant to Him. Furthermore, Mary’s conduct actually pleased Him as she was giving Him that which was most important-her undivided attention to Him. She sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His Word (Luke 10:39).

Here, it is a discussion of priority and of the things that Jesus really values. Oftentimes, because we are living in a physical world which places a great value on material things, those things become our priority as well. In churches, we sometimes place too much emphasis on just the material aspects of growth at the expense of spiritual faithfulness. This would be something that Jesus would disapprove of. This is a very real problem that the Christian world is facing today with many churches being so caught up with numbers, physical and financial expansion with little regard for the faithful and accurate proclamation of God’s Word. They pride themselves with all that they have accomplished, but in so doing, they forget to sit at Jesus’ feet, and focus on that which is most important.

On a more personal level, could we also be guilty of the same by being “cumbered about much serving” when we get too caught up with the administrative concerns of various “spiritual activities” so much so that we forget the real purpose of engaging in them in the first place - for the love of Jesus and His Word?

Thought: Being cumbered about much serving is like being too absorbed in the planning of a holiday to really enjoy it.

Prayer: O Lord, enable me to always give You that which You desire most from me - my obedience and undivided attention.

DO YOU USE HUMAN WISDOM IN DOING HIS WILL?

The Pharisees in the passages of today's reading resorted to cunning and deception in order to get rid of Jesus. They approached Jesus as if to be on His side to warn Him that King Herod Antipas would have Him killed if He did not leave. In reality, they were actually in collaboration with Herod in a scheme which they thought would get Jesus to leave the city. Herod had to resort to getting the Pharisees to trick Jesus into leaving because he knew that he could not openly murder Jesus due to His great popularity.

Of course, they thought that their plan would work and on the surface it did appear to be a very clever way to achieve their objective of getting rid of Jesus without causing a public backlash. However, Jesus had other ideas. In fact, Jesus simply continued to do the Heavenly Father's will in complete obedience and did not let any of the fear-mongering tactics of Herod and the Pharisees affect Him or cause Him to make any detours. His response to the Pharisees was simply to tell them what He planned to do for the next few days – simply to faithfully keep to God's schedule and do His will.

It can be difficult to not allow circumstances to influence us or to dissuade us from doing what we know to be right before God. Jesus being human knew this all too well, but Jesus being the Son of God was also sinless and demonstrated to the world that no matter what His enemies could conjure up from their dark and evil minds, He could always count on God to help Him accomplish the work He had to do, as long as He remained steadfast and faithful.

Are you sometimes tempted to sin "a little" in order to achieve a "greater good"? We must realise that compromise is compromise. A sin is a sin, and it is never right. To resort to our own wisdom and not trust in God displeases Him, and is an act of faithlessness and sin. The best way is always God's way even when it does not appear to be so by our own imperfect estimation of things. If we are to truly follow Jesus, we must walk by faith and not by sight.

Thought: Our faith may be feeble but God will not allow us to stumble if we let Him guide us every step of the way.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, walking by faith and not by sight can sometimes seem impossible but with You, nothing is impossible!

DO YOU SEEK TO SERVE OR BE SERVED?

The mother of James and John had approached Jesus to ask that her two sons be given the most important posts after Jesus Himself, and the other ten disciples were thus indignant. Jesus pointed out that although it was common in the world that the greater the post, the higher the authority to demand service from others, *“But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28).

In God’s kingdom, greatness is measured by how much one serves others. The Greek word for ministry is ‘diakoneo’, meaning to wait upon others, like a waiter serves others. Jesus Himself set the example for His disciples by serving others in noticing those in need, healing them and other forms of ministry to them, serving others to the extent of giving His own life for His sheep. Even though He is God, greater than all and deserves to be served and worshipped, Christ never demanded such service. Compared to the Chief Priest who presided over the Sanhedrin and had soldiers and servants at his beck and call, Jesus only had twelve disciples who voluntarily followed Him, and never had any earthly home.

It is very tempting to treat church service in the same way we expect good service from a restaurant, and some might even think they have paid for such service through their offering! Many youths today come to church service looking only to be entertained, to feel comfortable, to have a good time. Little wonder many such teens end up in charismatic churches where millions of dollars are spent by their rich church members to give all “a good time” through comfortable seats, trained ushers, rock bands, “warm fellowship”, refreshments, good food etc. Often the ministry of the Word is kept to a minimum. That must never be our focus. Our purpose in coming to church must first and foremost be to worship and serve God! In the process of serving God, we serve others around us as well. In church, are we sensitive to areas of need around us? Do we notice the newcomer who is not sure where to go; the lonely soul who feels no one else understands them; do we involve ourselves in the various church programs which are waiting for volunteers to spare their time, other brethren requiring assistance in one form or another? Which category do you fall into, those served or the servant?

Thought: Do others see Jesus in me?

Prayer: As Christ did, may I minister to others rather than wait to be served.

DO YOU SHOW LOVE TO THE UNLOVED?

Most of you know the episode of Zacchaeus climbing a sycamore tree to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was the chief of the tax collectors, and he was rich, at least partially due to extorting others. The Jews hated tax collectors for siding with their Roman masters instead of their fellow Jews. When Jesus told Zacchaeus that He was going to the latter's house that day, what was the reaction of the people of Jericho? “And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner” (Luke 19:7). Note the word “all”, which suggests that Zacchaeus did not have any friends at all in Jericho! Yet the Lord reached out in love, to Zacchaeus the unloved. Zacchaeus showed by his subsequent charity that he truly repented of his sin and believed in Christ.

Christ thus demonstrated in practice what He had earlier exhorted the multitude to do in the Sermon on the Mount about loving others in Matthew 5:43-48, especially *“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye?”* It is easy to love those who show love to us, and to love those who are lovely in looks or in character. It is far more difficult to love our enemies, and those who are unloved. Yes they may have certain personality quirks that you find repulsive, or do not have a very good character. They may even be rude, hot-tempered, selfish or hypocritical. Yet if we show love and compassion to these, who knows if they may be pricked by the Holy Spirit and come to realize that Christ and Christians are different from the world, and come to believe in Christ. It is so sad when even Christians physically avoid those who were formerly drug addicts but are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and delivered from the power of drugs and the world. Thank God that at some point of time beforehand, at least one Christian did show love to these unloved drug addicts, and pointed them to Christ. Look around you, dear teen, whether in church or in school, and ask yourself who does Christ want you to reach out to today, to show love as Christ did. Don't just retreat to your cliques and your friends.

Thought: ‘Love as I loved, give as I gave; these are the people that I've come to save’

Prayer: May I show love to the unloved, not just to those that I love.

DO YOU TAKE STEPS TO AVOID MISUNDERSTANDING?

Jesus met with Zacchaeus at Jericho on the way to Jerusalem, and He perceived that His disciples who knew He was the Messiah would assume that upon reaching Jerusalem He would crown Himself as an earthly king and set the Jews free from the Roman rule. To avoid this misunderstanding, Jesus taught them the parable of the pounds, to teach that He was definitely going to be crowned King, but only in the future. But before that would happen, He would first depart this earth, like a man going to a far country. The task of Christians was thus to work and bear fruit for Him before He returns, while false Christians in contrast will not work to fulfill God’s will and this fruitlessness will thus be judged by the soon coming King. Jesus did not want the disciples to misunderstand his intentions, nor did he want them to be discouraged by scorners who might ridicule them for believing in a Messiah who subsequently did not become King.

We ourselves should take steps to avoid other Christians misunderstanding our intentions. In speech, we should aim for “sound speech, that cannot be condemned...” (Titus 2:8a), that we may be Christian examples to others. When our pastor performs infant baptism, he stresses to all present that infant baptism does not save, to avoid any misunderstanding that we Bible-Presbyterians believe in baptismal regeneration. On a more personal note, if you go on an outing alone with a Christian of the opposite gender, the other party might assume you are interested in him or her as a life partner. To avoid such misunderstanding, ensure there are others going along on the outing as well or don’t go at all. Many years ago, I remember one Christian girl assuming that a good friend of hers would choose her eventually; she was crushed when the guy finally chose someone else. The fellowship between these two friends as well as of others around them was greatly affected as a result. The guy actually knew that she was interested in him, but could not bring himself to tell her he did not feel the same for her; if only he had done so, the misunderstanding and subsequent pain could have been avoided. It does take extra effort on our part to avoid misunderstanding (and obviously one cannot totally avoid any misunderstanding at all), but we should edify others instead of thinking of how difficult the effort is for ourselves. The unity of the Body of Christ is at stake! May we recognise that this Body that Christ gave Himself for, is worthy of our concern by avoiding misunderstanding within it.

Thought: Do I really love my neighbour as myself?

Prayer: May I do my best to be a useful part of the Body of Christ.

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise"

HOW DO YOU TREAT PRAISE ITEMS BY CHILDREN?

When the children saw what wonderful works Jesus did in entering Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, they spontaneously cried out, praising Him: "*Hosanna to the Son of David*"; in other words, they declared Him to be the Messiah. The chief priests and scribes were unhappy at all this, but Jesus refuted them by saying "...*Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*" (Matthew 21:16b). The word 'perfected' in Greek is *katartizo* which also has the idea of mending, and is elsewhere used to describe the mending of fishing nets e.g. Matthew 4:21. Where adults do not give the praise to God as He deserves, the children shall make up for this deficiency. Note that Jesus mentions sucklings, which refer to children who are still weaning on their mothers' breasts; thus even such young ones can realise how wonderful God is and praise Him for it.

When we witness very young children performing praise items in the sanctuary, there are a variety of different reactions. Some older ones might look with disdain assuming young children cannot perform any praise item to perfection. Some might concentrate on the performance of children that they know. I believe though that the majority's reaction can be summed up in the expression: "so cute!" Have you ever realised that all these reactions are no different from those displayed by non-Christians in any secular kindergarten concert? Christ sets the example for us in how we should react to such praise items: we should instead marvel at the power of God to work in young children. When Christian parents covenant their children to the Lord during infant baptism and bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, these children learn about God from a very young age. By the working of the Holy Spirit many accept Christ as Lord and Savior then, although at that time they may not understand the full meaning of salvation. By simple childlike faith they believe and they are saved! Just as adults praise the Lord, the children also can add their praise to complete or perfect the worship of God. Many such children spontaneously and exuberantly worship their God with loud voices both in such praise items as well as during congregational worship. Is this not a joyful noise?

Thought: Salvation is of the Lord!

Prayer: May I rejoice with thanksgiving when the children praise the Lord.

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s.”

DO YOU STRIVE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS SINCERELY?

I was erroneously taught in my Christian secondary school’s religious knowledge class that Jesus was a master at replying trick questions with trick questions. Nothing could be further from the truth! When the disciples of the Pharisees tried to trap Christ by asking whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor Caesar or not, Jesus saw through their question and asked whose image it was that was on the coins. When they replied it was that of Caesar, Jesus pointed out that the coins then obviously belong to Caesar. In Christ’s words, they should *“render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.”* Note that Jesus was not cleverly side-stepping the issue like a trickster does, but He was answering the question directly and sincerely. Christians must obey human authorities and pay their taxes to them for these authorities are placed over us by God (Romans 13:1-2). The Pharisees were left speechless by the sincere reply given by Jesus to their trick question, for they could not fault it one bit!

Sadly, our schools and mass media like to applaud clever answers rather than sincere answers. Teens use such techniques to answer the questions of parents and teachers, much to the admiration of their fellow teens. For example, during a test one teen was asked where one particular treaty was signed, his answer was: “at the bottom”. I know of a teen who strives very hard to be popular by trying to be witty at every opportunity. Till this day, I don’t think he has a true friend in church because no one can take him seriously or trust him to be telling the truth. Even when I shared the gospel with him, he would never answer sincerely. This may be an extreme example, but it does remind us of the importance of answering sincerely just as Christ did, rather than to give witty answers like what the world appreciates. For example, when your non-Christian classmates ask you why you give thanks for the food, what do you say? Are you afraid that if you answer that you know God provided the food and you are thankful for it, you will get laughed at, and therefore you try to think of a clever reply instead? The more we do not answer sincerely, the greater the likelihood that our testimony is affected and others doubt our sharing of the gospel. On the other hand, when a Christian is sincere and shares the truth of the gospel, then he is a most trustworthy witness for Christ. Yes, he might get mocked by the world for showing such sincerity, but this trustworthy witness will point the elect to Christ.

Thought: Am I truly humble if I am trying to be clever?

Prayer: May my yea be yea and my nay be nay.

DO YOU WARN OTHERS AGAINST ERROR?

After Jesus was extensively questioned by the Jews, He then warned His disciples against the hypocrisy of these teachers. Luke recounts Jesus' words: *“Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; Which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation”* (Luke 20:46-47). While these teachers took pains to appear holy, they used their status to swindle widows into giving them their possessions. These widows could ill afford to give up their worldly goods because they no longer had husbands they could rely on to provide for them, and yet they cruelly took advantage of them. Jesus here showed that not only did He teach others about the truth, but He also warned them against error. To only teach the truth and not to warn of error is to suggest to others that Christianity is only a theory, and thus in practice societal values such as peace and love must prevail over the truth of God's Word. The disciples of Jesus must not have such a reputation of hypocrisy that will cause the world to shun the gospel.

Jesus thus gives us an important example to follow: while it might be safe to teach what is right, we must also point out what is wrong even if it may cause others to be unhappy. Is it not hypocritical if we tell others we believe the Bible has no mistakes, but keep quiet when a fellow teen says he does not share this belief? Worse still, if the fellow teen is your best friend, do you then cease from telling others you have this belief, so that you will not offend this best friend? One of the greatest dangers to our service to the Lord is when we allow friendship and kinship to bias our judgment. Yet, just as Jesus did so to the disciples He cared about, we too must warn those we care about, even at the risk of spoiling the relationship. As Proverbs 27:6 tells us, *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”* Now some of you might try to avoid giving such warnings by claiming that one cannot possibly warn against every single error that one encounters, but the simple answer is that we should start by warning those we care about, those we call friends. Will we have the spiritual strength and spiritual courage to do so? Pray that God will help us!

Thought: Do I have any instances of not warning my friends against error?

Prayer: May I show how much I care by both exhorting and warning.

DO YOU LIVE FOR GOD'S GLORY?

In preparation to do His Father's will, Jesus prayed in John 12:28 *"Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."* The Son submitted Himself totally to the Father's Will, for His sole purpose was to live for God's glory. Jesus did this both by His active and passive obedience, in living a sinless life on earth and then dying on the Cross for us. Thus God the Father proclaimed that Christ had glorified God in His life, and now was going to glorify God in His death. No greater example do we have of one who has so completely lived for God's glory. And not just in action, but also in word, for so often in the gospel of John, Jesus continually gave glory to His Father and not Himself, even though He Himself was the Son of God e.g. John 8:50 *"And I seek not mine own glory..."*. In this we see the humility of Jesus, for all that He did, He did it not to glorify self, but only God the Father. If Jesus the Son of God was able to do so, what more ourselves?

Many of us acknowledge and believe that we must glorify God in whatsoever we do, but I for one confess that I fall short of living for God's glory; and if God calls me home now, I wonder if anyone will be able to honestly say at my funeral that I really lived for God's glory. Yes, there may have been instances in my life where God was glorified, sometimes by my actions, or sometimes despite my actions, but I dare not say that I live completely and only for God's glory. There were times for example where I spent too much time in recreation and for my own pleasure. There are times that I have not given the glory to God for what He has blessed me with.

To truly live for God's glory means that in all that I do, I never seek my own desire, my own will, or my own glory. I must empty myself of all my vain ambitions, and desire for the praise and recognition of man. All that I do must be for God and God alone. This is indeed a tall order, but we look to Jesus as our perfect example. I pray that God will forgive me for falling short, in all the times I failed to live for His glory, and I pray that you too will likewise examine yourself against the perfect standard of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought: Can I truly say I live for God's glory?

Prayer: That I may be reminded daily to live for His glory.

DO YOU SET THE EXAMPLE IN SERVICE?

Earlier in His ministry, Jesus had already taught the disciples that in God’s kingdom, greatness is measured not by position or power, but by how much one serves others. Sadly in Luke 22:24, we read that during the Last Supper, strife once again occurred amongst the disciples on who should be called the greatest. Jesus had to repeat His lesson: *“For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth”* (Luke 22:27). The one that ‘sitteth at meat’ is the one who would sit at the table and wait to be served, usually the position taken by the master of the house or the important guests that he invites. The one that serveth would be the household servants that wait upon the tables, to bring them the food and clear up after them. Logically, in the eyes of the world, it is the one who sits at meat who is respected and deemed the greater one. However, Jesus then tells them that He, though the Son of God, is the one who came amongst them to serve them. Jesus once again pointed out that the disciples should follow His example in service, and should not seek to be served by those they had power and authority over, but to serve them instead. Jesus was able to ask the disciples to follow His example because He indeed was exemplary in His life in seeking to serve rather than to be served.

How about you and I? Can we truly say we set an example in service as Christ did? I notice those who criticize church leaders for not serving enough, usually do not themselves serve either, as if criticizing others helps obscure their own lack of service. Dear brethren, the best way to encourage others to serve more is to set the example yourself. Several adults have told me they feel convicted of their own lack of service when they see teens and youths sacrificing so much of their time in serving the Lord. Your example of service speaks so much louder than the words of those who bemoan the gaps in service in our church, because you show through your works of service that your faith is not dead but very much alive (James 2:17-20). If you want to truly be great in the kingdom of God, then you must learn to humble yourself and do all you can to serve the people around you.

Thought: Is my faith living faith or dead faith?

Prayer: Let others see Jesus in me.

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

ARE YOU HUMBLE IN YOUR SERVICE?

Soon after the Last Supper, Jesus would suffer the greatest humiliation at Calvary. We must realise that no one can ever replicate the degree of humiliation that Christ faced, for though perhaps some men in history have been tortured or otherwise shamefully treated the way Christ was, none of these men possessed the high status of God the Son to begin with. Yet now in the washing of His disciples' feet, we see Christ setting the example in humility of service. The washing of feet was the duty of slaves, and was considered so demeaning that Peter objected to Jesus doing it to him. After Christ had washed the feet of all the disciples, He explained *“Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you”* (John 13:13-15). Jesus as Lord and Master did the work of a slave, to emphasize to His disciples that in their future ministry as Apostles, they must likewise be humble in service.

Jesus knew it was very possible for the disciples as well as ourselves that while we might be willing to serve others, there may be limits to the extent we are willing to serve when we think it too demeaning to us. Every camp, some teens are unwilling to bring the rubbish bag full of food waste to the rubbish point for fear the bag will break and they have to use their bare hands to clean up the mess. Every time the nativity play is performed, most teens are reluctant to play the flock of sheep led by shepherds. Some teens never wash the toilet bowl when it is dirty whether in church or at home, and always assume that someone else will do it! Do you likewise place a limit on your humility in service? I pray that you realise our Lord and Master Jesus Christ set no such limits. He suffered the greatest humiliation known to mankind so that you and I might be saved from our sins. Is there any humiliation that you are unwilling to bear for Him in return? None of us are greater than our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, we are so unworthy compared to Him. Why then do we have any cause to be proud? May we do our best to serve Him in meekness and humility.

Thought: Be thankful that the Son of God set no limits on His humility.

Prayer: May I be truly humble in service as Christ was.

DO YOU PRAY FOR THE FAITH OF OTHERS?

The Lord knew that Satan's intent was to try to destroy Peter, that he may sift him "as wheat". This describes the agricultural process in that time of how the farmer would thresh the harvested wheat by beating it with a flail, and then he would sift or winnow them by separating the chaff (the useless husk) from the actual grain. What Satan intended to do was thus to put Peter and the disciples through tough times, in hope that they would be like the useless husk that is blown away by the storm of affliction. Jesus was thus very concerned about Peter's weak faith, seeing through his cocksure attitude. Jesus prayed for Peter's faith that it would not fail, that Peter would not depart from the faith. Note that Jesus had prayed this prayer for Peter's faith even before Peter's boast that he would never deny the Lord. God answered the prayer of Jesus: although Peter subsequently fell by denying the Lord thrice, his faith did not fail. Unlike Judas Iscariot who after betraying Christ believed no hope was left for him and thus committed suicide, the fallen Peter was filled with remorse but never lost all hope in Christ. Peter would have remembered the second part of Luke 22:32 *"But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren"* and clung on to this hope that Jesus would subsequently restore Peter, which Jesus did after His resurrection.

I believe all of us Christians have interceded in prayer for others before, but we tend to pray more for the specific physical needs of others which they have requested prayer for, such as exams, health, difficult projects, time management etc. We seldom pray for the faith of others, unless they specifically request for that. We forget that even though a prayer list may, for example, state a certain person's prayer request for recovery from a certain illness, we should also pray for this person's faith, that through the whole difficult period of his sickness, he would learn to trust in the Lord and grow in his faith. For what glory to God does it bring if God heals this person but all can see this person never really trusted God to heal him? Indeed God is conversely glorified in many cases of Christians being struck down by terminal diseases but refusing to lose faith in Christ, cheerfully sharing the gospel from the hospital bed, and being faithful unto death. For Christians, victory is thus being faithful to Christ, even when our health or comforts are threatened. We should therefore pray for other Christians that their faith may not fail, no matter how bad the situation is, but instead thrive and bear a testimony for the Lord!

Thought: Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

Prayer: May I pray regularly for the faith of others.

DO YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER IN CHRIST?

Leviticus 19:18 first gave the commandment of loving thy neighbour as thyself, and Jesus Himself echoed this commandment several times. The reason why John 13:34 mentions this as a new commandment is because of the additional phrase *“as I have loved you”*. Prior to this, the disciples might have been tempted to limit the extent to which they showed love to their neighbour. Remember how the Jewish lawyer who found it so hard to confess a Samaritan as his neighbour in Luke 10:29-37. Remember how Jonah initially could not bring himself to preach to the Ninevites in Jonah 1-2. The new commandment Jesus gave showed that there was no limit to this love towards our neighbour, for as much as Jesus loves us, we too should love our neighbour: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (John 13:34-35). The disciples were soon going to witness Jesus going to the Cross, the greatest demonstration of love ever, and that same love of Christ we receive should spur every one of us Christians who bear His Name to likewise show that same love of Christ to every other Christian. Through such a testimony, others may see true love in action and then be able to better understand what the love of Christ is all about, and identify us as disciples of this Lord of love. And this audience includes unbelievers.

Like the Jews, we probably limit the extent we love our neighbour; we show most love for family and friends, show far less love to our church brethren, and like the lawyer we might even ignore unbelievers! First of all, we must realise that the blood of Christ that is shed for all believers is thicker than the blood of family, thus we should love those whom Christ loves and gave His life for. We must show love to unbelievers as well, in sharing with them the most precious gift of salvation in Christ Jesus and doing everything possible to further the gospel cause, such that *“all men”* may know we are truly His disciples. Without genuine love for these who are perishing and dying, these unbelievers may on the other hand perceive we are just doing our duty and could not care less! Let us learn from the compassion that Christ showed to the lost, for these are the people He came to save. Let us thus be a testimony of Christ’s love.

Thought: Do I limit whom I love?

Prayer: That I may love others as Christ does.

DO YOU COMFORT OTHERS WHO ARE TROUBLED?

Jesus perceived that the disciples were troubled by His talk of impending death and departure. He knew that at that point of time, their understanding was still limited, and did not fully comprehend why he had to leave them. Jesus therefore comforted them with these words, beginning with John 14:1 *“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.”* Notice how in the way that Jesus comforted, He turned their attention to God. Just as the disciples had faith in God’s promises in His Word, the disciples should likewise believe in Jesus the Son of God. Jesus’ death was necessary to conquer death on our behalf and thus open for us the way to the kingdom of God, fulfilling God’s law and promises in His Word. The disciples may not have realised the full significance of Christ’s words during the Last Supper, but surely after His resurrection they would have grasped the full import of these comforting words.

When you perceive other Christians who are troubled, do you comfort them, or ignore them? I pray that you will henceforth not ignore what you have learnt from yesterday’s devotion. However, you might feel wholly inadequate to comfort them; your reasoning is that you do not understand the feelings of others of a different gender, a different age group, a different personality etc. However, you have forgotten that you actually have a commonality far greater than these differences, which is this bond in Christ Jesus through His blood, and thus every Christian can be comforted with the Word of God. As long as you are comforted by God’s Word during trials, likewise comfort others who are troubled by using the same Words of God, for every true Christian will recognise that these are the Words of our great Shepherd Jesus Christ although spoken by the voices of ordinary men like you and I. In this way, the Holy Spirit is using us to speak God’s Word rather than share our own wisdom, so that the glory may go to God alone. That is the best way that we can comfort a brother or sister in Christ, by pointing him or her to trust in God and His Word!

Thought: Am I still giving excuses for not comforting others?

Prayer: May I comfort others though sharing God’s Word.

ARE YOU COMPELLED BY LOVE FOR GOD?

So often we think that the reason why Jesus did all that He did was because of love for you and me. However this is only part of the reason. Jesus in John 14:31 says *"But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence."* Jesus lived a life on earth totally obedient to His Father's commandments and then went to the Cross in obedience to His Father's will. He did all this because He was compelled by His love for His Father. This love compelled Him to purposefully face the sufferings to come, and so with steely resolve He was able to say *"Arise, let us go hence"*. Later in John 21, we will see Christ exhorting Peter to do all things compelled by love for Him. Here, Christ points out that He is the example to the entire world in the way that He obeys the Father compelled by love.

God desires that we too obey Him compelled by our love for Christ. This should be our natural gratuitous response to what He did on the Cross for us. Our motivation for obedience is important. Christ rebuked the Pharisees for appearing to obey just so that they would be admired of men. Some might obey only out of duty or obligation, just like those born into a Christian family who attend church because they are forced to do so. Some might obey because they desire more health or wealth and assume God will provide this in reward for their obedience. I know of one guy who pretended to obey so that he could marry the Christian girl he was pursuing! Wrong motives call into question whether one is truly saved or not. Even if one is saved, having the wrong motive can cause you to get disillusioned: for example, when you teach difficult children and find no improvement, you might get discouraged. Only when you are motivated and compelled by love for Christ will you be able to continue serving no matter what. I pray that in this study of the life of Christ, you will realise all the more what Christ has done for you, and that you will thus obey God and serve Him compelled out of love for Him, just as Christ did when he was on earth.

Thought: What is my motive for obedience?

Prayer: May I obey Thee out of love alone.

HOW OBEDIENT ARE YOU?

One of the major problems with the Pharisees was that they emphasized keeping of the Law, without abiding in the true Vine which is Christ. One can never be saved by trying to keep the Law perfectly because we will always fall short. The Christian knows he must abide in Christ who has kept the Law perfectly on our behalf. Not only is salvation only in Christ Jesus, but also we can live abundant lives here on earth only by abiding in Christ. We are weak vessels, but in the omnipotent hands of our divine Potter, we can be used to glorify Him. One of the divine promises that should encourage us weak vessels is that Christ loves us, and He told the disciples in John 15:10 *“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”* The Father loves Christ, and Christ in return loves the Father and will keep His commandments. Likewise Christ loves us so much that He gave Himself for us, and in return we keep His commandments compelled by love. Remember, this love that Christ has for His Father compelled Jesus to obey His Father perfectly; although in this mortal body on earth we can never keep God’s commandments perfectly, the more we love Him for what He did for us, the more we will endeavour to obey His every commandment.

A person in love with another will find out everything the other person desires and will strive to fulfill them; nothing will be too difficult to fulfill if one truly loves this person! If you truly love God, you would naturally want to do all you can to obey Him and keep His commandments! The key towards true obedience would be to study God’s Word to find out more about what He desires. This is where your love will be both tested and strengthened; as you study His Word you will discover more areas of your life that fall short of His commandments. At the same time you will discover more of how deeply Christ loves us and thus your love for Him will abound all the more to compel you to obey Him in these areas you fall short, rather than despair that the Christian life is so difficult. Obedience and love go hand in hand. Please do not delude yourself by saying you love God with all your heart and yet find excuses not to obey His every command.

Thought: Is my love for Christ growing or dying?

Prayer: May my love for Thee grow more and more each day.

HOW ARE YOU WHEN HATED WITHOUT CAUSE?

As sinful people, we are always very quick to defend our own names. Whenever we are accused of something, we would immediately jump to our own defence, or try to come up with justifications for our actions or even push the blame to someone else. Yet we know that, most of the time, our accusers are justified to a certain extent. There is likely to be some truth in what they say about us, and seldom are we entirely blameless.

For Christ, it was different. So hated was He by His enemies, yet so entirely unjustified were they in their hatred. Today’s passage tells us that Christ was hated because of the works which He had performed. What works were these? Take a brief look through the gospels, and you will see that Christ never did anything to deserve such hatred and ill will. Rather, His life was characterized by innumerable marvelous miracles and wondrous works. He brought sight to the blind and life to the dead, and not just physically but also spiritually. But what did He receive in return? He was accused of blasphemy, captured and tried, and sentenced to death! Yet, He continued to show great compassion and love to even His enemies. Even with His dying breath, He showed mercy and compassion, and prayed, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”*. Amazing love!

How about you? Just as it was prophesied that Christ would be hated without a cause (Psalm 35:19), likewise Christ has told His disciples that the world would surely hate those who follow the Lord, simply because of the One whom they follow (John 15:19). Indeed, the world is not a friend of Christians. How do you react when you encounter such people who would hate you simply because you are a Christian? The human nature in us would cause us to want to treat these people as badly as they treat us. We would find it difficult to love such people or to care for their souls. Yet, Christ’s perfect example in how He regarded His enemies should motivate us to a greater love and compassion for such people. When we see their strong hatred for Christians, all the more so, we realise that they are in need of salvation grace. Dear teen, may you thus seek to follow the example of Christ and to love those who hate you without cause.

Thought: When hated without cause, love without condition.

Prayer: Lord, help me to love even those who hate me.

DO YOU POINT OTHERS TO THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Jesus' disciples were filled with sorrow when He told them that He would shortly have to depart from them. To give them hope, He gave them the promise of the Holy Spirit. During His earthly ministry, He had taught His disciples as much as He could. However, due to their spiritual immaturity and lack of understanding of deeper spiritual matters, there was so much more that they needed to learn (John 16:12). Hence, Christ assured them that His departure would be followed by the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Do note that this does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not active and present before the death of Christ – the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity is eternal and has no beginning or end. Rather, this refers to the prominence of each Person of the Godhead during different points in Man's history. After Jesus' earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit would now come to the forefront in the cooperative work of the Trinity in man's redemption. What roles would the Spirit perform? Today's reading tells us that *“he will guide you into all truth”* and that *“he will shew you things to come”*. Through the Holy Spirit's illumination, all believers will be led into all truth. The natural man, by his own sinful self, can never hope to attain any knowledge at all of spiritual things. It is only when the Holy Spirit indwells the heart of a person that he can seek to know the things of God (I Corinthians 2:9-16). To the unbeliever, the Bible is but a collection of stories and wise sayings. But to the believer, we know that the Bible is so much more than that. It is God Himself speaking to His children, full of rich spiritual truths and instruction.

From this we learn of Jesus' care for His disciples in pointing them to the Holy Spirit. Knowing that they had a need for much more spiritual instruction, He pointed them to the Holy Spirit as the source of this. Likewise, we are also to point others to the Holy Spirit. New believers especially, might tend to rely a lot on the wisdom of men when trying to understand the Bible. They rely on commentaries, or the exposition of God's Word from pastors and preachers. Certainly these are all useful sources of instruction. But above all, they should be encouraged to search the Scriptures themselves, relying on the Holy Spirit's illumination to be their teacher and guide. Every believer has the promise of the Holy Spirit; every believer should rely on the help of the Holy Spirit. Dear teen, may you also rely on the Holy Spirit, and be able to point others to Him and to remind them of the important role that He plays in their lives.

Thought: The Holy Spirit is promised not only to some, but to every believer.

Prayer: Lord, teach me the importance of the Holy Spirit's ministry in every believer's life.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS TRUE VICTORY?

Sometimes, the Christian journey can get tiring. Trials and testings come our way, and we grow weary as we face difficulties and struggles. Doubt and discontentment start to creep in, and sometimes we just want to throw our hands in the air in despair and exclaim, “Why is it so hard to be a Christian?!”

Should this be the attitude of a true Christian? No doubt we will face difficulties and trials, but do we despair as if we have no hope? Think for a moment about our Lord Jesus Christ. He faced the greatest difficulty of all time – He was to go to the cross, bearing the weight of the sin of the world on His shoulders. He knew full well what it was that awaited Him – the pain and torment, not just physically, but more so spiritually. And yet He accepted it and faced it, armed with the knowledge that He would rise again on the third day, victorious over the grave.

With this same knowledge and conviction, Jesus was thus able to offer much comfort to the disciples. Yes, much tribulation awaited them – almost all of them would go on to die a martyr’s death at the hands of cruel persecutors. But they were commanded to “be of good cheer”! Why and how could they be cheerful in the midst of such affliction? Simply based on the assurance from Christ that “*I have overcome the world*”. Not an uncertain “I may overcome” or a future but as yet unfulfilled promise that “I will overcome” – it was a confident pronouncement of fact, Jesus has already overcome! Though the battle with worldliness and sin is an ongoing one, we know that through the death and resurrection of Christ the victory ultimately belongs to God and those who are on His side.

Dear teen, are you similarly assured of this fact? Are you fully convicted that Christ has already won the battle against sin? If so, why then are you still faithless and doubting when trials come your way? Christ’s assurance should always ring true in your heart – no trial should ever rob you of your peace and joy in God, for you know that, through God’s help, you will be able to overcome it. Dear teen, may you never fear trials or despair in the midst of difficulties, but instead take heart in the knowledge that the victory has already been won.

Thought: “Faith is the victory! O, glorious victory that overcomes the world!”

Prayer: Lord, grant me spiritual sight to see that the battle is already won.

ARE YOU OF THE WORLD?

“Christians should be in the world, but not of the world” – I’m sure this is a phrase that you have heard repeated so often. But what exactly does it mean to be “in the world, but not of the world”? If we are in the world, how can we not be of the world? As always, Christ is our perfect example. As much as Christ was fully God, He was also fully man. Difficult as it may be to fathom, Christ once lived on the very same earth we now live on too. He ate the same food and breathed the same air. He lived amongst people just like you and me. Yet though He was physically in the world, He was never of the world. He was never a partaker of worldly pleasures, nor was He a follower of worldly trends. He didn’t indulge in worldly practices, nor did He delight in worldly activities. Yes, He was present on earth, but His gaze was always fixed heavenwards, seeking only the things that glorify God and bring honour to His name.

Likewise for us who call ourselves followers of Christ, this same description should apply to us. You might find yourself placed in a worldly environment, interacting with classmates who curse and swear and blaspheme the name of God. You might even be in a family made up of non-believers – you might have parents who discourage you from attending church services in favour of tuition classes on Sunday, or siblings who make fun of you when you do your quiet time. But do you allow yourself to be affected by such worldly influences? Or are you able to keep up a blameless Christian testimony even in the midst of such temptations and difficulties?

Of course, this does not mean that we are to entirely cut ourselves off from all contact with non-Christians. If not, how are we to win souls for the kingdom of God? Christ Himself was found in the company of the basest members of society – the harlots, the tax-collectors etc. But though He was among them, He never participated in any of their sins, nor did He condone them. Rather, His sole mission was to bring them the message of the gospel. Dear teen, may this likewise be your motivation and purpose – to keep yourself pure from the stains of sin. As you continue your Christian walk on this earth, may you maintain a blameless testimony that is ‘out of this world’, that you may be able to bring the glorious message of salvation to those whom God has placed in your path.

Thought: To be in the world but not of the world is not a paradox, but a command for every Christian.

Prayer: Lord, keep me pure from the sinful earth-stains.

DO YOU PRAY FOR UNITY IN THE CHURCH?

In John 17:21, as part of His High Priestly prayer, Jesus prayed to the Father *"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* From the preceding verse, the *"they"* refers to the body of true believers in Christ, and Christ is praying that this body may be united in the same way as Christ and the Father are united. Now Christ and the Father were always in complete agreement, because this is based on truth. This unity in the Godhead is crystal clear to us who read God's Word, because both the Father and the Son are always one in truth. God can never contradict Himself! Thus any unity in the church must be based on the truth of God's Word, and must never compromise the truth. The ecumenical movement must therefore be rejected because it tries to compromise between truth and error. For example, when the ecumenical movement promotes unity with the Roman Catholics, and encourages Protestants to accept Mary as divine, that compromises the truth of John 14:6 where salvation is through Christ alone. If such a stand is accepted, the world would perceive there is unity and peace amongst men who have settled their differences, rather than see unity between the true church and the Godhead. Thus the ecumenical movement is wrong in adopting John 17:21 as a proof text that God wants all who call themselves Christians to settle all their differences. This is not true unity because it is not based upon the truth. When Jesus was on earth doing His Father's will, He never sought to achieve unity between Himself and the Jews, but always sought to declare the gospel truth alone.

Thus we who are part of this true church must strive for this godly unity that is based on truth. Now this is not easy, because the truth is sometimes hard to accept. I remember in the past, a teen in his 20s started to believe in Hyper-Calvinism. He eventually he left our church, leaving behind friends with whom he had worshipped together with for years. While the breaking of this bond of fellowship is saddening, if this teen were to remain and exhort other members on this false belief, the effects might have been far worse. When we pray for unity, we must pray first of all that all parties be rooted and grounded in God's Word. We must not pray for the kind of unity that seeks to bury differences if it compromises the truth. However, when there is no compromise of truth, then since all parties are united in the truth, then through much prayer and meditation on this truth, those who differ can show Christian love one toward another and accept these differences in unity.

Thought: Love rejoices in the truth.

Prayer: May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me from day to day.

DO YOU POINT OTHERS TO GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY?

In response to the disciples’ question about when Jesus would return and when the world would end, Jesus answered “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36) Although Jesus was God the Son, He pointed His disciples to the sovereignty of God the Father, who is in control of all events. Because the timing of His return was not known to any man, it was thus imperative for the disciples and all believers after them to live each day knowing His return was soon. Unlike those in the days of Noah who partied away, we must instead watch and pray, for who knows the time that the sovereign God has appointed for His Son to return. For this return is not to execute mercy but judgment. For this world, His return will be a time of calamity, where sin and evil will be judged, and everything on earth will be destroyed.

Like Christ, we too should point others to God’s sovereignty, not just about the timing of Christ’s second coming, but in all aspects, that both believers and unbelievers may realise God is in ultimate control. When we receive blessing, it should be natural for Christians to acknowledge that all good gifts come from God and give Him the glory, for not to do so points others to our own abilities instead. When calamity happens, we must acknowledge that His Will is best. Here we differ from false religion: in many religions, misfortune is due to fate. No such thing with our sovereign God: He is always in control, so if He allows misfortune to happen, it is for our good. Therefore to simply say in such situations “it is God’s will” does not fully point to God the Father as Muslims and Hindus will all have similar responses. Point others to God’s sovereignty by acknowledging you trust God that He is in control and His way is perfect. You may have studied very hard for a particular subject, and believed you have done enough in the exam to pass, but if results indicate otherwise, accept the outcome and point others to God’s sovereignty by acknowledging you trust God that He is in control and His way is perfect. Be thus an example to other believers who have poor results as well, and to unbelievers in showing your trust in God.

Thought: God makes no mistakes, His way is best.

Prayer: The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.

DO YOU RESPECT THOSE WHO SHOW TRUE FAITH?

Imagine you and I were there at the temple at that time of Luke 21:1-4. Our eyes would be drawn to the spectacle of the rich casting their gifts into the treasury. Our eyes would widen at the glimmer and beauty of all that gold and silver, and our hearts would marvel at the largesse of these rich men. As they walk in our direction we would respectfully stand aside for them to pass, probably giving a little bow or nod of respect as they come near. We probably would not notice the woman going up to the same treasury and casting something very small in contrast; if we did, we might think this woman stingy and miserly and stare at her in disdain. (A mite was the smallest coin in those days, and the size of the mite is about the size of our thumbnail). Unlike most of the people that day, Jesus noticed her, and had great respect for her, far more than the rich man. Jesus turned to his disciples and told them that she a poor widow, and she had cast in all she possessed, and she was left with nothing at all. She was not foolish in doing so, but in contrast she was totally trusting God to provide for her after she gave her all to Him. What amazing faith! Jesus thus valued that offering far more than the offerings of the rich men.

In Singapore, many are attracted to the attractive buildings of the mega-churches, funded largely by many rich men who attend such churches, and some might even come just to meet such rich men! In contrast, many walk past the ordinary looking buildings of the small churches, and assume the more run down the church, the less God had blessed it! In the same way, in our own church, we might give our deepest respect to those members who openly give rich gifts to missions and other causes, and shun those who are clearly poor and shabbily dressed. It is so easy for us to respect riches and despise poverty. But realise that to do so, is to think like the world. We must remember that one's physical and material possessions are immaterial in the eyes of God. What matters most is one's godliness and faithfulness. Indeed, we should instead respect those who have faithfully given their all in spite of their poverty. Don't give more respect to the rich member who ordered a caterer to provide delicious snacks, and look down to the poor member who spent many hours and most of the little money he/she has to provide simple refreshments for you.

Thought: What and who does Jesus value?

Prayer: May I respect faithfulness instead of treasures.

DO YOU SUBMIT TO GOD’S WILL IN ALL SITUATIONS?

At the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed *“Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”* (Luke 22:42) Jesus had always submitted to His Father’s will, and now as He was about to face His greatest trial ever, He continued to submit. The sin of mankind would be cast upon Him, and naturally His divine nature which knew no sin abhorred this, but He still submitted to His Father’s will in all situations without exception. He is truly our perfect example. In case you might think it was easy for Jesus to face all these trials because He was the Son of God, consider that in this most difficult of trials, He was still fully human, and as the Son of Man He bore the punishment of our sins. He could have called legions of angels to repel the soldiers who would soon arrest Him, but He did not. His human frailty caused Him to pray with drops of sweat, later make Him unable to carry the cross the entire way, and finally endure the excruciating pain of crucifixion, but He went as a meek lamb to the slaughter, that God’s divine Will would be done.

You who are made free from the bondage of sin by this perfect example of the Son of Man, will you in return submit to God’s Will in all situations? It is our human tendency to bargain and say you will try to obey His Will as much as possible, and already your mind prepares to give excuses for those times you will not do so: this trial is too hard, or I need some slack, or I am too tired, or I will make up for it the next time. The worst possible reaction is to think, I better not read God’s Word, then what I do not know of God’s Will I cannot be blamed for not doing! If Christ had given such excuses for not doing God’s Will, all of us would be condemned to hellfire.

Thought: What excuses do I give?

Prayer: May I give no excuses for not doing His Will

DO YOU HAVE FAITH THAT GOD WILL STRENGTHEN?

Just before going to Gethsemane, Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper and foretold of both Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. In a matter of hours, He, the master would be betrayed by a disciple's kiss, an armed crowd would come to arrest Him, and all His beloved disciples would desert Him. A farce of a trial would ensue, culminating in a long, painful and humiliating death on the cross. Between these events, there in the peaceful garden of Gethsemane, Christ went to pray, to commune with His Father. He prayed for strength to do the Father's will. Christ, being fully man was fearful of His impending death. His humanity was being tested. Despite all the failings of the people around Him, His Heavenly Father did not desert Him. The Father sent an angel to strengthen the Son. Luke is the only gospel account that mentions how the Lord was strengthened. In what way did the angel strengthen Christ? We do not know. But we know with the appearance of the angel, a messenger from the Father, that the Father heard His Son's prayer, and His presence was with His Son. We also know Christ's prayer was answered because He was subsequently able to obey the Father's will and die willingly on the cross.

It is not easy to have faith that God will strengthen us in times of great trials. Often we lack faith, we feel as though God is so far, or has forgotten us. We doubt the power of prayer. We forget God altogether and rely on our own wisdom and strength. Sometimes, we just do not want to pray because we do not want to do God's will. We do not want strength. As Christ's humanity was tested in His final hours, He sought the quiet solitude where He looked to the Father for strength, praying, believing that His prayer would be answered. Retreat to your prayer closet when you need strength! Angels may not appear now to instruct, strengthen, or confirm God's will in our lives. But what we have are godly counsel from friends, family, and church leaders to instruct and encourage us to obey. We have the Word of God which tells us what God's will is. If you desire to do God's will and pray that His Will be done, surely He will strengthen you. God delights and desires for you to do His will. If your faith in God's faithfulness or ability to strengthen you has grown weak, reflect on His faithfulness that has seen you through your life's trials thus far. Did He give you enough strength to endure them? Surely He has, and He always will. If only we would ask.

Thought: What is the antidote to fear and lack of faith that God will enable you to do His will? More prayer or less?

Prayer: LORD, I know you answer prayer. Give me the strength to do Your will, not mine.

*“...let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works
... and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”*

DO YOU ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO PRAY FOR STRENGTH?

Christ instructed Peter, James and John to do two things - watch and pray. Watching required them to abstain from sleep and be vigilant. Praying was to commune with God for divine strength to face what lay ahead. Much danger was awaiting them! Soon under the cloak of darkness Judas would arrive with an armed crowd, hearts all brimming with murderous intent. The disciples needed to be vigilant and prayerful, so that they may not give in to sin, to succumb to the temptation to run and deny Christ. They needed to be physically and spiritually awake and on guard. Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to pray in Gethsemane. When Christ told them to watch and pray, did they want to obey? Were they willing to watch and spend this precious time left with Christ fruitfully? Most definitely. But yet they wasted it. Their tired bodies slowly succumbed to sleep, not once, but twice! They had cast out demons and healed the sick in the name of Christ, yet they could not stay awake for even an hour to watch and pray with Him this final time. Their very best intentions came to naught.

Just as wakefulness slowly but surely gave way to sleep, so can we slowly and subtly fall into sin. How incredibly weak the flesh is! We fall into sin when we do not see the danger ahead or we overestimate our strength. The best of intentions alone are not enough. Nevertheless, do not despair! Though the slumbering disciples exemplify our susceptibility to falling into sin, we can avoid the danger by listening to the exhortation of Christ to watch and pray! When should we watch and pray? Always. There is no time when we are not susceptible to falling into sin. Our adversary Satan does not rest, nor will we be free from the weakness of our flesh whilst in this corruptible body. Indeed, being on constant watch is tiring. Soldiers take turns to be on the lookout. Peter, James and John could have encouraged one another and therefore strengthened one another to remain awake, watchful and praying. We see the necessity and beauty of Christian fellowship in gathering together to pray for one another. There is strength in numbers. Christ asked the disciples to pray for themselves, lest they fall into sin. He knew that their spirit was willing but their flesh was weak. This was His burden for them. Do you have this burden not just for yourself but also for fellow brethren? When others stumble and struggle do you encourage them to pray for strength?

Thought: Do you ask others to pray for you? Do you pray for others?

Prayer: Lord, may prayers for others be a regular and integral part of my prayer life.

ARE YOU FERVENT IN YOUR PRAYERS?

As His life on this earth drew to an end, Christ sought solitude in Gethsemane to pray. To be fervent is to possess passionate intensity. We see the earnest fervency of Christ's prayer in the following ways:

1. He sought a quiet place where He could pray, focused, undisturbed and privately without distractions.
2. Christ fell on His face as He prayed, demonstrating a spirit of total humility before the Father.
3. It was at night, the end of a long day. Christ was physically tired, but yet he saw the need to pray. Prayer requires time and discipline.
4. Christ kept on praying despite disappointment from those closest and dearest to Him. Peter, James and John fell asleep not once but twice. Imagine the disappointment Christ felt, as they could not even stay awake for an hour to watch and pray with Him one last time. Nevertheless, He let them be and continued praying, singularly focused and undaunted.
5. Christ prayed the same prayer repeatedly, with great sincerity and anguish so much so that despite the cool hour of the night He had sweat which was as great drops of blood that fell to the ground. He prayed acknowledging the total power of the Father to let the cup pass from Him, yet not His will but the Father's be done.

Christ prayed with such intensity because He knew how important prayer was, especially in light of the great trial that He was about to face. If He as the Son of God saw such a need for fervent prayer, what more for us?

Perhaps you think you have a pretty healthy prayer life. In light of Christ our perfect example, reassess your prayer life. Do you have a private prayer life, or do you only pray during public occasions such as Sunday Worship or Prayer Meetings? Is your prayer life disciplined, or subject to your moods and level of energy? Can you honestly say you have prayed with the same fervour that Christ had? Examine your life. Are there not things in your life that are worthy of sustained and persevering prayer? An unsaved loved one or friend? Besetting sin that you struggle with? Direction in an important decision you need to make? Struggling to obey God's commandments? Becoming slack or lacking wisdom in service? If these things truly matter to you, then surely you will make time on your knees in prayer. Not just an occasional prayer, but committed, earnest, sincere and fervent prayer.

Thought: Re-examine not just what you are praying for but why.

Prayer: Teach me to pray, Lord, teach me to pray.

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves..."

DO YOU HAVE COURAGE WHEN PERSECUTED?

As soon as Christ had finished praying, the tranquility of the garden was broken with the arrival of Judas and a band of men bearing lanterns, torches, and weapons. Throughout Christ's ministry, the Jewish leaders were always there, seeking ways to find fault with Him, harass His followers and prevent Him from teaching the truth. Such was their persecution that they chose these circumstances to arrest Him – armed, under the cloak of darkness as though He was a dangerous criminal. Confronted with this crowd, Jesus, unarmed, went forth boldly and calmly, and asked them who they were looking for. He took the initiative approach them first even though He knew the answer. He did not cower or hesitate. He stood His ground with quiet resolve, responding to their threats in a very matter-of-fact way. Jesus did not flinch when facing arrest. Despite His immediate predicament and danger, He had the presence of mind to lovingly think of the safety of his disciples. Christ's injunction to Peter to put away the sword and let God's sovereign will be done diffused the situation. In the heated situation and under great duress, Christ also paused to heal the wounded captor. Peter's act could have easily sparked off a fight. People would have been needlessly harmed and all the disciples arrested. But it was Christ they wanted. He alone would be arrested. And alone to the cross He would go. In Christ's firm, gentle and selfless demenaour throughout His arrest we see His great strength. Christ knew exactly what lay ahead for Him. He had known all His life. Was He afraid? Yes. Courageous? Yes. Courage is not the absence of fear but possessing the strength to persevere and withstand that fear.

Persecution goes further than someone mocking you or making fun of you. Persecution also includes ill treatment, hostility from people that follow and pursue after you even when you flee. They persistently seek you out to harass you. Persecution marked the life of Christ, the disciples and many of the saints of the early church. Perhaps some of you face persecution for your faith or your stance on the truth. How have you faced up to this persecution? Did you run away in fear or embarrassment? Hesitate? React and lash out in anger? For those of us who have not faced persecution yet, we still need to prepare ourselves for it, so that should that day come, no matter what form the persecution may be and how unexpected, we will respond in a manner worthy of Christ our perfect example who amidst 'wolves' was 'wise as a serpent' and 'harmless as a dove'.

Thought: Are you prepared to face persecution with courage?

Prayer: Grant me courage to face percutation and sin not.

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and...”

HOW DO YOU HANDLE INJUSTICE METED TO YOU?

A trial is a formal legal examination of evidence before an impartial judge or jury to determine the guilt of an accused. It is a basic human right in civilized and orderly societies. Everything about the trial of Christ before the Jewish high priest Caiaphas defied any semblance of a fair and just trial. Christ was denied basic respect and dignity. Everyone involved in the trial was corrupt! The chief priests, elders and all the council actively sought false evidence against Christ. Evidence presented by the witnesses was spurious. They all contradicted each other, and they distorted the words of Christ. In response to all that, Christ only spoke to confirm who He was and prophesied of His second coming. This elicited a charge of blasphemy for they refused to believe that He was indeed the Son of God. The high priest tore his clothes and condemned Him to death. This was indeed a ludicrous charge as Christ being the Son of God is incapable of committing blasphemy! The whole trial was but a mere formality. The sentence of death was a foregone conclusion. Christ could have easily refuted the false testimony and accusations, yet He held His peace. Christ showed no contempt for the kangaroo court nor tried to escape even though His life hung in the balance. Through it all, Christ exemplified complete passive obedience to the Father, and in doing so showed great strength.

“It’s not fair!” How many times have you cried this or at the very least thought it? In fact, most of us struggle to even accept just punishment due to us as a result of our wrongdoing. We try to avoid the consequences, try to justify our actions, or do anything to mitigate it. How do you think you will respond in the face of gross injustice when you are completely innocent? As Christ did, with total meekness and humility? Will you accept it quietly, without hesitation, counter-arguments, without uttering a single ‘but’? This sinful world is inherently unjust and we ourselves are so full of self. Was it justice for Christ to go to the cross for our sin? Nevertheless, as Christ stood there in the face of the false accusations, He knew they were for a greater purpose. These injustices are but temporal. And, so too are they in your life. They may seem unbearable but as a Christian, you suffer not in vain, but for the most worthy testimony of Christ. Your meek and humble testimony will shine brightly amongst unbelievers who will find it unfathomable. Handling false accusations as Christ did is not weakness but manifestation of strength of faith. God is the ultimate judge and He will reward and punish accordingly.

Thought: Are you a Christian? Then count it worthy to suffer for Christ!

Prayer: Lord, may You grant me the faith to suffer injustice with joy.

ARE YOU PREPARED TO BE HUMILIATED FOR CHRIST?

After Christ was denied a fair trial before His own people and given a death sentence, He was humiliated further as He was blindfolded (Luke 22:64), punched, slapped, and then taunted to identify who had struck Him! The *'they'* who did this were the servants who came close to Him, not just to physically hit Him but also to spit upon His face - an act of great contempt. All this was vindictive and personal and not what we would expect in the due course of a trial, all the more so one in a religious court. They were the blasphemers, not Jesus. He was the Son of God but they treated Him worse than a common criminal. Christ had done nothing to warrant such malicious and dehumanizing treatment. He had not shown disregard for the proceedings of the court nor tried to escape. Throughout it all, Jesus remained calm and collected. He was truly the fulfillment of prophecy. *"He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7)

Are you prepared to be humiliated for Christ? You may think you are, but do reconsider. It is not mere embarrassment or to be made to feel awkward or self-conscious. Humiliation is to be publically shamed, to lose one's dignity and self-respect. How do you react when someone finds fault with you? Or makes jokes about your name or your appearance? Are these easy to bear? Have you reacted in anger, or felt it in your heart? We are proud and quick to defend our image, our reputation. Whereas when people mock Christianity and take God's name in vain, isn't it all too easy to let it pass and keep quiet? What makes you think you will not shirk away from being humiliated for Christ? In fact, I think most of us have already showed how little we are prepared.

Before the Jewish council, our Lord and Saviour did nothing to defend Himself from the miscarriage of justice, the illegal and dehumanizing treatment. He was prepared for it. He knew the world was so lost in sin. The perpetrators were those whom He loved and had come to save. How it must have broken His heart. We can be better prepared to be humiliated for Christ by having a low esteem of ourselves in light of what Saviour Jesus Christ has done for us. When you are humiliated for Christ, remember the love of Christ and thus the love we ought to have for the lost. The question should not be whether Christ is worthy to suffer humiliation for, but whether we are worthy to suffer humiliation for Him.

Thought: Do you find it difficult to esteem others better than yourself?

Prayer: May I actively live out John 3:30 each and every day.

DO YOU HAVE A FORGIVING SPIRIT?

‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ was one of the seven sayings of Christ on the cross. The *‘them’* that Christ refers to are the soldiers and others who participated in His crucifixion, from His betrayal to His death on the cross. With this prayer, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:12, *“he bare the sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors”*. Indeed what amazing love of our Lord and Saviour, which lead him to plead for mercy for His tormentors whilst hanging on the cross. He had pity upon them for their ignorance, for they did not realise that they were killing the very Son of God. Note that the sins that Christ prayed for the Father to forgive pertained only to the sins from betrayal to the cross, it was not the forgiveness of all their sins that comes at the point of one’s salvation. They would still need to ask Christ to forgive them of their personal sins, for that is the only way that they can be saved. Indeed the Father did forgive them for their crimes, for He could have struck dead those responsible for His Son’s death straightaway, but He did not. Instead, many Jews were later saved at Pentecost and throughout the book of Acts. As such, many that spilled Jesus’ blood afterwards came to drink of it.

To forgive is not just to stop feeling angry and resentful against someone for an offence. To forgive as Christ did, goes far beyond this. It is our duty to pray for those who transgress against us even when they persist in doing so. We ought to pray not just that we will forgive them, but go further to intercede on their behalf, that they will come to see their sin and repent, that God would forgive them. For those who are unsaved, all the more we would pray, for their salvation! Will you not have a burden for their soul and intercede for them? We must also remember that it was our sin too that nailed Christ to the cross. Just as He paid the ultimate price and has freely forgiven us, we too should forgive our fellow man for their sins against us. Forgiveness sounds easy in principle, but it is incredibly difficult to live out. We may unconsciously or consciously pick and chose who we will and will not forgive, and to what extent. There are boundaries and limitations to our forgiveness. This is not how Christ forgave *‘them’* and us. To forgive as Christ did may seem impossible. But it is not. Through prayer and reading the Word of God, remember what Christ did on the cross, and cultivate a forgiving spirit. It begins with the small thing, the minor trespasses committed against us that we harbor unforgiveness for. Go on your knees now, forgive and intercede! God will surely answer your prayer!

Thought: Is there anything done against you that is unpardonable?

Prayer: Pray that I will have a forgiving spirit, just as as Christ did.

HOW ENDURING IS YOUR FAITH WHEN TEMPTED?

The crucifixion was public, for all to see. The enemies of Christ did not waste the opportunity to afflict Christ with what they could this final time. Passersby insulted Christ and shook their heads in contempt and scorn. They, along with those who were directly involved in Christ's sentence mocked Him with taunts that questioned His deity as the Son of God. They called Jesus a liar. If He was who He said He was, He would be able to come down from the cross! They claimed that if Jesus really did come down, they would believe him. Of course they never really meant it, but were just making jibes at Him. They joked at his expense: He could save others, but could not save Himself. They also attacked and questioned Christ's faith in the Father. If He had faith, then why didn't the Father save Him? The thieves too, joined in to complete the derision from all fronts. How alone and ridiculed Christ was when He was hanging on the cross. Would any of His followers and those who loved Him have dared to step forward and defend Him? Did anyone go to the cross to encourage Him? Hardly. His agony and relentless persecution had begun earlier with His arrest, at His trial before the Jews, and then before Pilate. He had been beaten and spat upon numerous times. He was mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted prior to the actual crucifixion. As He hung on the cross in unimaginable physical agony, He sustained all these further afflictions. It was well within His power to let Himself down from the cross, yet He chose not to. He could have cried out to the Father to free Him, yet He did not.

To endure temptation is not to succumb at all. Enduring is not going 99% and then giving in to temptation. It's 100%, all or nothing. In light of Christ's perfect example, how enduring do you think your faith is when tempted? We do not truly know how strong or weak our faith is until it is tested. Each and every trial and test in our life is a test of our faith, which over time builds endurance. There's no short cut to gaining endurance, it comes with 'training'. What are the things that tempt your faith? Is it fear of man? Is it physical pain and bodily affliction? Is it loss of material possessions or status? Or is it the loss of the regard by family and friends? All of us have differing aspects of our faith which we are weak in. To identify and acknowledge the 'weak spots' also helps us work on these weaknesses so that our faith will be more enduring. We also know for every temptation, there is a way out. It is not easy to walk this path, but we must persevere in faith, knowing that the Lord will always see us through.

Thought: Do you think you have an enduring faith?

Prayer: May I have a faith that grows with each passing day.

DO YOU ALWAYS HONOUR YOUR PARENTS?

There was a crowd of people who came to witness the crucifixion of Christ. Though there were some who mocked Christ, there were also some faithful disciples and a group of ladies. As Jesus was suffering from the agonies of being nailed to the cross, he manifested his love and kindness even there. As he was dying, he showed his great filial love for his mother Mary by committing her to the care of John, the disciple whom he loved.

First, Jesus spoke to his mother. He said, "*Woman, behold thy son!*". The word "*Woman*" has been construed as being rude and disrespectful. Clarke's Commentary on the Bible explains that the word used by Jesus was actually a title of much respect, like how we would use "Sir" and "Madam". Further, Jesus did not call her mother probably because he did not want to cause her additional sorrow. Perhaps it was also to prepare her against looking at the flesh and it was necessary that this should be done at his death. Here Jesus was telling his mother that John will be to her as a son, to provide for her and to discharge the duties of an affectionate child. Next, Jesus spoke to John and told him, "*Behold, thy mother!*". By these words he charged John to treat Mary as a mother, and to take care of her as if she had been his own mother. John readily obeyed the command of Christ for we are told that he took her to his own home. Thus in the closing moments of His life, Christ showed us an example of always honouring his parents, (Joseph had probably died by now) for he did not fail to perform the duty which he owed, as a son, towards his widowed mother.

Dear teen, how many times have you not cared about your parents' welfare and their well-being? Do we realise that they too are people that need encouragement, care and concern? When they were sick and unable to do the household chores, what concerns have you shown? Jesus is our perfect example in caring and loving our parents for when he suffered the agonies of pain on the cross for the sins of the world, he thought of his mother who needed to be looked after. He sought a home for her and asked John to be the son that He could not now be, that his afflicted mother might be well taken care of. As your parents grow older and weaker, a good son not only prays for them but ensures that their burdens can be eased. In so doing we fulfill the 5th commandment, that is honour our father and our mother. Follow Christ and do good to your parents all the days of your life!

Thought: Our parents are God's gifts to us – love, cherish and honour them.

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the love and care of my parents. Ever teach me to be grateful to them and give them the honour that they deserve.

DO YOU ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO WALK BY FAITH?

The Lord Jesus Christ after being crucified was resurrected three days later. This resurrection shows that Jesus had conquered death. The loving Saviour wanted to lift up their dejected spirits and so appeared to many of them to encourage them. His first appearance was to the women on the way home from the empty tomb that Easter Sunday morning (Matthew 28:8-10). Next, it was to Mary Magdalene at the garden tomb, that same morning (John 20:11-18). That afternoon he appeared to the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). As they hurried back to Jerusalem to spread the good news, Jesus also appeared to Peter (Luke 24:33-35). That very evening, Jesus appeared again to the eleven disciples in Jerusalem, Thomas being absent. (John 20:19-25).

In today's readings, we read about the Lord's sixth appearance. It was a week later, on the next Sunday evening. Jesus appeared to His disciples, this time while Thomas was present. Before this, Thomas refused to believe what his fellow disciples said to him about Jesus' resurrection. He even told them, *“Except I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). Now, Jesus appeared to Thomas and told him to do exactly that. At the sight of Jesus, doubting Thomas straightaway believed! He confessed, *“My Lord and My God.”* It was a good confession. Nevertheless, it would be better if Thomas had believed without seeing. Jesus chided him, *“Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”*

All believers should walk by faith and not by sight. Dear teen, do you have this faith? Do you have the faith to believe what the Bible says? Such faith will make you strong in your walk with God. Pray for faith as it is a gift of God. It comes from hearing, studying and meditating on the Word. Armed with such faith, you will be able to strengthen others in the faith and encourage peers in church to trust in the Lord as they go through the trials of life. What a wonderful testimony you will have. What a channel of blessing you will be. But first, you need to be strong in the faith yourself!

Thought: I need to have faith first before I can encourage others to walk by faith.

Prayer: Lord, grant me the faith of godly men of old like Noah and Moses. Help me to believe that if God says it, I believe it, and I will not doubt it.

ARE YOU READY TO RESTORE THOSE WHO REPENT?

After the Lord Jesus Christ had appeared graciously to Thomas, the disciples left Jerusalem and returned to Galilee. This trip was according to the message given to the ladies on the morning of His resurrection (Mark 16:7), that the disciples and Peter were to meet Christ at Galilee.

While the disciples and Peter were there, they decided to return to their old occupation and go fishing in the Sea of Galilee. After fishing without success for a whole night, they returned to find Jesus waiting for them on the shore. It was in this quiet and tranquil morning beside the beautiful lakeshore that Jesus held an intimate conversation with Peter. Jesus' words to Peter *“lovest thou me”* underlines the truth that Jesus wanted to impart to Peter – that true service must begin with a love for Christ. Here Jesus is our perfect example of how to restore those who repent. Peter had just failed His Master when he denied Him thrice before His resurrection. Now that he had seen his risen Lord, he was repentant. But he still felt unworthy to be a disciple of Christ. Jesus, who knew all things, knew that Peter needed the encouragement as well as a demonstration of forgiveness to restore him. This demonstration is seen in the fact that Jesus commissioned him to feed the lambs and sheep of God's flock. This incident was intended to teach us Peter's complete restoration to a position of apostolic authority after his three fold denial. Our Lord is our supreme example of always being ready to restore those who are repentant. Three times Peter had denied Jesus; three times Peter now affirms his love for his Lord, and three times Jesus commissions Peter to care for the flock of God.

Dear teen, just as others may have hurt or offended you, do remember that you too may have also inadvertently hurt others before. In this imperfect world of ours, all of us have experienced and cause offence from or upon others. If you have hurt a dear friend, have you felt the joys of friendship restored? Conversely, it is very painful to be cast out and have relationships broken because of a foolish mistake we have made, perhaps in making an insensitive remark or action. Learn from Peter to be truly repentant and learn from our Lord to be magnanimous to forgive and restore. As God restores, may we also know that it is all of God's grace to help us to resolve difficult issues in our various relationships.

Thought: The love of Christ constraints us to follow Him all the way.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank You for Your magnificent example of forgiving and restoring. May we learn to be as gracious and kind as Thee.

DO YOU EDIFY OTHERS?

One of the difficulties the early church faced, was how the Gentiles and the Jews would be able to live together in the unity and love of Christ. They had very different cultures and many came from pagan backgrounds. There was also history of animosity between the various groups. The Apostle Paul wanted very much for them to be able to live and love each other as brethren. Today it is no different as in any local church there will be many races and nationalities as well as differences in social status, educational background and spiritual maturity.

In this portion of Scripture, we are taught that those who consider themselves strong are to bear with the infirmities and weaknesses of others. The strong are not to criticize, judge or even to get him/her to conform to their standard or ways – especially it is only a perceived “weakness”. If a brother is really weak, we are to help him by reaching out to him, speak to him, pray with him, teach him and try our best to restore him to the Lord. We are exhorted to build the weak spiritually, not to pressure them to conform to you. The example that we draw from is of course our Lord Jesus Christ. He did not please himself but devoted Himself to the best and highest interests of others. We are also given the Scriptures that we may read and learn to form right attitudes and treat people with respect. Paul prayed that believers might adopt these principles of conduct – that we might think and act as Christ did. The result is that we glorify *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* If Christ has received the Christian who is very different in many ways from me, I need also to receive him, *“to the glory of God.”* If Christ has accepted him, who am I to do otherwise?

Dear teen, the glory and love of God is that He has saved so many people of every tribe and nation and race. God’s mercy and love is indeed very wide and far reaching. That should teach us to accept brethren who are weaker and poorer than us. Jesus loved them and died for them. Who am I to judge? Instead, if I am really following Christ, then I should seek to edify others. Jesus cared for the poor and the weak. Indeed they were the ones who received him but not the proud Pharisees. Romans 15: 7 tells us that when you receive one another, regardless of their race, background or infirmities, it is to the glory of God. Do you have this attitude?

Thought: “We might say, ‘Any friend of His (Jesus) is a friend of mine.’” (Robert H. Mounce).

Prayer: Lord, may I understand and obey You in this – to receive one another, as Christ has received us. Forgive me for my prejudices.

“Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor...”

ARE YOU AFRAID OF POVERTY?

The churches of Macedonia were not particularly rich even though they gave to the church at Jerusalem. Paul commended them for their liberal giving. It was certainly God’s grace that enabled them to give so willingly of themselves. Now, speaking to the Corinthian church, Paul also desired that they would not be behind other in this grace gift. As they abounded in everything, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, Paul wanted them to abound in this grace, particularly to prove the sincerity of their love for the Lord.

In today’s verse, Paul turns to Christ Himself as the supreme example of generosity because he became poor for our sakes. Paul was speaking not of physical riches, but the riches of Christ’s heavenly existence. Christ became poor, in the sense of his humiliation to become man. This was a voluntary action on His part. He came to this poor earth, was born in a manger, lived a simple life as the son of a carpenter and had nowhere to lay His head. From being Creator of heaven and earth, with all powers given to Him, Christ made *“himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man... and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”* (Philippians 2:7).

A Bible commentator observed that Christ’s sacrifice did not begin on the cross, nor even at birth. It began in heaven, when he laid aside His glory and consented to come to earth. Why did He do it? He did it, Paul says, so that we through His poverty might become rich. We can also say that it was His love for us that He made this sacrifice for us and we must do the same.

Dear teen, we need to cultivate this life of sacrifice and self-denial. The self must die if we are to amount to anything in this life. We need to crucify the sinful self and then it is possible for Christ to increase and self to decrease, day by day. As Christ increases, we are able to deny ourselves in more and more areas of our life. We are able to give up pleasures in order to help someone. We are able to do with less in order to give to the needy brethren. We think we will become poorer but God is able to provide and supply our needs (Philippians 4:19). Are we willing to give up all that we have for Christ’s sake? Do you have this faith? Do you seek to follow Christ? May God give you this grace.

Thought: *“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth...”* (Proverbs 11:24).

Prayer: Gracious loving heavenly Father, may I learn to give cheerfully and willingly to the work of God and to the needy brethren.

ARE YOU AS MEEK AND GENTLE AS CHRIST IS?

The Apostle Paul met with a great deal of opposition when he was at Corinth. He had to write at least three letters to the church there as there were many contentious issues that he had to address. They were facing internal strife, committing fornication, taking one another to court and some were abusing the Lord's Supper.

Here Paul writes in a mild and humble manner as he seeks to restore them to a life of holiness as well as to defend his authority as an Apostle. He appeals to the great example of the Lord Jesus Christ who showed great meekness and gentleness when He walked on earth. He sought to emulate Christ in the way he defends himself as well as to seek repentance and spiritual renewal among the Corinthians.

Christ is *“before all things, and by him all things consist”* (Colossians 1:17). He is the beloved and only begotten Son of God, and it *“pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell”* (Colossians 1:19). Yet, he was gentle, caring for the poorest of widows, beggars and leprous outcasts. He went and ate in the homes of people who were despised as *“sinners.”* Even when He hung on the cross, he prayed for those who drove nails through his hands and feet, *“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”* He Himself taught us, *“Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5).

Dearest teen, are you tempted to think, like the world, that meekness is weakness? To them, a meek person has no strength to fight back and is a weakling. But have you pondered well and deep over such matters? Is it really weakness? It is very simple to hit back when attacked. It is the reaction of the natural man. It is only the spiritual man who can absorb the hurts for we have crucified self and it is the life of Christ that lives in us. As such, we are willing to suffer for Christ, to forgive those who offend us and to be brave to go forward to continue serving the Lord. We know that Satan would be only too pleased to hinder us. So, we valiantly soldier on for the great name of our Lord and His kingdom. We must therefore strive towards gentleness and meekness, not brute force. Isn't this true strength?

Thought: Sometimes we are bold as a lion and sometimes we are gentle as a lamb.

Prayer: Gracious heavenly Father, grant me wisdom to be bold in witnessing for Thee and yet gentle and meek in winning others to Christ.

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT CHRIST UNDERSTANDS US?

One of the things which the Jews valued most about their religion was the fact that it had a High Priest. In this portion of Scripture, Paul showed that the Christian's High Priest is the Lord Jesus Christ and He surpasses the Aaronic priesthood. He made it possible for us, the saints of God, to come boldly before His throne of grace. Since the time the Levitical law was given, this was not possible as only the High Priest could come into the Holy of Holies once a year, and with much fear and trembling. Moreover, our Lord and our great High Priest went into heaven, and is now making intercession for us at the mercy seat.

Our High Priest is not cold and unfeeling. We have one who is qualified to sympathize with us in our difficulties and problems of life. We can always look to Him for aid and support. Christ knows and understands because He was also subjected to all kinds of sufferings and afflictions. What we undergo, He had undergone. He is, therefore, able to understand us. He was tempted, he was persecuted, he was poor, he was despised and humiliated. He suffered bodily pains; he endured great sorrows and a most cruel death.

Thus we can be sure that He feels for us in all our trials of life. He, who knows our thoughts, without us having to verbalize all our feelings. He knows what we are going through, especially when we go to Him in prayer. The great difference is that Christ is without sin. He was the sinless Son of God who suffered for the sinners of the world, you and me.

Application – Dear teen, do you know that Christ understands us more than anyone in the world? Yes, even your nearest and dearest to you may sometimes not completely understand you. But Christ who is also the all-knowing God, who was touched with the feelings of our infirmities, is only a prayer away. When we feel so ashamed of ourselves for our sins, yet He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. He will not chide and add more humiliation as unthinking friends sometimes do. He hears our cries and we can confidently cry to Him when we are surrounded with shame and sorrows. Have you experienced any break of friendship? He will heal your broken heart. Yes, Jesus cares!

Thought: *“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning”* (Psalm 30:5).

Prayer: Lord, let me go to You in prayer as I face the ups and downs of life, trusting You always to see me through.

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself”

DO YOU GET DISHEARTENED WHEN OPPOSED?

In the Hebrews 11, we see Paul exhorting his brethren to follow the godly examples of the ‘heroes of faith’ that had gone before them. Every one of them suffered and sacrificed for the Lord. Now in Hebrews 12:1, he reminds them to run the spiritual race well, seeing that they have this great cloud of witnesses as examples. In verse 2, he further brings the example of Jesus who *“endured the cross, despising the shame”* and as a result is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God. In verse 3, we are further called to consider the great opposition that Jesus faced, who ‘endured such contradiction of sinners against himself’. In times of trials, we are to consider and think of this truth and be encouraged.

What was this ‘great contradiction’ that Jesus faced? Well the Jews in the time of our Lord constantly opposed Him, perverted His sayings and ridiculed His miracles, saying they were done with the help of the devil. The Pharisees denied His deity, mocked Him and treated Him with the utmost contempt. They were also against His actions when he healed on the Sabbath day. Yet despite their opposition, He persevered in the course that His heavenly Father had marked out for Him. In order to humbly learn from our Lord’s example, we should study Jesus’ conduct when He was on earth. As He acted, we are called to act. Jesus conquered their opposition with meekness, patience, and perseverance. We should follow in His steps. As you follow and trust Him, you will receive strength. Therefore, no matter how great your opposition or trial may be, do not be weary.

Dear teen, do unbelievers face opposition and trials in their lives? If you think about it, all mankind do. Believers and unbelievers all face problems in life. The difference is that we have a heavenly Father who has promised to protect, guide and care for us and He has the power to do so. Unbelievers do not have this. Thus why should we be discouraged when men oppose us? We can pray. We can seek the wisdom of our heavenly Father. We have the blessed Holy Spirit who will bring to remembrance the Word of God for our encouragement. We have the supreme example of Jesus who despised the shame and went all the way to the cross in order to save us from our sins. All our suffering are but light afflictions compared to the martyrs of old. We have not resisted unto blood. They will work an eternal weight of glory if we valiantly endure.

Thought: *“If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small”* (Proverbs 24:10).

Prayer: Merciful Father, grant me grace to endure the adversities of life.

DO YOU PURSUE HOLINESS?

God is holy. This describes His transcendence, that He is above and beyond His Creation in such a way as to be distinct from it. God is so pure that He is totally separate from all sin. When God calls us to holiness, it means that we are to be set apart from the world unto God, separate from all sin, and take Christ as our perfect benchmark for holiness. The great problem for us is, as fallen creatures, *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”* (Jeremiah 17:9), how can we ever hope to be holy?

There are three aspects in which we are holy or sanctified as God’s people. The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour, we are positionally sanctified or set apart unto God. This means that through faith, we become perfectly holy and pure in the sight of God, and no longer have to face His wrath at judgment. However, this does not mean that our lives will instantly become perfect. The next aspect of holiness is our progressive sanctification. This process will not be complete as long as we are in this mortal body, but we must actively work at it. If our faith in Christ is genuine, it will result in a life of progressive holiness. If a person is not striving against sin and seeking to grow in holiness, it is doubtful whether his faith is true saving faith. In this Scripture text before us, we are commanded to pursue holiness in all the areas of our life. The Puritians who lived in the 17th century certainly understood this for they lived out their Christianity in all aspects of life, from the most intimate aspects of married life to the most public aspects of social life. Every area of life was sacred and all activities were sanctified to the glory of God. That kind of integrated living gives us a Christian worldview that promotes holiness and eliminates hypocrisy. The final stage of our holiness will be when we meet the Lord for then we will be perfectly sanctified, given the perfect, incorruptible glorified body, and made completely like Him (1 John 3:2).

Dear teen, are you guilty of coming to church and then going your own way the rest of the week? You put on a front on Sunday and then let down your standard after that. Then it is time to repent of this sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Do not fake your Christian life outwardly, but inwardly, you are not living in holiness. Be a total and sincere Christian, not a hypocrite. God is faithful and just to forgive your sins, if you confess them before Him (1 John 1:9). Resolve not to linger and dither, living a double life. Be whole-hearted and true-hearted for God our glorious King.

Thought: Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord. 🎵

Prayer: Lord, cleanse me of my sins and I shall be whiter than snow.

“Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps”

ARE YOU AFRAID OF SUFFERING?

As a young believer, you might be afraid of suffering. However, as you grow in the faith, you will find yourself bolder and braver in the face of persecution and unjust treatment. This is because the Spirit of Christ that is in you gives you grace and strength to overcome your timidity and fears. The Word of God will also fortify you especially as you read the Beatitudes of Matthew 5 and the double blessings of the persecuted (verses 10-11). Here in the portion of Scripture before us, the Apostle Peter teaches us that as believers we are actually called to suffer for righteousness' sake for this is *“acceptable with God”* (1 Peter 2:20).

“Christ also suffered for us.” His life on earth was one of unjust treatment by a world which rejected Him. They refused to believe Him when He said that He and the Father are one. They mocked his miracles. They conspired to send Him to die on the cross though He had done no wrong. Was He guilty of any wrongdoing? No. Did He say an evil word? No. Was His death an unjust execution? Yes. Christ's death shows us that a person can be perfectly righteous, perfectly obedient to God in everything, and yet suffer. Therefore, we his children, should not be surprised if we suffer too. It is possible to be right and perfect and yet suffer. Jesus did.

We are therefore called to this purpose – to suffer even when we are doing right and good in the sight of the Lord. The world is hostile to us and what we stand for. But take heart, dear teen. The path to glory is through suffering. That's the pattern for us. Suffering for Christ demands that we respond as He did when He was unjustly treated. In all the circumstances of life, in all the injustices, in all the accusations against Christ that were false, He never sinned in anything. That's why Christ is our perfect model.

Dear teen, perhaps the question you are asking yourself is how are you to be blameless in all the false accusations, unfair and unjust situations of life. I desire to be Christ-like in my spiritual walk but will I ever be strong enough to be sinless and faultless? Yes, it is possible to be more holy and blameless. God has given us the spiritual resources and armoury to fend off the attacks of the Devil. Ephesians 6:10-18 gives a list of weapons that are at our disposal, that we may *“quench the fiery darts of the wicked.”*

Thought: *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth”* (Isaiah 53:7).

Prayer: Father in heaven, grant me grace to suffer for Thy great name's sake and thus glorify Thee.

"As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"

ARE YOU GUILLESS?

When one is bullied, the natural tendency is always to retaliate, to lash back at the person abusing you. It takes a huge amount of self-control to just turn the other cheek, and not take matters into our own hands – especially if we know we are able to easily overcome our opponents. As we remember the suffering of Christ, we must also remember the passive manner in which he received all the abuse that he was afflicted with, for *"he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7).

1 Peter 2:22 describes Jesus as having *'no guile in His mouth'*. To be without guile is to be free of deceit, hypocrisy, and dishonesty in thought or action. Such a person has only honest intents and pure motives. When Jesus was falsely accused and greatly provoked, nothing that He said in response was sinful. When Jesus was reviled and subjected to abusive language, He didn't revile in return. For example, when Jesus was tried unjustly by the Sanhedrin Council in Matthew 26:57-75, He was greatly provoked, being spat upon in His face, buffeted and smote on with the palm of their hands. He accepted all the abuse they threw at Him in silence, not reacting to the great pain and humiliation it was causing him. His example is a perfect standard for us. As a Christians, we are never to return abuse to the one who gives it, no matter how unjust their abuse might be. Christ accepted the injustice of it all without threatening anyone. He simply committed Himself to God who judges righteously. That is also what we should do. Fighting back, whether physically or verbally does not show that we are strong. That is not God's way. We should calmly and confidently commit our cause to God, for we know that God will surely judge.

Dearest teen, to be without guile, we need to be careful of the words that we say. Do you use enticing words to tempt someone to say or do something they would not do otherwise? Do you often exaggerate? That is saying things that are beyond the truth, which is a lie. Do we gossip? That is spreading news that does not edify. Do we backbite? That is to speak evil of someone. Beware too of proud and boastful words. Flattery is another form of guile that we should also avoid. You can see from the list of symptoms here that we need to be very thoughtful and careful when we speak. How will you respond when you are provoked? Always remember the perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thought: An absence of guile, is a by-product of a full surrender to God.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, show me the deceit in my heart that I may repent and be an honest and transparent person.

DO YOU COMMIT YOUR INNOCENCE TO GOD?

Another element in Christ's sufferings which we are to follow, is that we are to commit ourselves to God's care. In the text for today, we learn that amidst his trial and sufferings, Jesus allowed His heavenly Father to be in control of the situation. Though Jesus had complete power to lay down His life and to take it up again, He allowed the Father to take charge. He knew that His innocence will be taken care of by a loving and just God. His focus was on how He can glorify the Father. Because He did that, Christ was able to bring a thief to faith, find a home for His mother and also forgive his enemies – all these as He hung dying on the cross. By faith, Jesus committed himself to God. He knew that His heavenly Father had perfect knowledge, perfect judgment, perfect power and would handle the situation perfectly. In His perfect time, He would vindicate Christ, His beloved Son, and be able to raise Him up from the grave. He never thought to take matters into his own hands, or to do anything to alleviate the sufferings or to take vengeance on His enemies.

With our imperfect and sinful nature, surely it is foolishness to take matters into our own hands. It is not only wiser but far more glorious to let God have His way and His time to work things out for our greater blessing. Jesus was vindicated when He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven and one day He will come in the fullness of His glory to become the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Dear teen, it is a myth that life must always be one of health, wealth and happiness. This world is not our home. We must expect some sufferings and even to be unfairly treated. The most important lesson is that you be steadfast in your faith and commit each stage of your life to God. We do not trust God when we fret, fume and fuss. To complain and to moan and groan when we are faced with disappointment and adversity also shows unbelief and a rebellious nature, like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness after their escape from bondage in Egypt. God knows each tear we shed and each hair that falls from our head. God is aware of everything that happens in our lives and He cares. It matters to Him whether His child is happy or sad. When you are unjustly treated, commit your innocence to the Lord, as Jesus did. Do not take revenge. He will fight for you and always judge righteously.

Thought: When there are no storms, life has no depth.

Prayer: Eternal God, make me to see that all things work for good to them who love Thee and that sufferings can be a blessing.

ARE YOU WILLING TO DIE FOR YOUR BRETHREN?

Jesus sets the standard for us on how to love others, especially our brethren in the Lord. He loved us so much that while we were still His enemies, He died for us (Romans 5:8). Genuine Christ-like love knows no boundaries. It never says, “This far and no farther!” It is freely given and asks nothing in return. This kind of love will make one willing to give his life for another. It is different from the love that we see in the world.

This sort of love was evident in the early church. Christians were arrested and compelled to give up the names of their fellow Christians. If they didn't they would suffer be put to death. The true Christian, John says here, would be content to suffer and even die if that would benefit his brother. The prophets, apostles, and martyrs did it, laying down their lives for the cause of Christ, for the good of God's people and the truth of God's Word.

Another more contemporary story is told of two teenagers in the Amish community of Pennsylvania. On October 2, 2006, an armed deranged man, with over 600 rounds of ammunition broke into the Amish school and opened fire. 11 young girls were injured and 5 died. It was indeed very tragic news. But as more news emerged, the courage, faith and love of two of them was revealed. According to the survivors, when Marie Fisher understood what the deranged man wanted to do, she made a request. “Shoot me first,” she said, and “leave the other ones loose.” As the oldest child in the group, she hoped that her death might somehow spare the others or provide more time for their rescue. Immediately after this, Marie's younger sister stepped forward and bravely said, “Shoot me second”.

Dear teen, I am sure you will agree that this is a standard that is almost impossible to reach. Most, if not all of us, cannot measure up to it. This is something only God can do, through us. But if you have that kind of love in your heart, desiring always to obey God, there is hope. We can first begin to show more love to those around us. We must begin to put self aside, and to love others as we love ourselves. Remember true love is without discrimination. Jesus loved all kinds of people. Do you? It must be offered freely for Jesus did not require that people love Him first before He helped them. This love is filled with compassion for the poor and the outcasts of society. Calvary's love is also sacrificial. Do you put others first?

Thought: We ought to be devoted to the service of our Lord, living or dying.

Prayer: More love for Thee, O Father in heaven, may I have for Thee and my brethren.

WHAT IS GOD’S PURPOSE FOR OUR LIVES?

This text before us is often called the golden chain of salvation because it describes the way and purpose of salvation from start to finish. It starts with God’s choice (foreknowledge and predestination) to save whomsoever He wills and ends with the believer’s glorification at the second coming of Christ.

From eternity past God foreknew who would be saved. One commentator puts it this way. “This is His divine ability to know what is going to happen before it happens – because He intends to make it happen.” Those who are chosen, God predestined them to be adopted as His sons and for God’s glory. In other words, God chose them as He has a special plan for them. Predestination is God’s conscious choice to save one even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4-5). The call is what happens in the life of the believer, whereby he believes and is justified. Throughout the believer’s life, his purpose is then to fulfil God’s will for him, that he will be confirmed to the image of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The word ‘*conformed*’ has this idea of being moulded and shaped into the form of another. This describes the sanctification process of the believer, whereby after he is saved, he is to become more and more like Christ each day. It is a gradual process, that will one day culminate in the glorification of the saints, where at Christ’s second coming, we will be given a perfect sinless immortal body, just like what Jesus received after His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:51-58). Knowing all these things, our lives should therefore be one seeking after holiness rather than pursuing our earthly ambitions. God, our heavenly Father’s ultimate goal is not for us to be more prosperous, successful or influential. He wants us to have the priorities of Christ, the heart of Christ and He wants us to love Him like Jesus did.

Dear teen, do you now know what is the purpose of your life? The purpose is not to pursue your own dreams on earth – to enter the best college, to study in the world’s renowned universities and win academic honours. These things are not what God saved you for! It is not that God will never give these to His children, but they must come because it is God’s will and not your own. Above all we must strive to become more and more like Christ each day, having Him as our perfect example. In so doing, others may see Christ through us, and we can become more effective witnesses and testimonies for Him. Dear teen, is this your sincere desire?

Thought: Am I becoming more and more Christ-like each day?

Prayer: Father in heaven, may I be single minded in living for You, seeking Your Kingdom and Your righteousness before all things.

DO YOU KNOW HOW WE SHALL BE LIKE IN HEAVEN?

Through the past few months, we have learnt more about what Christ was like, and have been taught to emulate His perfect example. Yesterday, we understood that we will one day be given this perfect glorified body, but do we know exactly what this means?

Even the Apostle John, who had seen the Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh after His resurrection, did not really have that clear an idea of the full extent of how the glorified body will be like. For him the hope was that when the Lord Jesus Christ returns and grants us the glorified body, we shall be like him! This is the simple assurance and promise made to all believers – that one day we shall be like him, and be able to see Him face to face! Indeed what a wonderful promise this is, to know that the same perfect body that Jesus Christ possessed when he rose from the dead will be given to us. Although we do not have many clues as to exactly how this new body will function, and what we can or cannot do, we do know that it will be the very best as it is from God. We know that it will be an immortal body that will never fail and weaken like our present physical forms. We also know that we will be able to eat as Jesus did so in Luke 24:42. But above all, the most precious aspect of this promise is that we will be like Him, incorruptible and no longer having to struggle with sin, but able to now have perfect fellowship with God and the fellow saints for eternity.

Right now, all these things might seem to be just a very distant dream to many of us. The reality is that we are still struggling with our sinful flesh and our wicked desires. We read of Jesus the perfect example, but we know that our lives are so far away from that high standard. Dear Teen, do not be discouraged by the seeming insurmountable task before you. Sanctification is a gradual process that requires much prayer, much guidance and much help from the Holy Spirit. We must yield ourselves to the Lord and ask that He be the one to help us in our quest for sanctification, purity and holiness. If God has promised that He has justified us, is sanctifying us, and will glorify us, then we can rest assured knowing that He will surely fulfil it. Let us take heart and be encouraged by the knowledge that we will one day be like Christ, and therefore in the meantime, press on in our sincere and earnest desire to be more and more like Jesus, our perfect example.

Thought: Knowing that I will be like Christ one day should spur me on in my quest to be more and more Christ-like each day.

Prayer: Lord I thank You for the wonderful promise of glorification. May You help me to always look forward to this blessed hope.

ARE WE THERE YET?

Christ is the example before us, and our goal is to become more and more like Him. From the time that we are born again till the time that we die, we are on this long race, striving to become more and more Christ-like each day. But when we compare how we are now, and what we ought to be, we know we still have a very long way to go! That was what Paul acknowledged in Philippians 3:12, that he had not yet attained, and was far from perfect. He had not yet apprehended (laid hold of) the goal which Christ had apprehended him for. In simple terms, he knew that with regards to the target of becoming like Christ, he was not there yet.

With that in mind, Paul tells us in verses 13-14 that his purpose was to strive hard each day to press toward the mark. He likens his motivation to be like that of a runner striving towards his end point, fighting to win his prize. Firstly, he runs with this single-minded focus, for it is *'this one thing I do'*. He knows that he has not reached his goals yet, and therefore pushes himself to keep on going. He had one single purpose, and that was all he cared about. The pleasures and luxuries of the world held little attraction to him for he was now in Christ, and all he wanted was to focus on serving Him. Secondly, he was *'forgetting those things which are behind'*. Like a runner who must *'lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us'* (Hebrews 12:1), he put aside any hindrances of the past that would have held him back. He had counted them as dung, refusing to make excuses for any lack of spiritual progress. Despite his shameful past as a Pharisee who persecuted Christians, and often described himself as a chief of all sinners, he refused to make excuses, but instead pushed even harder to ensure that what remains of his life was not wasted but would be useful to the Lord who saved him. Finally, he was pressing forward, *'reaching forth unto those things which are before'*. He was continually stretching forward towards the direction of the cross of Christ, focused on achieving the goal that Christ has called him to. He was running after the mark – the end point that has been set in front of him.

Like Paul, we know that we are not there yet. As long as God gives us life, we must keep running and never stop!

Thought: I know I am not there yet, and therefore I must keep running.

Prayer: Lord, may you grant me the grace to become more like Christ each day.

Notes

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