



growing to please Him

by Keith Glasgow

daily devotions for new Christians

Growing To Please Him

by Keith Glasgow

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BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

Being brought up in a Christian home does not make you a Christian. Going to church does not make you a Christian. Being baptised, confirmed, or taking communion does not make you a Christian. Believing in the existence of God and of the Lord Jesus does not make you a Christian.

How then do I become a Christian?

Jesus said, "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

The only way you can enter the Christian life is by being born again. You must receive God's gift of eternal life. The only One who can give you that life is the Lord Jesus: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Whoever trusts Jesus Christ personally to be their own Lord and Saviour is immediately born again and receives the gift of eternal life.

By nature we are sinful and under God's holy judgment: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23); "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature...we were by nature objects of wrath." (Ephesians 2:3).

But God in His great love and mercy has sent His Son to take upon Himself the penalty for our sins. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

He died on the cross for us, so that by trusting in Him we can be freely forgiven. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

HOW CAN I BECOME A REAL CHRISTIAN?

Pray sincerely to God using the following outline:-

Admit to Him your guilt as a sinner (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

Acknowledge that you cannot save yourself (Eph.2:8,9).

Be willing to turn from your sin (Acts 2:37, 38).

Trust Jesus Christ to save you * (Acts 16:31).

Invite Jesus Christ to come and live within you as your Master and Lord (Rev.3:20).

**** Note: Why can we trust Jesus Christ to save us?***

1. Because He is God (the Son) - John 20:30,31.
2. Because He died in our place to pay the penalty for our sin - 1 Cor.15:3.
3. Because He rose again from the dead to become a living Saviour - 1 Cor.15:4

INTRODUCTION

You have just made the most important decision of your life. You may or may not feel any different, but that does not change God's promises to you.

Promise: "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12)

Promise: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13)

Promise: "Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away" (John 6:37)

The Bible describes new Christians as 'new born babies'. Peter says "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:2). Babies are born to grow, not to stay infants forever.

Just as a baby needs nourishment in order to grow into a mature person, there are three essentials for Christian growth:

1. Food - Thoughtful Bible reading
2. Air - Prayer and thanksgiving
3. Exercise - Practical obedience to what the Bible teaches

Growth is often slow. There are things you will not understand; there may be some habits or ways that you feel you are not able to change. You must regard your whole life as an apprenticeship for heaven, and your Bible as a manual. God wants you to spend the remainder of your life changing gradually into a person with all the character and moral beauty of His own Son, Jesus Christ.

I remember my daughter Kim looking forward to her third birthday. We had told her that when she turned three she would "be a big girl", and would be allowed to do things which previously had been denied her. On the morning of her third birthday she came out of her room with tears in her eyes. I asked her why she was so upset on her birthday morning, and her reply was: "But Daddy, I'm not big, I'm not big!"

Many young Christians have been discouraged and upset, simply by expecting to develop overnight into mature Christians and finding that they can't.

Our natural growth depends on regular food, air and exercise. In the same way, a Christian will develop fast, if a time each day is set aside to read the Bible and pray.

Think of prayer as you speaking to God, and reading the Bible as God speaking to you.

When you have finished your time with God and go to work or school or to your daily housework, then you can exercise your spiritual muscles by being obedient to what you have learned from God's Word, the Bible.

Remember:

Keep feeding!

Keep fit!

You'll be surprised at how fast you can grow!

This book contains Bible readings for your first three months as a new Christian. Each day, before reading one, pray and ask the Lord to speak to you. Be open to Him and let Him search your mind and judge your thoughts.

Read the Bible passage indicated at the top of every page and think about it.

Ask yourself two questions:

1. WHAT IS IT SAYING?
2. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?

Don't read the comments written in this book until you have meditated on the Bible passage.

When you have finished reading, speak to God about the Bible verses you have read. Give God worship, praise and thanksgiving for what you have learned about Him. Then speak to the Lord about your own needs, problems and requests. Don't forget to thank Him when He answers.

Over the next few months you would be wise to meet regularly with an established Christian, so you can talk through any difficulties and also pray for one another. This early part of your Christian life is a crucial time. You may need to make some big changes in the way you think and the way you live, and so the support of another person can be a great encouragement.

Each week there is a REVIEW page designed for when you get together with another Christian. If you do not have a person to meet with in this way, speak to your pastor or a leader in a local church. They will find someone suitable who would love to help you.

Today or Tonight:

It is a good idea to tell someone that you have become a Christian immediately. Say it in your own way, but share the news now!

Bible reading: Ephesians 5:1-10

Welcome to your new family!

Now that you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you can call all Christians your brothers and sisters! How wonderful it is to read in verse 1 that we are "dearly loved children". It is because we are now in His family that we must learn to live like Him.

Imagine the Queen of England adopting a little boy from the slums of Bombay. This new member of the royal family would have to learn manners and speech worthy of a prince.

We are adopted into God's eternal family with all the gifts and privileges of that wonderful position. As we begin to understand the honoured place that our heavenly Father has given us, we must surely want to please Him in return. We are called to live a life worthy of God's royal family to which we belong.

Can you find five virtues which please God in today's reading?

v.2 _____ v.4b

v.9 _____ and _____.

Now try and find five sins which displease your new Father.

v.3 _____

v.4 _____

v.6b "...those who are _____".

If you make verse 10 your aim in life from now on, you will grow strong and become very useful to God. Memorise verse 10 and repeat it to yourself at various times during the day: "*find out what pleases the Lord*".

PRAYER:

"Dear Father,

I thank You that I can call You my Father because You have accepted me as Your child.

Lord, I want to learn to please You in the things I say and do. Help me today especially, because I am not used to this new way of life and I could easily slip back into my old ways.

I trust You, Father, to help me through this first day.

Amen."

Bible reading: John 10:11-13, 27-30

Jesus calls us His sheep and speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd. In this way He pictures the unique relationship that we have with Him. The shepherds of His day knew their sheep and called them all by name. They did not use dogs or motorbikes to move them from one pasture to another, but walked ahead and the sheep followed behind.

The sheep knew the shepherd's voice, and because of the close relationship between them, the sheep would not follow the voice of a stranger. Our Shepherd speaks to us through the Bible. He calls us to follow Him. That is why it is so important for us to spend time every day meditating on a passage from the Bible.

It is clear from verse 11 that Jesus considers His sheep to be very valuable. If Jesus was willing to die for you, then you are of great value to Him. You may think that you are not worth much, but the price God paid to purchase you for Himself gives you great worth. We are like antique pottery which was originally formed from worthless clay, and is not worth much in itself, but has become very valuable to a collector.

The Bible says "You were bought at a price" (1 Cor.6:20) and "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ...but with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet.1:18,19). We do not deserve to have such a price paid for us! We deserve judgment and God's wrath, but instead we receive mercy!

If our Shepherd was willing to die for us, we can surely trust Him to guide us in the right pathway and to keep us safe. That's just what this passage says: "I know them and...

His Guidance - "they _____ Me" (verse 27)

His Protection - "...they shall never _____ ;

no one can _____" (verse 28).

What gift does Jesus give you? v.28

PRAYER:

"Dear Lord,

Thank you for regarding me as worth dying for! Thank you for your gift of eternal life.

You are my Shepherd, and I want to follow You. Please guide me and protect me today, because I know how easily I can be led astray."

3 DEALING WITH DOUBT

Bible reading: 1 John 5:10-15

Most new Christians have times when they begin to doubt they are really God's children. The excitement of receiving Christ into your life can fade, and the old habits and lifestyle can be hard to shake. It is often in this area that the devil tries his hardest to tempt you to turn back from your new walk with God. The devil will say: "You don't feel any different. Has God really forgiven your sins? Has He really made you His child? How do you know all this is true?"

Today we read in verse 13 "*that you may **know** (not think! not suppose! not hope!) that you **have** eternal life (here and now), to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God.*"

The Lord is telling us that those who believe in Christ as Saviour can be absolutely certain that they possess eternal life.

What is the basis for this certainty?

Read verses 11 and 12 again. Our feelings are not mentioned. It simply says: "He who has the Son has life". Whether or not we feel forgiven or feel like a child of God does not alter the fact that God promises eternal life to those who believe. If God promises something, He can be trusted to keep His word. If you have received the Son as your own personal Saviour, you have received life . . .

. . . that is not feeling, it is fact!

If we rely on our feelings to give us assurance of being accepted before God, we will never know true peace of mind. Our feelings can often change.

John Bunyan, in his classic "Pilgrim's Progress", portrays our times of doubting by describing the way 'Christian' found himself locked in the dark prison-like walls of 'doubting castle'. He found no way of escape until he took the key of God's promises and unlocked the door. Trust God's promises and you will be set free from doubt.

PRAYER:

"Dear Lord,

Thank You for always keeping Your promise. I am so glad to know that my own personal salvation does not depend on how I am feeling, but on Your eternal promises.

Help me, Lord, to find rest and peace of mind in simply believing Your Word, even when I am overwhelmed by fears and doubts."

REMEMBER!

To trust is not to fear; To fear is not to trust.

Bible reading: 1 John 1:5 to 2:1

Do you remember as a child being caught doing something you knew was wrong? Can you remember the intense feeling of guilt? As we grow older we learn to hide our guilt from others, and yet we still feel it deep down. Now that you have become a Christian, God awakens your conscience and you become more sensitive about doing anything that you know is wrong. If you are concerned that you are still swearing or losing your temper; or worried that you still have bad thoughts and attitudes, God is stirring your conscience.

Christians are not 'zapped' by God, and programmed to never sin again for the rest of their lives! We are not delivered from the possibility of sinning until we get to heaven!

What happens when a Christian sins? Does God just ignore it? No! God hates sin just as much after we become His children as He did before. But the moment we sin, Jesus Christ pleads our case before God. He stands up on our behalf, acting as an advocate (Ch.2:1). This means that His presence in heaven is a continual reminder to God that He has died for our sins and is our Saviour.

At the same time as the Lord Jesus acts as our advocate before God, His Spirit in our hearts is grieved, and stirs our conscience. We sense that God is not pleased. We lose our joy and peace. The work of the Spirit is meant to bring us to the point where we confess our sin and restore our close relationship with God.

Christians who sin, then, do not lose their salvation, but are faced up with their guilt by the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness and cleansing come when they confess their sins (see verse 9). They do not have to ask the Lord to come into their lives again.

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

What does it mean to "live in the light" (verse 7)? We are called to live our lives with a clear conscience before God. If we should sin, the light shows us our errors, and we confess them to God and stop doing them.

It means to always keep short accounts with God - to have our sins forgiven promptly, rather than continuing to go against the conscience or the teaching of God's Word. Conversely, to live in the darkness means to give no heed to the conscience or to the Bible, but continue to live as we please.

According to verse 6, what does God say about the people who claim they are Christians but continue to walk in darkness?

Today: Learn verse 9 - it is one of the most important verses in the Bible.

5 PRAYER

Bible reading: Matthew 6:5-15; 7:7-11.

Prayer is vital for the Christian and should become as natural as breathing air. The Bible says "Pray without ceasing". It is good to set aside a specific time every day in order to pray to God in a quiet and orderly way. The Lord gave us the disciple's Prayer as a pattern to show us how we are to approach God in prayer.

"Our Father in heaven" We should come to God as a child would approach a father, with confidence in His love and in His willingness to listen to us. As our Father, He knows what is best to give us and what is not good for us, so we can trust Him with the answer.

"Hallowed be Your Name" Even though we can call God our Father, we must approach Him with reverence (respect for who He is, the Almighty and Eternal God).

"Your kingdom come" During this present 'evil age' we are not exempt from suffering, disease or death. When we pray "Your kingdom come" we remember that we are living as foreigners in this world, and we wait for the time when He will set up His kingdom on earth. In this age He may or may not heal us or remove our suffering.

"Your will be done" Pray that God will guide you to know and do His will, especially what He reveals to you in the Bible every day.

"Give us today our daily bread" Nothing is too small or mundane to bring to God in prayer. Note that Jesus taught us to pray "give us"! The whole prayer is unselfish, including others who are also in need.

"Forgive us...as we also have forgiven..." Confession of our trespasses (things we have done wrong) and debts (things we should have done, but failed to do) will bring forgiveness as long as we also forgive those who sin against us.

"Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us..." A prayer of dependence upon God to keep us from falling that day. We are to rely upon His power to live a life that is pleasing to Him.

Note the three promises:

Our Father _____ (ch.6:6)

Our Father _____ (ch.6:8)

Our Father _____ (ch.7:11)

In your prayer today, go through each of the sections of the "Lord's prayer" and pray them with meaning, applying them to yourself.

Bible reading: Ephesians 3:16-21

When you asked the Lord Jesus to be your Saviour, He came into your life by His Spirit. He dwells in you now, and will never go away. In Hebrews 13:5 God makes a wonderful promise: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." Despite what may have happened since the time you first put your trust in Christ, and in spite of all that may happen in the future, He will not let you down!

How can you tell He is there?

Paul's prayer that you have read today talks about God giving the Christian an inner strength. He also speaks of a growing knowledge of Christ's love. In other words, our experience of His power in our lives (as we rely on Him), and the gradual developing of His great love in our lives, show that He is living in us.

The final evidence of His presence - we are filled with the fullness of God. Putting it simply, Jesus Christ's presence in you is shown in the way your life is beginning to change. You will go on changing with the aim of eventually being completely filled with God's character.

That's a far-off goal, and so you will have to learn to acknowledge His presence in you by FAITH (verse 17). He is there whether you feel it or not. Sometimes you may have serious doubts when you are reminded of sinful behaviour or attitudes. Others also may doubt it at times. But He is there with you and in you if you have genuinely trusted Him to be your Saviour. So rely upon the fact!

Remind yourself of His presence when you get angry with someone, when you are laughed at because you are a Christian, when you are doing a boring job, and when you are faced with an important decision. In every circumstance of each day you can always count on His presence with you. Learn to say "Lord, help me to know what to do"; then trust Him to give you the inner strength (verse 16) and the wisdom (verse 17b, 18) to do what is right.

What does verse 20 say that God is able to do when we rely on His presence and power?

PRAYER:

"Dear Lord,

even though the Christian life is not easy, and I may face difficulties each day, I thank you for your presence with me.

I trust you today for the strength that I need to live for You. Help me to remember that You are with me, and to rely on Your power when I need it."

7 FELLOWSHIP

Bible reading: Hebrews 10:19-25

Some people say to me, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian." I always answer, "True, but a real Christian will want to go to church."

Today's reading gives four reasons why we should attend a church regularly:

1. To Worship (verse 22)

Worship is the most important activity you can be involved in. Worship is appreciating God for who He is. Praise is appreciating Him for all that He has done. We also give thanks and glorify the Lord's Name. This is the natural response from hearts of people who believe that He alone is worthy of our adoration. We can worship alone, but the Lord calls us to join with others for special times of worship and praise.

2. To Learn (verses 23 and 24)

God wants us to understand important truths about the hope we profess. At church we learn the truths that surround our new life in Christ. Truths about God. Truths concerning the 'how we should live' ("spur one another on toward love and good deeds").

Make sure you attend a church that teaches that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, that Jesus Christ is God (the Son), who is bodily risen from the dead as our living Lord and Saviour.

3. To Fellowship (verse 25)

Fellowship means sharing something in common. All Christians have a common faith, a common Lord and a common hope. We are all responsible to one another! There should never be any isolated Christians. We are to "encourage one another".

The fastest way to become cold and dead as a Christian is to cease attending a local church. If you take a burning coal from the fire and put it on the hearth by itself, it will stop burning brightly. In the same way, the Christian needs to be with other Christians to stay bright.

4. To Obey (verse 25)

Read verse 25 again and notice that it is a command! Attendance in a local church is something our Lord expects of us, and we will please Him if we obey.

If you do not attend a church, pray that the Lord will guide you to a fellowship where the truth is taught, and where the Christians are loving and supportive.

Read Acts 2:41, 42 to see the example of the early church meeting together, and the activities they were involved in as a church.

Thinking it Through #1

1. REVIEW ON BASICS OF SALVATION

- a. Before I became a Christian I was cut off from God because of _____ ? (Rom.3:23; Isa.59:2).
- b. Why could I not save myself? (Heb.9:22; Eph.2:8,9).
- c. How has God brought me back to Himself? (Eph.2:13).
- d. What has Christ done to save us? (1 Peter 2:24).
- e. What did I have to do to be saved? (Acts 16:31).
- f. What is the Gift of God? (Rom.6:23).
- g. What must accompany faith? (Acts 3:19).

2. REVIEW LAST WEEK'S READING

- a. What new general principle should now govern my life? (Eph.5:10).
- b. As my shepherd, Jesus has promised to _____ me and _____ me forever (John 10:27-29).
- c. Who causes us to doubt? (1 Pet.5:8).
- d. Will God always forgive a Christian who confesses his sin? (1 John 1:9).
- e. Should we ask God for things, even though He knows what we need before we pray? (Matt.7:7).
- f. Do we acknowledge the presence of Christ with us by feeling or faith? (Matt.28:20).
- g. Name one reason why we should go to church regularly.
- h. In what ways does your life show a definite change since you received Christ?

8 HONESTY

Bible reading: Ephesians 4:22-32

Honesty isn't the best policy for the Christian, it's the only policy!

A vicar in a London parish preached a stinging challenge about the need to be honest. He emphasized the importance of integrity even in the small things. The next day he travelled into the city by bus and, after having paid his fare, he sat down near the back of the vehicle. As he went to put his change away, he noticed he had been given fifty pence above the correct change. He sat there for a while debating about what he would do.

It seemed so trite and embarrassing to walk all the way back to the driver and give him the fifty pence, but he couldn't bring himself to put it in his pocket. The bus was crowded and there were more people getting on. Maybe he should put it in the collection next Sunday! Finally he gave in to the Holy Spirit's prompting and walked up to the driver. "You gave me fifty pence too much change," the vicar said, handing him the coin. The man looked up. "I know," he replied, "I went to your church last Sunday and heard your message on being honest, so when I saw you getting on my bus this morning, I thought I would see if you were for real!"

One of the simplest tests of your integrity is your honesty in small things. You don't have to steal a car or rob a bank to be a thief! The same sin is committed no matter what you steal or from whom you steal it. Our world is geared for dishonesty. Insurance premiums are higher to allow for a certain percentage of dishonest claims. Prices of merchandise in shops include sufficient to cover for losses due to shoplifting and staff pilfering.

The Christian, however, should be geared to honesty. There are three steps to godly living in our Bible passage today.

* We are to "put off" our old self (verse 22). That means we are to leave behind the old lifestyle which was governed by our sinful nature.

* We are to allow God to renew our minds (verse 23). This occurs as we allow God's Spirit to change our thinking as we read and obey the Word of God.

* The final step in verse 24 is to put on the new lifestyle of holiness and upright living.

We must choose to put off the old and put on the new. God will not do that for us. But sandwiched between these commands is the key - to allow our minds to be changed, renewed. In verses 25 to 32 we are given some examples of how a renewed mind can result in putting off the old lifestyle and putting on godliness. Honesty is not an option for the Christian. It is vital to our calling!

Bible reading: Acts 8:26-40

In New Testament times new Christians were immediately baptised (read verse 12 and Acts 18:8). Some had even been baptised previously (Acts 19:1-5), but still had to be baptised again when they personally trusted in Christ.

Baptism is the outward confession to the world that we now belong to Jesus Christ. We are not baptised in order to become Christians, but to show that we already are. We are saved by our trust in the Lord Jesus. This is something hidden. It is private between us and God. Jesus commanded that we should be baptised in order that our hidden faith might be clothed in an outward, visible act which can be witnessed by all.

There were no unbaptised Christians envisaged in the New Testament church. Jesus had clearly commanded: “ Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt.28:19).

In the story today, the Ethiopian Official believed the good news about Jesus Christ, and upon his believing, and that alone, there was nothing to keep him from being baptised.

How was he baptised?

*“Both Philip and the eunuch went _____
and Philip _____ him. When they came _____
_____ the water ...” (verses 38 & 39 New Int. Version)*

It is very clear in this and other passages in the New Testament, that baptism is meant to be complete immersion in water.

Romans chapter 6 tells us the meaning of baptism. It is a picture of what has happened to us.

We have died with Christ, and so we go down into the water: a picture of death. “The death He died, He died to sin, once for all ... in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin” (verses 10-11).

Just as Christ was buried, so we go down under the water.

As Christ was raised by God’s glorious power, we come up out of the water to live a new life - a life which pleases God.

If you want to obey the Lord and be baptised, speak to your pastor or someone at your church.

10 TODAY'S TEMPLE

Bible reading: 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20

1000 years before Jesus Christ, the ancient people of God worshipped in a temple at Jerusalem. It was there that God made Himself known through the priests and prophets. The temple was called God's dwelling place, because in the innermost sanctuary of the building the shining glory of God dwelt. The Israelites were not allowed into the awesome presence of God. There were many laws set out by God concerning the temple. He declared it a holy place. It was not to become unclean or common, because it was the place where God dwelt among His people. The penalty for not abiding by some of the laws concerning the temple was death.

Today, God still dwells in the midst of His people, but now His dwelling place is not a building, but a 'temple' of another kind.

In chapter 3 we read: *"Don't you know that you yourselves (all) are God's temple."* The 'you' here is plural and refers to the church. All true members of the Lord's church together constitute the one temple where the Holy Spirit of God now dwells.

But in chapter 6 this truth comes closer to home: *"your (own) body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you."* That's getting personal, isn't it? Just think, within your very own body dwells the great God who created and upholds the universe! You can say with real certainty, "God lives in me!"

Such a wonderful privilege carries with it an equally great responsibility. If God lives in you, how are you to live your life? The answer is in the last sentence in today's reading: *"Therefore honour God with your body."* You are to please God in the way you use your bodies, for you take Him with you through each day.

This truth affects every area of your life. What you say with your tongue, what you see with your eyes, what you eat or drink, and what you do with your hands. Over-eating, lying, watching certain videos, smoking, getting sexually involved and drinking alcohol, must all be judged by this one principle: Does it glorify God?

The Old Testament laws concerning the temple of God show the importance that God places on the need to keep His dwelling place clean and pure. God is holy, and those who worship Him must likewise be holy.

Can you honestly say you are honouring God in your body?

Is there anything in your life that should be removed? It may not seem much or it may be big. Now is the time to pray to the Lord and confess it. Tell Him you will turn from it, and, in His strength, learn to live in a way that glorifies God.

Bible reading: Joshua 1:1-9

Joshua had a great task ahead of him when he took over the leadership of Israel following the death of Moses. Imagine him standing on the bank of the Jordan River looking across to the land God had promised them. The enemy forces on the far side of the river were strong. They far outnumbered the Israelites! How was Joshua to succeed in his mission?

Read verse 8 again and note what God said would bring him success. The key to victory was not weapons, or numbers, or even battle strategy. God promised that if he meditated on the holy Scriptures, if he studied, memorised and obeyed them, then he would succeed.

You are facing the battlefield of Christian living, and the evil forces are too great and far too subtle for you to be victorious in your own strength. That is why the Lord's words to Joshua are so relevant to you today. Memorising God's Word is a very important part of Christian living - far more important than many Christians realise. Psalm 119:9,11 says, "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word. I have hidden your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You." John also writes in his first letter (to young Christians who showed evidence that they were growing), "you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one."

At the back of this book you will find some of the more important Bible verses to learn. Cut the verses out. Don't try to memorise them all at once. To commit one verse to memory each week should be your objective. As you learn more verses, keep reviewing the past ones or you will begin to lose them from your memory.

You may be saying to yourself, "I couldn't memorise Bible verses by rote!" My advice is to try anyway. You will find, as others have, that the more you learn, the easier it becomes. Ask God to help you and then take the verse with you in your pocket or purse. If you read it over to yourself a few times each day, by the end of the week you should know it by heart.

There is a wonderful promise in verse 9 for those who obey verse 8. Let it be true of you!

PRAYER

Dear Lord,

Help me to memorise Your Word so that I can grow fast and strong as a Christian. I know I am in a battle against the Evil One. May I be successful in the battle because I know Your Word. Amen

Bible reading: Psalm 100

Praise is an attitude of the heart. Praise is not just the singing of a hymn on Sunday with all the other Christians, but an appreciation of God which gladly takes the words of a hymn or prayer and makes them one's own. Praise is not just for church, but should be the daily attitude of our hearts. Nor should praise always be expressed in words. A life of glad and willing service for the Lord is a form of praise. In fact, true praise is shown in a balance of both: an appreciation of God with our lips and in our lives.

Praise does not automatically gush forth from an empty mind. It is tied very closely to our knowledge. The more we know about God, (e.g. His grace, wisdom, power and faithfulness), the more we will respond in praise.

Note the three things in today's Psalm which cause us to worship and praise God:

(verse 3)

1. *Know that* _____
2. *It is He* _____ *and we* _____
3. *We are His* _____, *the* _____ *of His* _____

A right appreciation of these three things will enable us to praise Him in all situations.

1. A knowledge that the Lord we worship is indeed God, and He alone is in control of all things - He is seated on the throne of the universe. Therefore nothing can take Him by surprise. Nothing can thwart His loving purposes for our lives.

2. We have been created by God and we owe our very existence to His power and will. He made us for Himself.

3. Not only did God make us, but He loves us and gave us eternal life through the death of His Son. Therefore He can call us His people and His flock. Surely our response to His love should be praise!

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I praise You for Your power and majesty. You alone are God. I praise You for loving me, and sending Your Son to die on the cross for me. May I always remember to praise You, for You are worthy of all my thanks, my worship and my praise. Amen

Bible reading: John 1:35-45

In this passage the apostle John tells us of three people who pointed others to Jesus Christ.

1. John the Baptist

When Jesus started His public work, John was the only one who knew who Jesus was. He had a responsibility to tell others about Jesus. He said to all his own followers, "Look, the Lamb of God!" His whole purpose in life was to point others to Jesus.

We also have a personal responsibility to tell others about Jesus and what He has done for us. You don't need to be a theologian, a preacher or minister in order to share Christ with others. You need only say, "He is the Son of God who has come to take away our sins by dying on the cross for us." Your memory work will come in very useful when you witness to your friends about Christ. By the way, how is your memory work going?

2. Andrew

Andrew led his brother to the Lord, and as a result, thousands of people were saved through his brother's (Peter's) preaching. You do not know what will result from leading one person to Christ! I suggest you prayerfully choose one or two people at a time and pray for them each day, then seek opportunities to speak to them about Christ.

You will find that often you can talk about Jesus Christ quite naturally when your friends ask you why you no longer do things you used to do. If you feel weak or afraid that is good! You can trust God to give you an answer and the courage to say it. He will not let you down. The Bible says that when we are weak, then we are strong, because God's strength is made perfect in (our) weakness.

3. Philip

When Philip spoke to Nathanael, he met with opposition. Nathanael was skeptical, like many people today. They cannot believe that Jesus is Who we say He is, or that He can do what we say He can do. Note Philip's answer to this opposition. He did not try to argue or reason with him; all he said was "come and see".

Often we can only do the same - give them a New Testament and ask them to read it and see for themselves.

PRAYER:

"Lord Jesus, please guide me to say the right words and give me the courage to witness for You today.

*I pray especially for _____ and _____,
that they may come to know You as Saviour and Lord. Amen".*

14 TRUE RELIGION

Bible reading: James 1:19-27

James was the earthly brother of Jesus - in the family of Mary and Joseph. He was able to observe the perfect life of Christ at close quarters. He also saw Jesus in the place where a person's real character is revealed - in the home. Not once did Jesus lie or get angry. He was never guilty of selfishness or greed. There can be no doubt that He would have helped people in need.

If anyone in all history had viewed true religion in action, it was James. Daily he saw the Lord Jesus in and around their little home and the carpenter's workshop in Nazareth.

In his letter to the churches, from which we have read today, he calls Christians to face up to what true religion really is.

Religion isn't a creed or a belief. Religion isn't just going to church, praying and reading the Bible. Pure and genuine religion is living a life that is pleasing to God. The one life which is pleasing to God above all others is the perfect life of His Son, Jesus Christ.

We may not have been with James in the family home in Nazareth, but we still have an example upon which we can model our lives - the example of Christ which is recorded in the Bible. Not only do we have the perfect example, but we also have His Spirit living inside us. He gives us an inner knowledge of how we should live, plus the power to live that life.

In verse 26 we are given a test to that show if we really are genuine in our faith and not mere hypocrites!

Go through today's passage again, then ask yourself if there are any areas in your life which need special attention in order for you to be following the example of Christ.

Name a widow or dependent person who may be needing your help.

Are there any other people in need who would appreciate your assistance?

Are you allowing the world's attitude towards homosexuality, honesty, alcohol, indecent films and material possessions to corrupt your own attitudes? What do you have to do this week to keep yourself unspotted from the world?

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I want my religion to be genuine, not a sham. Help me to care for people in need, whoever they are, and to stay pure in this ungodly world I live in. May I be like a light in a dark place. Amen

Thinking it Through #2

HONESTY

1. What are some situations in your life where you find it hard to be honest?
2. What effect should our honesty have on others (Matt. 5:14-15)?

BAPTISM

1. What must a Christian do according to Luke 12:8?
2. What do the following verses command for the Christian?
Matthew 28:19

Acts 2:38

3. What comes first, believing or baptism? Acts 18:8.
4. What is symbolised in baptism? Romans 6:3-5.

See if a date can be arranged for you to be baptised.

MEMORISATION

What does Paul encourage us to do in Colossians 3:16?

Why is memorisation of Scripture so important for the Christian?

LEADING OTHERS TO CHRIST

Share the names of those whom you are praying for, and your counsellor can also pray with you.

Share any difficulties in this area with your counsellor (e.g. shyness, fear, or confusion).

15 TROUBLE AND PAIN

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Christians are not exempt from pain and sorrow. In fact, often quite the opposite is true: we can face more suffering simply because we are Christians.

In Romans 5:3-5 we read that the Christian's suffering has a beneficial effect; it produces perseverance, character and hope. God is more interested in moulding our characters into something of eternal value than in removing pain and trials from us. Hope is produced, because our troubles today cause us to look forward to our home in heaven, and to hope in the soon return of our Lord Jesus.

In today's passage, Paul says we are partners with God when we are faced with trouble. He is our merciful Father who cares. We do not endure pain, sorrow and tragedy alone, but we face it with God at our side. The Holy Spirit who indwells us is called the "Counselor" (John 14:16). The word literally means: "One called alongside to help." He comforts us by giving us the courage to face even the worst trouble.

Although the Holy Spirit comforts us by His inner ministry to our hearts and minds, He also employs other means. He often uses believers to encourage us. He applies appropriate passages from the Bible to our situation, which become a source of great strength.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul shares how his hope was strengthened in the midst of the hard experiences he went through. Some lessons can only be learned in the 'school of suffering'. If we pass through trials of any kind, we are taught in James 1:5 to ask God for wisdom to know what He is trying to teach us.

After we have gone through a time of trouble we are able to sympathise with others and help them through similar difficulties. Read verse 4 again.

You will probably find that, even if you are still faced with many of your own problems, when you use your experience to help others, your ability to cope yourself, and your whole outlook will improve.

PRAYER:

"Dear Lord,

please give me wisdom to understand how my particular trials can benefit me; and give me the grace, I pray, to allow the trouble to change me into a better person.

I also pray that I may not be completely absorbed with my own problems, but that I may be concerned with others problems also. Amen."

Bible reading: 1 Cor.15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14 -7:1

We are social creatures - relationships with others are important to us. Our friends can influence us more than we may be willing to admit. Even those who regard themselves as 'non-conformists' are often influenced by the pressure of their own minority peer group.

We tend to conform to the thinking and ways of our friends because we want to be accepted by them. Now that we are Children of God, our non-Christian friends can have a negative influence on the way we grow in the Christian life. They have a completely different outlook on life. Christians live in the light of a future eternity in heaven, where unbelievers live for this life only. They often have a far lower standard of right and wrong, and can have no desire to try and please God in their lives.

Does that mean we should give up our non-Christian friends? No, that isn't what the Bible teaches. However, if our friendship with them is too strong, we could fall into the trap of gradually conforming to their standards. We read today, "Bad company corrupts good character". Keep strong ties with the friends you had before you were saved, only do not join them in doing wrong. Instead, try to be an influence for good in their lives.

Make friends of as many Christians as your non-Christian friends. Seek out the Christians in your office, school, factory and neighbourhood. In particular, regularly attend a local church and seek to build up a relationship with those in the fellowship.

Christians are forbidden to marry unbelievers. That is the clear meaning of today's reading, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers." God commands this because all Christians belong to Him and have been delivered from Satan's kingdom of darkness. For a Christian to be joined in marriage with an unbeliever would be the same as trying to mix light with darkness.

This does not mean that a non-Christian partner is bad, but their focus in life is not God's way. It is very difficult for Christians to maintain a strong commitment to Christ when their partners are pulling in the opposite direction.

What is the promise of God to those who obey in this matter (verse 18)?

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I thank you for my friends. I pray that I will not lose their friendship because I am a Christian, but my love for them will grow, and I will be able to share the good news of Jesus with them at the right time.

I pray that they will not influence me away from my commitment to You. I also pray that you will help me to make some new friends who are Christians. Amen

17 THE LORD'S SUPPER

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus instituted a memorial supper, so that when He had gone back to heaven, the disciples (who became the church) would remember their Lord and Master.

For many hundreds of years before Christ, the Israelite nation held a similar feast. At the annual Passover, they would eat bread and drink wine in a ceremonial feast commemorating their deliverance as a nation. It was at one of these Passover feasts that Jesus took the bread and wine, and attached new meaning to them. Just as the Israelites celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, the followers of Christ are now to celebrate their deliverance from slavery to sin and death.

The bread is a symbol of the body of Christ which was willingly given up to be nailed to the cross. It speaks of the complete submission of the Lord Jesus; His unwavering obedience to the will of God for Him. We read in Philippians 2:8 that He was "obedient to death - even death on a cross!"

The wine is a symbol of the blood of Christ which was shed. He gave His life for the sins of the world. The Bible says "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins." The cost of our deliverance was very high; it cost the shedding of the precious blood of Christ.

There is no merit in taking communion. You do not obtain forgiveness, eternal life or anything else from eating the bread or drinking the wine. There are no conditions placed on you before you can take part. You do not need to arrive at a certain level of growth, or have been baptised or become a church member. Once you have trusted Christ as your Saviour you should be welcome at any "Breaking of Bread" service.

The only reason for a church to refuse people the privilege of sharing in this service is when they refuse to repent of an immoral sin, or if they are teaching heresy. Even then it is a temporary measure to discipline them in the hope that they will repent.

We read today that when we come to the Lord's table to take part in this important feast we must examine ourselves to see that we are not careless, irreverent or insincere. If we are, then we eat and drink judgment to ourselves.

If you would like to obey the Lord and remember Him in this appointed way, see your counsellor or the pastor at your church.

When you are accepted into the fellowship of the local church and take part in the Lord's Supper you are committed to that local church. This means that you should be loyal and obedient, sharing the other believer's joys and sorrows. In the same way, the local church is committed to you, and should help and care for you.

Bible reading: Colossians 3:22 - 4:1

Good employees may work hard for a variety of reasons. They may want to get promoted. They may want a raise in pay. They may want approval from their boss, or acceptance among their workmates. Some may be motivated by fear of redundancy.

Christianity is very practical and relates to everyday life. With God in our lives, the way we approach work around the home or on the job should be significantly different.

What should be the motive behind Christians doing a good job in the work place?

Paul was writing to slaves who could be beaten or even killed at the hands of their cruel masters. This kind of treatment is unlikely to occur today and we are not slaves as they were; nevertheless the basic attitude and behaviour of both the employee and the slave remain the same.

We are taught to obey our masters in all things. Even when it seems unreasonable or unfair. Jesus said that His people must go the extra mile. In other words, if your boss tells you to do a chore which is unpleasant, do it well and do more than is expected of you.

You may say: "How do you expect me to treat my boss like that if he doesn't treat me well?" Don't forget that Christ now lives in you and He wants to live His life through you. What would Jesus do if faced with the same situation that you have? If we only obey when the boss is around to check up on us, our Christianity is insipid and useless.

We show our sincerity of heart when we obey at all times, especially when the boss is not around. A Christian must therefore be punctual, industrious, humble and honest.

What is the key which will enable us to work in this way? Verses 23 and 24 have the answer ... we aim to please our Lord Jesus Christ, not just the boss. God has instituted all authority and therefore we are obeying God when we are obedient to the boss. That means we grieve God when we disobey! Forget that you are serving your employer, and see behind him your heavenly Master whom you serve gladly. To apply this principle to your day to day occupation will not only benefit you by transforming the most dreary or menial task into something worthwhile, but it will be a powerful way to witness to all at your work that you have become a Christian.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I pray that the people I work with will see such a difference in the way I work, that they will want to know more about the Lord Jesus.

Help me to honour You in the way I do my job. Amen.

19 YOUR MIND

Bible reading: Romans 8:1-8

Pleasing God is, at times, very hard. It often goes right against our human nature. The old sinful nature we were born with is continually trying to please itself. The Spirit of God who lives in us is always trying to please God. Given these two facts, we have a battle - a battle for the mind.

Verses 1 to 4 show that the victory in this battle has already been won by Christ. We are "in Christ" and the power of the Spirit has set us free from the power of sin and death. However, as long as we live in this body we also have the old nature which pulls us towards selfishness and sin. Our minds are the battlegrounds where either self wins and Christ is dethroned; or where Christ wins and self is dethroned.

Verse 5 shows that our minds can either be controlled by our sinful nature or they can be ruled by Christ. If our minds are controlled by our sinful nature, the result is death (verse 6). This is not physical death, but spiritual death, and occurs when our close communion with Christ is broken. We can never lose our vital union with Christ, but we can easily lose communion with Him. In the same way, a married couple do not lose their marriage bond when they quarrel, but they certainly lose their close, personal relationship.

If our minds are controlled by Christ, the automatic result is life and peace. Life is the close communion with Christ and peace is the fruit of that life.

Our minds therefore must be kept clean - they must be controlled by Christ and His Word (the Bible). Paul said, "Let the word of Christ dwell (*be at home*) in you richly" (Col. 3:16). Remember: "*if you sow a thought you reap an action, if you sow an action, you reap a habit, if you sow a habit you reap a destiny.*"

Your mind is an important fortress in this war - keep it clean and at peace with God. When your mind begins to think wrong thoughts, the Spirit of God will make you aware they are wrong and you can then "put them to death".

Your mind is where the battle against sin is either won or lost!

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I do want to win the battle against sin in my life. I do not have the power to win alone - I need You!

Help me to guard my mind; the attitudes I have, the thoughts I think and the general way of thinking that I have, so that I can think the way You think, and so live the way You live. Amen.

Bible reading: James 4:10-12

A famous British preacher from the past, Charles Spurgeon, along with his wife, were criticised for being miserly and greedy. People noticed they sold all the eggs their hens produced. Never once did they give any away. After both had died it was found that they had used the sale of their eggs to help support two elderly widows in need. They had endured years of criticism without retaliation.

One attitude our old sinful nature enjoys is a critical and judging spirit. It is so easy and so natural to point the finger at others. We not only judge people's actions but often their motives as well.

When we sit back and think about it, we have neither the right nor the ability to judge. Jesus said "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).

We do not have the right to judge because we are not sitting on the throne of the universe as the judge! We are all sinners and we are all subject to the laws of the one Law-giver. Only God has the right to judge, because He is the Law-giver.

Neither do we have the ability to judge, because we cannot see the way God sees. We look on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

If we judge others we set ourselves up as 'God', and it is an evidence of deep-seated pride in us. That is why the words of verse 10 are so applicable to the verses which follow. We must be humble, meek and lowly. Read the last sentence in verse 12 again and remember that judging our fellow man is not pleasing to God. It is not helpful to others but hurtful; not of love but of pride.

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, I admit that I am sometimes guilty of judging other people when I have no right to do so.

I pray that I may grow to accept people the way they are and love them simply because You love them. Amen.

Bible reading: Colossians 1:15 - 23

This remarkable passage opens our eyes to the wonder of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find that He is Lord. Not just a lord among other lords, but the unique Lord of glory. He is "Lord of lords" (Rev.19:16).

The great confession of the New Testament is "Jesus Christ is Lord". In other words, the Lord God of the Old Testament is the Lord Jesus of the New Testament. Jesus is the visible revelation of the invisible God (verse 15). He is supreme over all creation. He created all things by His own power and will, and for His own purpose. Even the unseen world of spirit beings and heavenly authorities were brought into existence by our Lord Jesus before He became a man.

However, not only is He Lord of creation, but He is supreme in the church. He is the Head, and the very life of the church, which is composed of every person who trusts in Him as Saviour and Lord.

According to verse 19, where is the full nature of God to be found? In Jesus Christ the Lord. God is one. That is, He alone is God. There is no other. There is but one true and eternal God. However, this one God is a tri-une being. He is a "3 in 1 being". God's nature is revealed in the Bible, and we may not be able to understand it, but we are to believe it. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. These are not three separate Gods, but one in nature and being. Yet each of the three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) are separate 'persons'.

God could be likened to light, which, when it passes through a glass prism, splits into a variety of colours. Each colour in the spectrum is different from the others, but each is still that one light. The yellow is not the red, and the blue is not the yellow. But all three are exactly the same light as the one beam before it was split by the prism. Likewise, the Son is not the Father, and the Spirit is not the Son, but all three are one in nature, and together they are the one and only God.

The practical implication of the Lordship of Jesus Christ is found in verses 21 - 23. If He is Lord, and we are His people, then we must be holy and pure. We must stand firm in our faith. In Jesus' own words: "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46).

If He is Lord, we must obey Him.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I worship You, for You are the Son of God. I pray that I may always live under Your Lordship, in obedience and love. Amen.

Thinking it Through #3

THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

1. What reason does Romans 14:9 give to the death and resurrection of Christ? What does this imply?

2. What must everyone do sooner or later (even those in hell)?
Philippians 2:10 - 11.

3. What does Jesus rebuke in Luke 6:46?

4. If we love Jesus Christ, what should we do? John 14:15.

5. What area do you find hardest to yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

6. What encouragement do we find in 1 John 5:3 and Romans 12:2, which will help us to be willing to obey the will of God?

7. What do the following verses tell us about the unique person of Jesus Christ?

John 1:1,14

Hebrews 1:2-3

Hebrews 1:6,8

22 TEMPTATION

Bible reading: James 1:12-15

Often when we are tempted, we can think that we are a special target, and no one else is facing temptation in the same way. However, the only people who are never tempted are those who are lying in cemeteries. Others think that they have "arrived" spiritually and are beyond temptation, but the Bible clearly says in 1 Cor. 10:12 "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall". "No temptation (test) has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Cor. 10:12,13).

Temptation, we read today, is not something God does to us, but it is our own evil nature which lures us away from obeying the truth and walking with God.

In verses 14 to 15, our giving in to temptation is likened to the natural sequence of a person's life from conception to death. The thoughts and desires which we all fight are like a seed of sin. We can either put them out of our minds, or act upon them by our own will. When we allow them to remain in our minds we fall pregnant to sin! If the evil desire is acted upon it gives birth to sin, which, when it grows up results in death.

Christians do not lose their will power (or their won't power!). We must actively say "yes" or "no" to what we know is right or wrong. Temptation will exercise our capacity to resist evil and to please God. The wonder of the Christian life is that alongside your will to say yes or no, is the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. He will not interfere with our freedom to choose right or wrong, but He will give us the power to obey ONCE WE MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE !

"Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;

Each victory will help you, some other to win;

Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue;

Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through."

God does not treat you like a puppet, pulling strings to make you resist temptation; but He does give power to do what He wants. He waits until you choose to do what is right, and then He empowers you to do it.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I admit that I am weak when facing some temptations. I know that some of the things I do are not pleasing to You, but I still end up doing them. Help me to make the right choice every time I am tempted, and then trust You for the power to obey You. Amen.

Bible reading: Galatians 5:16-26

The incredible fact that God's Spirit has entered your life must have some effect! It would be ludicrous to believe that God, the holy and all-powerful God, could live inside you without making any difference, without there being any change!

In Galatians 5 we learn about the fruit of the Spirit. 'Fruit' is the evidence, the effect, the outward result of the Spirit indwelling the life of a Christian.

Verses 22, 23 show what this fruit is:

1. Love - the love for people which God's Spirit produces in us is not a sentimental, emotional or even family love. It has more to do with our will than our emotions. It regards others as important.

2. Joy - not happiness which is dependent upon good circumstances, but joy which is present even in spite of bad circumstances.

3. Peace - a sense of wholeness and fulfilment that comes from trusting Christ. It is also an inner knowledge that you who were once an enemy of God because of sin have now been made His friend through the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross.

4. Patience - a steadfast enduring spirit which never gives up hope but suffers long, and is not easily provoked.

5. Kindness - extending oneself to show practical love; showing kindness with no ulterior motive, nor from a mere sense of duty.

6. Goodness - a person who is good is someone who always does right. Goodness is shown in a person with a clear conscience before God.

7. Faithfulness - a firm trustworthy quality which does not bend or break when put to the test. If you can be trusted with small things then God will give you big things. God only uses those He trusts.

8. Humility - a gentle, meek and lowly spirit - the opposite of a proud and haughty attitude. Humble people do not have a low view of themselves - they have a correct view. To be humble is to see yourself as God sees you. To accept the gifts, calling, looks and lot in life He has assigned you.

9. Self-control - Self-mastery of the tongue, the eyes, the mind, the appetite - a disciplined person.

All these qualities are shown fully in Jesus Christ.

Now read verse 25 and see what is necessary before the fruit can be seen in our lives; and see how it relates to verse 17. Either our old sinful nature is in control (result verse 10) or the Holy Spirit is in control.

24 THE CHURCH - THE BODY

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

The church is often thought of as either a building, a religion or an organisation. But it is none of these. When you trusted Christ as your Saviour you instantly became a member of the church, referred to in the Bible as the body of Christ.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a religion. It is a family of believers who are all linked together through their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. "He who has the Son has Life" (1 John 5:12). It is not an organisation but an organism - where individual members in the church share together in the life of Christ. All are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.

The human body is the closest illustration on earth to the amazing union that exists between the church and its Lord. The body is an earthly picture of a spiritual truth. Jesus Christ is the Head of His 'Body' and we are the members that make up the Body. We all belong to Him and are in submission to Him as the living Head.

The moment we trust in Jesus Christ as our Saviour, we are once and forever "baptised by one Spirit into one body" (verse 13). This means that the Spirit immerses us into the living family of believers.

Our union with Jesus Christ therefore is unchangeable. It cannot be reversed or re-established. We don't need to be baptised in the Spirit subsequent to the time we believed. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians taught to seek after a second Spirit-baptism. Romans 8:9 says "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ". We receive the Spirit at conversion, at which time we are baptised into the body of Christ.

Every member in the one body has certain things in common with the rest, but also some things that differ. We all submit to the one Head (the Lord Jesus), and read the one Bible, but each member differs in function, privilege and responsibility. We have different gifts, personalities and experience. We are all at different levels of growth and spiritual maturity.

The body is an apt illustration of the church because every part of our human body has a special part to play in order that the whole body can operate properly. We all need each other and we should honour one another. Any division or disunity should be avoided.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I thank you that I am part of Your Body, the church. Help me to play my part so that the whole Body may function properly. Amen.

Bible reading: 2 Timothy 3:10-17

The Bible is unique in the world's literature. The Bible speaks of itself as "living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Bible is the living "Word of God". God has revealed Himself and His divine purposes for man in the Bible. He has chosen events in history to show His mind and will. History cannot be changed. Accurate records of what has happened in the past can show us what God is like. His power, His love and patience and His judgment on sin are all seen in the historical events written in the Bible.

The Scriptures are "inspired by God" - that is, they are God-breathed. Men wrote, but God moved in them to write, as the wind blows the sailing boat along in the seas.

Note: "ALL Scripture" is inspired by God.

God has a message for us on every page of the Bible. It is His divine word to all people everywhere.

The Bible is useful for:

- 1. Teaching the truth** - about man and his sin - about God, and about our Lord Jesus Christ, about the church, about how we should live as Christians.
- 2. Rebuking error** - the Bible is the only tool we have and the only infallible guide in refuting wrong teaching.
- 3. Correcting faults** - showing up flaws in our character - inconsistencies which would otherwise go unnoticed or unheeded.
- 4. Instruction for right living** - training in the life that really pleases God.

When you read any passage of the Bible, apply the four preceding tests to what you have read. Ask yourself: What does it teach me? What error is it rebuking? What correction is needed in my life? What positive instruction is there for me, showing me how I should live to please God?"

If you read in this way, what does verse 17 say the result will be?

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I praise You that I can read the Bible and know that it is the very Word of God.

I pray that I may be motivated to read it regularly and to apply it to my life in a practical way. Amen.

26 TWO MASTERS?

Bible reading: Matthew 6:19-34

You have been delivered out of the kingdom of Satan and brought into the family of God. You are set free from Satan's power, and you are a child of God, but that does not mean the Devil cannot influence you, or lead you astray! Satan cannot take away your salvation, but he is actively trying to draw you back to follow the way of the world.

One way he does this is by the love of money. The Bible says that "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). Money is not evil - but the love of money is. There is a power in the dollar - so much power that it causes some people to do terrible things. The words of Jesus today warn us against letting money or possessions be our master.

A good test to find out who really is our master, is to ask ourselves the question God asked King Solomon in 1 Kings 3:5: "What would you like Me to give you". If God asked you that open question, what would you desire most? What would you ask for? Solomon asked for the ability to serve the Lord and His people well - in other words, as Jesus said in verse 33, he was concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and His righteous requirements.

Solomon made the right choice, and God blessed and honoured him because he had honoured God.

Gambling, whether it be in the form of horse racing or lottery tickets, is a device used by the Evil One to stir up our desire (or love) for money. Never forget that covetousness is condemned in the Bible in one of the ten commandments, and greed is also called "idolatry" (Eph. 5:5)!

The Lord calls us to use money for good. We have a God-given responsibility to manage our finances well, and then use it for good. It can be used to help needy people, assist in the spread of the gospel, help towards the running costs of the church and support missionaries in other lands. If you have not been in the habit of budgeting your money, speak to your pastor, or seek help from a government agency set up to assist people in this area.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I pray that I may manage my finances well. I pray that You will help me to be careful not to waste money, but to use it for Your glory and for the extension of Your kingdom. May I be generous and open handed with what You give me, and resist the temptation to be greedy and covetous. Amen.

Bible reading: Psalm 32

Fellowship means sharing. We have fellowship with God because we share His life and His blessings. Our fellowship with God is due to our personal relationship with Him and this needs to be maintained. Just as a plant needs water to maintain its growth and productivity, we need to remain in fellowship with the Lord.

The one great hindrance to fellowship with God is sin. In fact, sin often hinders our fellowship with other Christians also. That is why John said, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). To walk in the light means we must be open to the light of God's Word; and if we sin, we must confess it and put it right. We should have a sensitive and clear conscience.

David, the writer of today's Psalm, rejoices in verses 1 and 2, because his sin has been put away. We can rejoice in the same way, can't we? It is a wonderful feeling to know that God does not hold our sin against us any more because of the sacrifice of His Son on the cross.

Then in verses 3-5 David speaks of a time when he had not confessed and forsaken some known sin in his life.

How did this unrepentant spirit affect him (verses 3-4)?

What did he do in order to have the joy of his salvation restored to him (verse 5)?

A good indicator of the state of our fellowship with God is the presence or lack of joy. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit in us, and joy returns when things are put right again.

David also tells of another way to break our fellowship with God in verses 8 & 9. We are warned to be attentive to the Lord's guidance in our lives. We are not to be like a horse or mule which needs to be forced to go where the master directs. To resist God's guidance in our lives will not be pleasing God. He wants us to be open to His direction, and careful to obey. There are some areas where there are no specific instructions in the Bible, only guidelines or principles. The Lord may be prompting you to help in the Sunday School or help in the support of a missionary. He may be wanting to guide you about important decisions, or convicting you about giving up a bad habit.

To maintain fellowship we need an open sky above us (a conscience clear of sin) and an open road before us (a walk in obedience to the Lord's directions).

Bible reading: Matthew 25:14-28

Today's parable has a clear message for all Christians. All the servants were given talents, and we are all given responsibilities. Some of us have been given more than others, and some are put in positions of greater honour than others, but we are all required to use what God has given us in a way that will please the Master.

The Lord knows our abilities . He does not ask us to do what He has not fitted us to do. Your talent may be to sing or play a musical instrument . It may be to care for people in need. You may be gifted as a teacher of children or an organiser. Your talent may be to show hospitality, to give money, to clean the church or mow the lawns. Whatever we can do, whether gifts or natural abilities, they are talents we have been given by God, and we are expected to put them to use!

Another responsibility is to witness for Christ. All of us are responsible to God for the way we witness. God calls us to live and speak so that others will hear the gospel and turn to Jesus Christ.

The servants who traded with their talents risked losing them. The servant who kept his talent wrapped thought he was wise - his talent was safe! But God rewarded those who took the risk of serving Him, and He severely judged the servant who, through fear of his master, hid his talent away.

It is only as you put your gifts to work that God blesses and uses you in His service. We are saved to serve. When we begin to develop our gifts, it is often necessary to take risks. It often means doing something we have never done before. But in taking that risk we are serving God and will be pleasing Him.

God will judge our service for Him by our faithfulness - not our ability. The more talents we have the more we need to be faithful. The greater the privilege - the greater our responsibility.

What has God given you? What can you do? What are your gifts?

If you do not know - or are not sure:

- * Pray that God will show you.
- * Ask others what they think your gifts are.
- * Ask yourself what you enjoy doing which God can use to build up His church. What natural ability do you have which God could use to help, strengthen and encourage others?

These will probably be God's gifts to you.

Use them!

Thinking it Through #4

TEMPTATION

1. What areas of your life are most susceptible to temptation?

2. What specific temptations have come your way since you became a Christian?

3. Why are we so weak in resisting temptation (Galatians 5:16-17)? How are we able to stand against temptation even when we are so weak (Galatians 5:24-25)?

4. What does the Apostle Paul mean when he speaks of our sinful nature being 'corrupt' and it's desires being 'deceitful' (Ephesians 4:22)? How will our understanding of this help us to resist temptation?

5. What does James say about the way our selfish desires can cause conflict; and what does he give as an answer (James 4:1-3, 6-8)?

6. How did Jesus resist the Devil's temptation (Matthew 4:4,7,10)?

7. What will be accomplished in my life through memorising passages of the Bible (Psalm 119:9,11,105) ?

Bible reading: Ephesians 5:21-33

The Lord wants your marriage and home life to shine brightly as a witness for Him. A truly Christian home is a powerful testimony in a world where family life is fast disintegrating.

How can we live in harmony in the home? Verse 21 sets the scene. Each partner is to submit to the other. In other words, none is to dominate, but each is called to give 100% of themselves to the other. That is the foundation, and on that basic principle we can look at the individual roles of each partner.

The role of the wife

The wife is called by God to submit to her husband, as the church submits to Jesus Christ, her Lord. This does not mean a wife must be like a 'servant' to her 'master' husband, but she must recognise that God has given him the responsibility of headship in the home. In Proverbs 12:4 we read that a worthy wife is her husband's "crown" (glory). Humble submission is not demeaning, for Christ Himself lived in complete submission to His Father. It brings honour.

If your husband is not a Christian, you are called to win him to Christ without a word, by your respectful and pure behaviour (1 Peter 3:1-2).

The role of the husband

Your responsibility as head of the home is two-fold. As head you must be a loving leader. Not following the leadership of the world where leaders "exercise authority over them", but, as Jesus said, a leadership marked by sacrificial service: "...the one who rules (should be) like the one who serves...I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:25-26).

As leader in the home, a husband is accountable to God for the spiritual, material and physical needs of his wife and family. He is to take the lead in spiritual things, attending church, reading God's Word and prayer. He must set an example of godliness and love.

Next you must love your wife, not just with an emotional or sexual love, but in the same way that Christ loved the Church. He loved us even when we did not love Him. He laid down His life for His enemies. It is a love that treats the other person as more important than yourself.

Finally, the relationship of husband and wife in the home can be likened to the relationship of God the Father and God the Son. Both are equally God, but the Father is Head in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

The New Testament brought about an equality between man and woman not known in previous history, but insists on the distinctive roles of each partner in order to maintain harmony in the marriage.

Bible reading: Ephesians 6:1-4

Children and Teens

The word duty is not a very popular word in our vocabulary today, yet it is the word that may best describe how children (including teenagers) should live in the home. It is your duty to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right". If ever you can show your Mum and Dad how being a Christian changes your life, it is in the area of obedience to them.

Respect for parents is one of the 10 commandments God gave in Exodus 20. The fifth commandment says "Honour your father and your mother" and adds the promise of the Lord's blessing if you obey. It must therefore be of great importance before God. It is not an option!

Name some ways you can show respect and honour to your parents.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

God is pleased when young people show love and honour to their parents. If you do not respect the authority God has placed in the home, it is unlikely you will learn to respect any other authority (school, work, the church, the government, and even God Himself). By showing respect to those whom God has given authority to, you show respect to God. If you fail to submit to God's authority in the home, you will make yourself an easy target for Satan.

Parents

Parents also have a duty - they are to treat their children with respect. To be overbearing will make them discouraged. Love is to be the motivating force behind both the encouraging words and the discipline. The Heavenly Father is the perfect example of what an earthly parent should be. God our Father is gentle, kind, longsuffering, patient, and good. Nevertheless, He is also firm, trustworthy, and He disciplines His sons (Hebrews 12:5-11).

Above all God is always approachable. He always keeps the lines of communication open. God desires Christian homes with Christ-like qualities. It pleases Him when He sees love and mutual respect in both parents and their family.

SUGGESTION:

Hold a family conference and discuss together how you all can change so as to become a family that honours the Lord.

Bible reading: Philippians 3:10-16

Do you realise you have been a Christian for one month? In every area of life there is a need to stop occasionally and review the past, and then think of the future. Whether it is the coach of a football team at half-time or a conference in a major business, there must be times when we review our progress, and then renew our commitment to the particular task or cause.

It is a good habit for Christians to think back over the previous month, year, or five years; and consider how far they have come; how much they have grown. It is sadly true that many of us still have the same bad habits - the same uncontrolled tongue - the same temper or selfishness we had when we first received Christ into our lives.

In today's reading we are encouraged to forget what lies behind. In other words, don't let your past failures be weights around your neck. Forget the past, and strain forward just as a star athlete would in an important race. If you set your mind on the goal, not on past failures, you will have the right attitude to run the Christian race.

Paul cautions us in verse 16. We must remember that any good habits or the new character traits we have learned over the last month can easily become unlearned. How have you changed since you were saved? Have you a new love for the Lord, a desire to read His Word, a care for other people, a desire to tell others about Christ? Do you have a peace and joy in believing God? Are you more honest, trustworthy and good? You can never say you have already succeeded or become perfect (verse 12), but you must not let go those things you have attained.

Keep running forward according to the same rules you have been following until now. If your spiritual muscles ever become tired, don't rest them, but refresh them with prayer, Bible reading and fellowship with Christians.

The Christian race is not a sprint - it's a marathon. The one great requirement for long-distance racing is perseverance. We read in Hebrews 12 that we are to "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (verse 1). There are many things in life that may not be wrong in themselves, but they can hinder our growth as Christians. We are called to throw these off in order to be able to run the race well. Also sin which is allowed to continue in our lives will tangle us up and prevent us from running.

The writer of Hebrews then says: " Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (verse 2).

Bible reading: 1 Peter 5:1-11

Pride is the primal sin. It is the source of all other evil. It is shown in our lives by stubbornness, an unwillingness to submit to authority, a desire to be important, and in a refusal to admit our sin or failure. In fact if you look hard enough you will find pride in every sinful attitude or action.

Someone has said: "Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it!" When we are proud we have an unrealistic view of ourselves. Pride is a form of self deception (Galatians 6:3). The actual word in the original language of the Bible means "to be high, raised up or exalted". These are words the Bible uses for God! No wonder the Bible says: "The Lord detests all the proud of heart" (Proverbs 16:5).

In the Scripture reading today, Peter is writing to young Christians, and calls them to be clothed with humility. Pride will stop your growth as a Christian, and put you in reach of Satan, who is prowling like a hungry lion (verse 8). Pride makes you easy prey. What is more, God will oppose you when you are proud, but will give grace to the humble!

Humility is not thinking of yourself as a slug! You were created in the image of God, and you are the object of His love. In God's eyes you are worth dying for! Humility is the attitude of heart where you have a right estimate of yourself. Then you can see yourself correctly, as God sees you. Your personality, physical features, intellect and abilities are all God-given: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

Your humility is best tested by your response to other people, especially those in authority over you. You are called to submit to your church leaders. They also must show humility by not lording it over those in their church fellowship.

Peter knows that having a submissive attitude could mean we lose out in some ways. He calls us to trust God to look after us in those situations where a humble attitude could make us vulnerable (see verse 6). He "gives grace to the humble", meaning He will not allow our humility to prevent His good purposes for us from being fulfilled. Jesus gave an example of this in Luke 14:7-11.

If we are anxious about the consequences of being humble, He says we are to cast all our anxiety on Him, because He cares for us (verse 7).

Don't let Satan get his hands on your life by being stubborn, unteachable or self-important. Be humble, and give God the opportunity to show his grace in your life.

Bible reading: Proverbs 23:17-35

One on the rocks could result in you ending up on the rocks!

The Bible speaks out against strong drink and beer: "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise" (Prov. 20:1). Solomon warns that alcohol will cause you to mock (scorn what is good) and brawl (stimulate an aggressive and argumentative spirit). What is more, it leads the drinkers astray, deceiving them to become fools. In short, it is not wise to drink excessively. However the Bible does not command us not to drink any alcohol. Wine was a common drink in Bible times as it is in many countries still. It is the over indulgence and abuse of alcohol that God condemns.

It is difficult to resist the constant pressure to drink. Television and sports glamorise drinking and set a person up to believe it is "normal" to drink. But alcohol has another face. Over 50% of traffic fatalities are attributed to drink. Alcohol abuse pulls the triggers of more guns, loses more man-hours of work, rapes more young girls, fills more hospital beds and prepares more coffins than many other contemporary problems we face. In short, alcohol abuse is a social evil in our country today!

Should Christians drink?

1. Alcoholism or drunkenness always begins with the first glass. We are commanded not to get drunk (Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 6:10).
2. Over indulgence in alcohol lowers our resistance to temptation so we end up doing what we would never have done had we been sober. Moral values get blotted out. High resolves are forgotten. Booze stimulates the sensual and represses the conscience.
4. Alcohol can be addictive, and Christ has died to set us free.

In considering the issue of alcohol, it is important to remember that it is a matter of conscience for the Christian. We do not impress God or gain His favour by not drinking alcohol (unless we choose not to do so because we want to remain true to our conscience). God accepts us on the basis of His love and free choice alone. Not our performance, but His grace.

Many sincere and faithful followers of Jesus Christ have no conscience in drinking a glass of wine or beer. Others believe they would be sinning to do so. And still others are not sure, so they choose to remain on the side of caution, and refrain. Everyone must choose to do what their conscience dictates.

Bible reading: 1 Thess. 4:13 - 5:11

The Christians to whom Paul wrote these words were expecting Jesus Christ to return in their life-time. When some of their number died, they thought that those ones would miss going to be with Him in heaven. No, says Paul. When Jesus Christ returns all Christians, will meet the Lord in the clouds. Those who have died will be raised to life and those living at the time will be transformed in an instant, and receive their resurrection bodies before joining them in the clouds. The whole church will then go to heaven with the Lord Jesus.

After the Christians go, the Bible talks of a time of great tribulation - a time of great upheaval, chaos and bloodshed. It will be unequalled in all history, and will last for 7 years. During this time God will allow men to go unrestrained in their evil desires and eventually almost destroy themselves. Then, when all the nations are gathered for a final great conflict, the Lord Jesus will come from heaven "with His saints", to rule the whole world for 1000 years.

Paul uses a very interesting picture in Ch.5, verse 3. The time just prior to the Lord's return is characterised by suffering similar to the pains an expectant mother goes through just before childbirth. When a woman is in labour, the pains get quicker and more intense as the time of the birth gets closer. In the same way, the signs of wickedness, violence, wars, famines and earthquakes, which signal His return, will become more frequent and intense as we get nearer.

In Matthew 25 Jesus gives many detailed signs of His return. All of these signs do not relate to the time when Jesus returns for His church. They precede the return of Christ with His saints (Christians) at the end of the 7 year tribulation period. The signs will occur during those 7 years. However, if we see the signs beginning to intensify already, how much closer must the return of Christ for His church be!

Since Israel returned to their own land and became a nation in 1948, Christians all over the world have been expectant. There are many signs being fulfilled today, and the Lord could come for us at any time. Jesus Christ our Lord, the same One who was crucified and then rose again, will return very soon. Verse 8 tells us how this should affect our lives.

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I believe you are coming back, and I pray that knowing this will effect the way I live my life and how I use my time. Help me to tell others about the Lord Jesus while there is still an opportunity for them to be saved. Amen

Bible reading: 2 Timothy 4:1-10

Paul here is writing to his life-long companion Timothy, just before he faced martyrdom in Rome (verse 6). He tells Timothy that he has finished the Christian race well, because:

A. He did his best.

That means he didn't just run, but every step was taken with as much energy and concern as he could command. Every day, every hour, was consecrated to God; given to doing that which pleased God the most.

B. He ran the full distance.

He didn't just run for a few months or several years. He did not even rest when his mission was complete, but wrote this letter and others. He kept going right to the end. He wasn't attracted by pleasures or possessions of this world.

C. He kept the Faith.

He was not side tracked to believe teaching which might have been appealing, but was not in line with the Scriptures.

D. He lived a righteous life.

He had not failed to live according to his conscience and the righteous demands of God.

What did Paul expect to receive in return for all his faithful life and service (verse 8)? The word 'crown' which Paul uses here was used in his day for a laurel prize of victory given to Olympic athletes who won a race. He was talking about the heavenly equivalent of a first prize "cup" or "medal".

But verse 8 goes on to show that in the Christian race we all have equal opportunity of winning the prize!

If we do our best, run the full race, keep the faith and live uprightly, we can be assured of the same crown when we get to heaven. It is not an ornamental crown, but one which gives the winner authority in heaven to reign with Christ and serve Him in a place of honour for ever and ever. If you have time, look up the crowns mentioned in the New Testament (1 Cor. 9:25, 1 Thess. 2:19 & 20, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:2-4).

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I ask you for grace and strength today, to persevere in my Christian life, remembering that I am competing for a prize. May I always live in light of the rewards I will gain or lose, after this life is over. Amen.

Thinking it Through #5

LIVING VICTORIOUSLY

Believers have strength and help from God which they never had before (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

1. What is our source of power for the new life (Romans 8:11) ?

2. What must we do that God might work in us unhindered (Romans 6:13) ?

3. What is the source of spiritual food for growth (1 Peter 2:2) ?

4. The Bible talks of eating God's Word - taking it into our inner beings (Jeremiah 15:16). How can we do this?

5. The Bible tells us that we have three enemies working against our new life. These are

the (1 Peter 5:8),

the (1 John 2:15-16),

our (James 1:14).

6. Our Lord Jesus has won a great victory at the cross. How has He defeated our enemies?

Hebrews 2:14

John 16:33

Ephesians 2:2-3

Romans 6:6

7. What application do the above verses have to you living victoriously?

8. In spite of our enemies being defeated, we must still face them. What does God tell us to do for victory?

1 John 2:15

James 4:7

Romans 13:14

Bible reading: Proverbs 3:5-18

God has a plan for your life. He wants to make your path straight (verse 6). In other words, He wants your path through life to be blessed - a fruitful and fulfilled life. He has your best interests at heart. He knows the best path for you to take through your life.

Your responsibility is to fulfil the conditions in verses 5 and 6, and then He will bless your life. The conditions of trusting in the Lord and ceasing to rely on your own understanding can only exist when you are confident that God is wise, loving, and in complete control of all the circumstances of your life. If you rely on your own ability to understand, you are saying in effect that you trust your own judgment, not God's!

Seeking God's guidance does not mean waiting for a word from the Lord about which shirt to wear, or what you should cook for dinner! It involves an attitude of dependence upon God to lead you through each day, and guide you in any significant decisions you may need to make. The Bible warns against Christians making important decisions without prayerfully seeking God's will (James 4:13-17).

How does God guide?

If you are seeking the Lord's will in an important decision you have to make, the first place to look is His Word. The vast majority of God's will is in the Bible. It is God's will that you keep your promises, love your neighbour, obey those in authority over you...and the list goes on! If a certain pathway may seem good but is forbidden in the Bible, then it is the wrong path.

Ask God to clearly guide you, and as you pray, you will find that God works through circumstances and people to confirm your decision or prevent you from taking a certain path. Advice from godly men and women is an important part of seeking the Lord's mind in important decisions. The Lord may also give you an inner peace about what you should do.

If after prayer you believe you are making the right decision even though the Lord has not clearly guided one way or the other, then boldly step out and do it, knowing that God is in control of all circumstances. Someone once said, "You can't steer a ship that is stationary; it has to be moving before it can be turned." It is often when we prayerfully start to move that God reveals His will.

If we rebel against doing the will of God, He may correct us (verses 11-12). The Lord disciplines us in love, wanting us to walk on the pathway that He knows is best. No matter how hard, how tedious, how uninteresting or painful the will of God may seem to us, it is best!

Trust Him, obey Him, and He will guide you day by day.

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 8:1-9; 9:6-11

A missionary in West Africa was amazed to discover that a poor widow had placed a large gift in the church offering. He knew she was penniless, and said to her that he could not accept such a fortune from someone so poor. She replied "The Lord has saved me from a life of sin, and made me a child of God. I want to give to Jesus an offering that satisfies my heart." The missionary then found out that the woman had obtained the money by selling herself as a slave for life to a nearby plantation owner.

Now that you are a child of God, you will appreciate God's love for you. He gave His all to save you from sin and death. He became poor in order to make you abundantly rich. You owe Him your life, your all.

***"Love so amazing, so Divine;
demands my soul, my life, my all."***

Paul thought it natural that the Christians at Corinth should give to God. He writes to them using an illustration of the Macedonian church which had given "extremely generously" despite the fact they were very poor. Paul said they "begged us and pleaded for the privilege" of giving to God. In many churches today the opposite can be true, with church leaders begging people to give.

What was the secret of the Macedonians' joy and generosity in giving? See verse 5. If we give ourselves to God completely we will regard all that we have as belonging to Him. It will be a joy to help others with the money or goods God has "lent" us.

There are no rules laid down by God (verse 8). The motivation must be an appreciation of the priceless gift we have received from Him (9:15), and that our cheerful giving pleases Him (9:7). You cannot out-give God (9:8-11) so the more you give to Him (with the right motivation), the more you will receive to give again.

Church offerings are not to be viewed as your contribution to the running of the church, but as your share in building God's kingdom.

Whatever you decide to give, set it aside every payday and give it to your local church, to missionaries, or to Christians in need. The Lord doesn't look at how much you give but at how much you have left! Some Christians like to tithe (give one tenth of their income) as it is a principle in Scripture. This is fine so long as it is not made a law that Christians are expected to keep. After all, giving is a practical expression of Christian love. We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus also said "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

"You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving!"

Bible reading: 1 Peter 2:18-25

We have read a lot over the past weeks about Christian actions - how we must act as God's children. But it is not just our actions that should be pleasing to God. We must change our reactions!

When someone hits you on the one cheek, said Jesus, your reaction should be to offer the other. We must not be like the soldier who had just become a Christian and his mates were jeering and mocking him. One came up to him and slapped him hard on the cheek, saying "Come on now, turn the other cheek" - so the new Christian turned his head to expose his other cheek to receive another hard blow. "Right", said the Christian, "now that I've obeyed the Bible, take this ... (pow!) and this ... (whack!) and this ... " (thud!) No, Christian living is Christ - and His example must always be our guide. He was mocked, whipped, spat upon and crucified, yet all He said was, "Father, forgive them".

The verses we have read today were written to slaves who, at that time, were often treated like animals. They were beaten and treated harshly by their masters. Sometimes they were even killed, which was allowed by the law of the land. Their wives and children were taken from them. Their lives, their possessions and even their families were all owned by their masters. They could do with them as they pleased.

Peter says that they will be blessed by God if they submit, and thus follow the example of Jesus Christ. The word "example" was a term used in a school class. Pupils were given a perfectly written alphabet as an example to copy out on the line below. The Lord Jesus is a "copy-book" example for us to follow. But we have something more... we also have His presence with us to help us react the right way when we suffer unjustly.

One reaction which the Lord always looks for in His people is a forgiving spirit. We are called to forgive as He forgave us - freely, totally and from the heart. A test to check whether you have truly forgiven someone is to sincerely pray for them, and for God's richest blessing on their lives. Try it!

PRAYER:

Dear Lord,

I can find it so hard to react the right way to people who have hurt me or those I find it hard to get along with. Father, I pray that you will help me to forgive them from my heart, just as You have forgiven me.

I pray for them, especially for, that you will bless and be with them. If they have sinned against me, I pray You will not hold that against them. Amen.

Bible reading: Romans 11:33 - 12:2

You may have heard the story of the chicken and the pig who were going past the door of a restaurant. A large sign said, "Ham and Eggs our Speciality". The chicken noticed the sign and said, "Let's help them out", to which the pig replied, "It's all right for you! You only have to give an offering, for me it is a sacrifice!" You may smile, but that clearly illustrates the meaning of the word "sacrifice" in Romans 12. God does not want part of our lives, a kind of piece-meal offering which does not cost us anything. He deserves our whole lives - a total surrender of ourselves to Him.

"Living Sacrifice" sounds a contradiction in terms. If something is sacrificed it can't be alive at the same time! Paul explains in Galatians 2:20 that we "have been crucified with Christ" ('Sacrifice'), and we no longer live, but Christ lives in us ('Living sacrifice').

We cannot put Christ in control of our lives unless we die to our old selfish ways. We are to be alive, though dead: dead to serving self, alive to serving God. It is as if we say, "Lord, I am willing to die right now and go to be with You in heaven"; to which God replies - "It's good that you are willing to die, and I could easily take your life from you. But I am going to give you your life back. From now on you are like a dead man on leave. In this new life ahead of you, I want you to live in submission to Me."

The offering of our bodies as living sacrifices (verse 1) is the first step to experiencing the transformation Paul writes about in verse 2.

The second step is spelled out in the words "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind". We can never be changed by the transforming power of Christ unless our minds are weaned off the world's way of thinking ("Do not be conformed to this world" - verse 2). We are to reject the world's values, the world's moral standards, and the world's perspective of living for this life only with no real thought of eternity to follow. Then we must replace the world's way of thinking with the truth of God. We must fill our minds with God's Word (the Bible). In this way our minds will be renewed, leading to our lives being transformed.

Then, when we are living sacrifices, and we are living in line with our renewed minds, Paul gives a wonderful promise: we will prove that God's will for us is good, perfect and acceptable (verse 2). You can trust God with your surrendered life because He loves you and knows what is best for your life.

Read through the remaining verses of chapter 12 and see how being a living sacrifice and renewed in your mind should translate into practical, down to earth living!

Bible reading: Romans 14:13-23

Once you start mixing with other Christians, you soon find out that there are many areas which all agree on, and other areas where many disagree. The main teachings of the Bible, such as who Jesus Christ is, and how a person can be saved, should never be in dispute. They are the essentials; the non-negotiable beliefs of our faith. However, there are different beliefs about less important issues such as whether a Christian should play sport on a Sunday, drink alcohol, smoke, or go to war.

The first century church had similar differences of opinion. Some had a Jewish background, with a strong emphasis on obeying the Law of Moses. They had been brought up with a deep conviction that it was unthinkable to eat pork, or to work on the Sabbath day. Yet the moment they trusted Christ as Saviour they were free from those old laws. But some of these Christians still had a conscience about what they should eat and which days they should observe. Others, who understood their new freedom from the old restrictions were upsetting them by doing those things which they knew went against their fellow Christian's consciences.

Paul says in verse 15 that, although we are free from the Law of Moses, we are now governed by a new "law" - the law of love. If an action, quite legitimate in itself, injures a fellow Christian's conscience, it is sin.

There are many areas in life today which are governed by this same principle. For example, the Bible says nothing about whether or not we should smoke. But clearly, apart from it being habit-forming and harmful to the body, it would certainly hurt the consciences of many Christians. We have no law in the Bible that forbids us to go to a pub. There are no commands about gambling. God has not said anything about watching videos that portray adultery and violence. The Bible is not filled with a multiplication of laws that straight-jacket our Christian lives until we are burdened down by all the things we can and cannot do!

God wants us to live in relationship with Him. To please Him in all we do. To go where He would be happy for us to go, and to be involved in the things that would gain His approval. He calls us to watch out for our brothers and sisters. We must not do anything that would cause another Christian to stumble or fall.

You are free!

But use your freedom for the other's good, and then you will be pleasing God (verse 18).

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

In a 'Peanuts' comic strip, Linus announces to his cranky sister Lucy that he's going to be a doctor. "You, a doctor" she replies in amazement, "How can you be a doctor? You don't love mankind!" To which Linus responds: "I do too love mankind. It's just people I can't stand!"

We can easily kid ourselves that we love others, but love that is genuine will love everyone - even the unlovely. Sometimes the hardest person to love is a person in your own church fellowship!

Winfrey Oprah was once interviewing a variety of people, and asking them the question: "If you had the power to say "DIE" and by merely saying the words you could cause someone you named to drop dead, would you use that power? A surprising number of people said they would! One young lady, when asked who she would say it to, said: "To someone in my church"!

The church is made up of people from all backgrounds and strata in life - people with a wide range of personalities and ways. We are all thrown together with just one common bond - our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot choose. We have to love all God's children.

Love is to be the great characteristic of all Christians. The Bible declares that "God is love", and the Christian is indwelt by God. Therefore we show that we are true Christians by our love for one another. God's love is not the sentimental emotion that is the subject of so many popular songs and poems. Paul Rees defines the love of God as having "the minimum of emotion and the maximum of evaluation".

Jesus said we must love our enemies. Obviously we cannot feel warm affection towards our enemies, but we can recognise them as people who are important to God, and therefore important to us. You will not be able to love everyone in your church in the same way you love your mother or father, but you can regard that person to be just as valuable in the sight of God. Emotion may or may not be in Christian love, but evaluation certainly is.

When you read verses 4 to 7 in today's passage, did you become aware of areas where you fail in this primary Christian grace? Read those verses again, only this time put your name in place of the word "love" (e.g. "John is patient and kind...").

Now read the same verses again, only this time substitute the name "Jesus" for the word "love" ("Jesus is patient and kind...").

Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of God's love. His example for us to follow is coupled with His presence in us by His Spirit. We have no excuse for failing to show this same love ourselves.

Bible reading: 1 Corinthians 15:3-23, 50-58

One of the most important beliefs of the Christian faith is the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. If He had not conquered death, how can we trust Him to raise us from the dead? The apostle Paul states very clearly that to deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus renders our faith futile. In other words, if there is no resurrection, we have been deluded in believing the gospel and we are still guilty sinners before God (verse 17).

But Christ has been raised from the dead (verse 20) and because He lives we can confidently trust Him to raise us also. He is the guarantee (verse 20) of our resurrection. The word "firstfruits" means a guarantee. When a peach tree is laden with fruit, there are always some peaches which ripen before the others. They are picked first (therefore called firstfruits), and the orchardist can confidently tell his customers that the main harvest is not far away.

Paul uses the firstfruit illustration to show us that there is one resurrection 'harvest' which involves Christ and His Church. The firstfruits of this harvest (Jesus Christ) has already been raised. All the remainder of the harvest is guaranteed to be raised from the dead, but must wait for the last trumpet (verses 51 & 52).

As 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him". It is just a natural extension of our belief in the Lord's resurrection to believe in our own also. Verse 23 tells us that this event will happen when Christ returns, and it will only affect "those who belong to Him."

The last part of the chapter shows that it is necessary for us to receive a new resurrection body. Our earthly body is weak and subject to decay, corruption and death. The resurrection body is "like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21) and is suited to living in heaven with God.

The head of our earthly race, Adam, passed on his physical characteristics to all his descendants. We received our earthly bodies from him. Christ, the head of the new creation, is a life-giving Spirit from heaven (verses 45-47).

Those who trust in Him as their Saviour and Lord are brought into a living relationship with Him which is far more glorious than the earthly relationship we have with our forefather Adam. Jesus Christ, the head of the new 'race' of people gives eternal life now and a new body to match that life at the resurrection.

What should this knowledge stimulate us to do (verse 58)?

Thinking it Through #6

DISCOVERING THE WILL OF GOD

1. What is the first question to ask yourself? (John 7:17).
2. What should be your first concern? (Matthew 6:33).
3. What correct attitudes do you find in Proverbs 3:4-5?
4. What does God promise as we begin to seek His will? (James 1:5).
4. What has the Lord said He will do? (Psalm 32:8).
5. How is prayer a part of discovering God's will? (1 John 5:14-15).
6. Where can we look for guidance? (Psalm 119:105).
7. What is the problem with simply doing what seems best to us? (Isaiah 55:8).
8. In what other way can you know the right path? (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22).
9. Share with your counsellor or friend any important decisions you will have to make in the future.
 - * Which of the above verses apply most to the decision?
 - * What is your greatest fear in making the decision?
 - * How can you trust God in making the right decision?

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 5:9-15

Motivation lies behind everything we do in life. We eat because we are motivated by hunger. We brush our teeth because we are motivated by a sense of cleanliness or the fear of decay.

In a Christian's life and service motivation is very important. Why should I go to church? Why should I obey the Bible? Why should I tell others about Christ? Why should I offer to help in church activities?

We find three important motives for the Christian in the Bible reading today:

1. Verse 9 - The Christian's desire should always be one of pleasing the Lord . Sometimes speaking or acting to please the Lord may not please others, nor may it be very pleasing to our selfish nature. But if it pleases God then we should do it. Take an example of when we have an opportunity of witnessing for Christ . It doesn't please the world, nor is it easy for us to do, but it brings real joy to the heart of God.

This book is entitled "Growing to Please Him" because this one great motivation is the key to growth and stability in the Christian life. Before you were a Christian your life was probably marked by pleasing yourself. To the extent that you have sincerely desired to please the Lord since you trusted Christ as your Saviour and Lord, you will have changed. If there has not been much change, you will almost certainly be able to trace it back to a lack of motivation to please Him.

2. Verse 10 - All Christians will be judged by Christ on a future day of judgment. He will review our lives, our walk, our service. We will be given rewards or suffer loss of privilege according to how we have lived. There will be many Christians who will then regret the careless, selfish and indifferent life they lived.

3. Verse 14 - We are to be ruled by the love of Christ. Surely this is the greatest motive for a Christian. If the Son of God died on a cross for us because He loved us, we ought to be motivated by that love to do what He tells us! "We love Him because He first loved us".

4. Verse 17 - We have been created anew by the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 2:10, we read that this new creation which God has performed in us, is "for good works". That means God has miraculously changed us on the inside, and now His Spirit motivates, energises and uses us to reach out to others. He provides an inner motivation to do good. God is at work in us, and through us!

This week try and apply these motives in your daily life.

Bible reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

One difficulty which Christians have to face up to at some stage in their growth is what seems to be unanswered prayer. You may be praying for something which you feel is really important and which, if unanswered, will be very difficult for you to handle. The answer does not come even with earnest and repeated prayer. You claim God's promises and pray for long periods of time, but still the Lord does nothing.

The apostle Paul had just such an experience. He was given a "thorn in the flesh" (verse 7) which seems to have been a "painful physical ailment", a handicap which impeded his service for the Lord. Paul could well have reasoned the way we would: "If the Lord removed this problem I could be much more active and useful to God". He prayed three times, and from what we read, he prayed earnestly, and in faith. Yet there was no answer.

Then the Lord showed him that in answer to his prayer God would give him grace (the ability to cope in God's strength). God's power would be even more evident because of Paul's weakness than it would if he was healed! God showed Paul that the thorn was intended to keep him humble because he was likely to be tempted, having received such wonderful revelations from God.

In James 1:2-8 we read that when trials, problems or sickness come our way, and the Lord does not remove them when we ask Him, then we are to pray to God for wisdom. That is, ask God to show us the purpose in His allowing the problem to remain. That prayer of faith God has promised to answer.

One reason we sometimes do not have our prayers answered as we think they should, is the misunderstanding of what prayer really is. Prayer is not a wish list we hand to God each time we pray. Prayer is our communication as children of God with our Heavenly Father. We are given the unbelievable privilege of a private audience with the King of Kings whenever we want. Prayer is meant to be a means of developing and maintaining our relationship with Him. We seek Him in prayer, not His gifts. We worship **Him**, not what He can do for us.

Read James 4:3 and see another reason why God sometimes may not answer prayer. God is our Father and He gives only good gifts to His children. He knows what may harm us; He knows what is best for us.

We are called to pray ("You do not have because you do not ask"). Pray, but allow God to test your motives and guide your prayers. Pray: "Lord, how do You want me to pray about this situation?"

Bible reading: Galatians 1:3-12

One of the strongest words used in the New Testament is found twice in our reading today: "Anathema". In the original Greek language it means "cursed" or "condemned to hell".

Paul writes here to Christians, most of whom he had led to the Lord himself. He marvels that they had so quickly turned away from the truth they had heard from his lips, which had brought them salvation. They had been led astray from the teaching they had initially believed, to embrace a different gospel. Actually, says Paul, there is no "other gospel" - yet some false teachers had come and captured their minds, drawing them away from the truth. The same can happen today. Young Christians are especially vulnerable because they do not know enough to be able to discern the subtle and deceitful arguments of people who use God's Word to promote their wrong teachings. A farmer was showing a friend the carcasses of 24 lambs which wolves had killed in the night. "But there are no adult sheep among them" the friend said. "Your right" said the farmer, "they always go for the lambs".

Paul then tells the Christians that even if he, their spiritual father, and one who has been given all the authority of an apostle of Jesus Christ, or if anyone else, even an angel from heaven, should preach a different gospel to the one originally taught and believed, the false teachers are to be accursed.

Jesus says, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves". Jesus is saying that it is easy to be deceived by false teachers. They look respectable. They may sound most authoritative. To the undiscerning eye they are the same as the other sheep in the flock. They use the same words, do the same things, and even try to show that they are following the Bible closer than other Christians. They often point out the failure of the institutionalised church, but fail to recognise that though the church has often failed, there are still many true Christians in the church.

Beware of people whose doctrine goes against what you first see taught in Scripture. Do not listen to them (or even try to argue with them) because you are no match! Have nothing to do with them or you will find yourself entangled in their web. These men and women are Satan's deceitful agents to try to draw you away from your simple faith in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Lord and Saviour.

The Bible repeatedly warns against being deceived by false teachers. God seems to be laying a very heavy stress on the importance of standing firm in what the Bible teaches. You are no match to their clever arguments so don't even start discussing your faith with them.

Bible reading: Luke 9:18-27

At the time of Christ people who wanted to learn about God and His Word would receive instruction at the feet of a rabbi, a teacher. There were many rabbis, and those who learned from them were called disciples. In the New Testament we find disciples of John the Baptist, Gamaliel and other men.

Jesus had a large group of followers who, in their eyes, were His disciples. But Jesus, though popular as a rabbi, was not enamoured by a large following. He was constantly facing them up to the cost of following Him. He wanted men and women who had counted the cost of being His disciples.

Obedient Disciples

Jesus said: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Learning from Jesus was not to be merely intellectual. Jesus required His disciples to take the yoke of obedience. A yoke was a wooden beam placed over two oxen when they worked so they could walk together. Jesus used this illustration to show the kind of submission we should have to His authority.

Open Disciples

Jesus knew that He was going to be rejected and even despised, and He called His disciples to be willing to stand with Him, openly confessing that they were His followers. He said "The Son of Man must suffer many things ... and be killed". This teaching was inconceivable to the disciples. It did not properly register in their minds until after the resurrection of Christ.

As disciples of Jesus we must all take up our own cross and follow Him (verse 23). This means we must identify ourselves publicly with Him who is rejected and despised by the world. The people in Jesus time would gladly have identified themselves with Jesus if He were to ascend the throne of the earth and rule in glory. So would we! The test of our loyalty is whether or not we will publicly confess that we belong to Him when He is despised and forsaken.

Jesus bore the cross because it was the will of God for Him. We must likewise be willing to obey the Lord and follow Him, even if it involves hardship, suffering and contempt. As disciples we must count the cost - we must face the fact that the Christian pathway is not an easy one. If we try to save our lives (verse 24) by not taking up our cross and following Christ in obedience, we will end up losing our lives. If we gain the whole world (verse 25) and yet lose our souls, we will finish the loser for all eternity.

Jesus will not always be despised and rejected (verse 26) - one day He will reign, and we will reign with Him!

Bible reading: John 15:1-11

A few years ago a university experimented with a pumpkin to see how much weight it could lift . The apparatus was set up to measure the pressure exerted as it expanded. Each day the pressure grew until it peaked at 5000 pounds! Amazed at the incredible power in the life of the humble pumpkin, the students watched to see what would happen when they cut the stalk. As soon as the knife severed the pumpkin from the plant, the needle wound back to zero!

Christians have been brought into a living, vital relationship with Jesus Christ. His power and life, like that of the vine, flows to us, the branches. While we are linked with Him we have power, His power, to produce the fruit He wants to see in our lives. When we do not remain in Him our needle winds back to zero!

Though Jesus went back to heaven after His resurrection, He continues to be our 'Rabbi', and we continue to be His disciples. However, instead of being physically present as our Master and Teacher, He now lives in us by His Spirit. Our discipleship is now a dynamic life-relationship with Him. A true disciple of Christ must therefore produce fruit.

Anything that is evidence of His life in us is fruit. How can a person have the Spirit of Jesus Christ dwelling within and not show it in some way?! We prove to be His disciples by bearing fruit: "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (verse 8).

We are just as powerless to produce the life of Christ by ourselves as a pumpkin can grow by itself! Jesus said "Without me you can do nothing"! That is why we need to remain in Christ, the Vine. We do this by depending on His strength to resist temptation and live a life that pleases God.

Our Father in Heaven is also involved in us producing fruit. Jesus said that He is the Vinedresser. He is the one who cares for the vine, who oversees it's growth and fruitfulness. He removes parts that are unfruitful, and prunes the fruit-bearing branches so they become even more productive.

None of us enjoy God's pruning knife! We very quickly ask Him to take away our problems, and ease up on our pressures. But our Father has a great purpose in mind - to make us more and more like His Son. He uses the difficulties to prune us of unwanted growth. He removes impatience, bitterness, selfishness and independence so that our lives can produce a truly Christ-like character.

Bible reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

The Christian is like a soldier behind enemy lines! We are in a battle. Satan and his many of evil forces are real. They are fallen angels, spirit beings who were created to serve God, but rebelled. They are opposed to God and so they are also against God's people.

Satan is a powerful being. We are no match against his cunning and strength. If we fight in our own strength and reason with our own wisdom, we will fall. But he has no power against our Saviour!

Christ has already overpowered and defeated Satan at the cross, and we share in His victory since we are united with Him. As verse 12 tells us, we can be strong "in the Lord", we can win the fight because of our union with Christ.

God has provided us with protection in our battle against Satan. We have an armour which will keep us safe against the strongest attack. Twice we are told to put the armour on.

1. The belt of truth. We know the truth of the Gospel and the truth has set us free. We must always stand firm on the truth of God's Word, and not waver from what it says. Also we must ourselves be truthful, sincere and honest.

2. The breastplate of righteousness. When we trust in Christ we are declared righteous. No one can condemn us as sinners again (Romans 8:33-39). The Devil cannot accuse us because we are clothed in Christ's righteousness. We must also live a righteous life.

3. Shod feet. Our feet are to be prepared with the good news of the gospel, that Jesus Christ is Lord and is the Saviour of the world.

4. The Shield of Faith. The fiery darts of fear and doubt the Devil sends us are quenched by the shield of faith. You have to choose between believing your doubts or believing God's Word. Faith is in the trustworthiness of God, and takes Him at His Word.

5. The helmet of salvation. Our minds are protected by the present knowledge of salvation and the guarantee of our future salvation which will take place when Christ returns for us..

6. The sword of the Spirit. The Bible is our sword to defend ourselves against the attack the evil one. He has no answer to the authority of God's Word. Even Jesus, when He was tempted by Satan, used Bible verses to ward him off. This is a reason why Bible reading, study and memory work is vital.

7. Prayer. Prayer is the great animating force behind all of these pieces in the Christian's Armour. Prayer is the means by which we put our armour on, so that we may experience peace and security.

49 THAT LITTLE BIG MEMBER!

Bible reading: James 3:1-12

The tongue is a little member of the body but it can boast about great things. A person's tongue can change the course of history. A person's tongue can do a great deal of good and also it can do unimaginable harm. The inflammatory speeches by Hitler was the major cause of the second world war with millions of people being killed.

James starts by saying in verse 1 that a person who is God's mouthpiece has a special responsibility to keep his tongue under control. Then in verse 2 he shows us that to control the tongue is the hardest act of self-control. If we can control our tongue we can control everything else.

The tongue, though small like a ship's rudder or a tiny flame, can result in consequences far in excess of its size. For this reason it is very important to keep it under control. One person can come into a happy church fellowship and, using the tongue alone, can create havoc. Scars from gossip and slander can remain for years - even for a lifetime, and bring dishonour to the Lord's holy Name. No wonder James says that the fire of the tongue comes from hell itself!

Some wrong uses of the tongue:

Flattery - insincere praise which is for your own advantage.

Gossip - spreading rumours about someone.

Slander - destroying a person's reputation by spreading lies.

Lies - speaking what you know is not the truth. Even a half truth communicates a lie.

Curses and swearing - coarse and dirty language

Outbursts of temper - uncontrolled anger

We can tame lions, snakes, elephants and other creatures, but we cannot control our own tongues! It seems incredible, but it is true. Hypocrisy is shown in a tongue which at one moment is lavishly praising God, then shortly afterward is cursing a fellow human being who is made in the image of God. As verses 11 and 12 say, what comes out of our mouths is really just an expression of what is in our hearts.

Jesus said: "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). As we learn to put to death our evil thoughts and desires, and as we learn to rely on Christ to rule our hearts by His Spirit, then, and then only, can we control our "little big member".

Thinking it Through #7

PRAYER

1. Does prayer do any good? (James 5:16).
2. What are two reasons we 'have not'? (James 4:2-3).
3. What is His command and His promises? (Matthew 7:7-8).

4. What are the conditions to prayer?

John 14:14

Matthew 21:22

James 1:6-7

Psalms 66:18

1 John 5:14

5. Our prayers should include worship (praise), thanksgiving, confession, intercession for others, and then personal needs. Write down which areas are mentioned in the following verses.

Psalms 100:4 (two things)

1 John 1:9

Ephesians 6:18

1 Timothy 2:1

6. God answers prayers in ways other than directly and immediately. What was the Lord's way of answering these prayers?

John 11:3,6, 14-15, 43-44

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

Luke 9:52-55

Bible reading: Philippians 3:17 - 4:13

Paul had just written in 3:14 that his life was like a race where he strained forward in order to win. We are not involved in a short sprint, but a marathon! We have to be prepared to run the race right to the end. Every day, every obstacle, and every slip will test our stamina.

Then in verse 17 we are called to join in imitating those who are good examples. This advice is helpful for new Christians. Often you may be unsure of how to behave as a child of God. Character traits such as mercy, longsuffering, meekness and kindness are easier to understand when seen in another person. Christians are not perfect, but when the character and attractiveness of Jesus Christ is seen in other believers, you should follow these examples in order to grow.

Paul then shows us the attitude necessary for anyone who wants to finish the Christian race well.

1. Hope (3:20-21). Because we are only briefly on earth and our true home (our citizenship) is in heaven, we can stand firm (4:1) even when the greatest trials come our way. It is like a person who knows he is shortly going to leave Cuba to live in U.S.A. where he is already accepted as a U.S. citizen and is promised a beautiful home. Even if he loses all his possessions and faces many difficulties before he goes, he would overcome because of his hope.

2. Joy (4:4). "Rejoice always" is not what the apostle says. He calls us to "Rejoice in the lord always", which is a lot different. It is "in the Lord" that we know that all things work together for good, and that His loving hands are using all life's experiences, good and bad, to mould us and prepare us for better things ahead.

3. Prayer (4:6-7). We should not be worried or anxious but bring all our requests to God in prayer. He has promised that if we leave them with God, trusting Him without anxiety, then the "peace of God, which transcends all understanding" will guard our hearts and minds. Prayer can change a person who is being over- come by stress and fear. It will make him an overcomer.

4. Contemplation (4:8-9). Meditate on good things - whether in the Bible or as seen in people's lives. Keep your mind in forward gear, not reverse, because thought leads to action ("do"- verse 9), and overcomers need pure minds in order to live good lives.

5. Contentment (4:10-12). Do not complain of want; do not covet, or be greedy or envious.

6. Confidence (4:13). Trust at all times in the strength and help Christ gives you and you will overcome in all things.

Section 2

As you have daily meditated on Bible passages, and read the comments in this book, you have probably learned a great deal about God and yourself. But there is still much more for you to know. Your aim should be to learn how to dig even deeper into the Bible and “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

From this point on, the book changes. Now you must begin to learn from God more directly. Each day pray for help and understanding in order to learn what God is teaching you. Then, after you have read the Bible passage, follow the simple outline as you meditate on what you have read, and write down what you personally learn. Don't be discouraged if at times you seem to get nothing out of a reading. You may be surprised at how your life is effected by continual exposure to the Word of God.

Each day you will have a chapter of the Bible to read. If you are not able to read the whole chapter, then read the verses for meditation.

HOW TO USE THE OUTLINE:

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

Eg. God is merciful and kind. He always forgives us when we confess our sins.

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

Eg. I must forgive others if I expect God to forgive me.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Eg. I need to apologise to Jim for the way I spoke to him last weekend.

51 MARK - Chapter 1

Passage for meditation: verses 1-12

Hundreds of years before Christ Isaiah prophesied that a special messenger would be sent to Israel just prior to the coming of Christ. This man would come to "prepare the way of the Lord" by calling the people to repentance and by announcing that Christ's coming was at hand (verses 4 & 7).

After Jesus was baptised and tempted by the Devil, He immediately commenced preaching and healing. Jesus was 30 years old when He came out of obscurity into public life. Even though He knew from an early age He had a special mission to fulfil, He patiently awaited the right time to start. It is significant that in a very brief time His fame spread throughout the land (verse 28), showing the extraordinary nature and power of His teaching and miracles. He was indeed "The Son of God" (verse 1).

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 1-12

Anyone could claim to be "the Christ" and say to people "Your sins are forgiven". The Pharisees were correct in saying that only God can forgive sins, because sin is the breaking of God's law. Jesus Christ backed up His words of forgiveness with a powerful miracle. If, then, the people questioned His authority to forgive sins, they could not deny that God was with Him in what He did. The healing of the paralytic was proof that God approved what He said. Miracles were Christ's credentials - evidence that He was who He claimed to be. If He was the Son of God and didn't do the miracles, then we could seriously doubt His authority.

Notice the contrast between the man who was physically paralysed, and the Pharisees and Scribes (religious leaders) who were spiritually paralysed. They were bound by a heavy burden of keeping the law (verses 18 & 24). Jesus came to bring freedom from the law, to give new life. Christianity cannot be contained within the old wineskins (verse 22) of the Jewish religion. It is something new. It brings rest to the heavy laden (Matthew 11:28).

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

53 MARK - Chapter 3

Passage for meditation: verses 1-19

The Jews had taken the law of the Sabbath and added to it over 1000 additional laws. It was meant to be a day of rest, a day when they could honour and worship God. But they made it into a burden so great that even the slightest action was condemned (like plucking an ear of grain which we read about yesterday). Because Christ restored the true meaning to the Sabbath in what He said and did, the leaders were angry and took counsel to kill Him.

Jesus chose twelve apostles out of all the followers He had. His reason was for this select group "to be with Him" (to witness His life, miracles and teaching), and to be "sent out to preach". The Apostles were hand picked by the Lord to lead the church after He went back to heaven.

The incident in verses 31-35 teaches us that neither family nor national pedigree can guarantee us a place in God's kingdom. No one is born a Christian because of Christian parents. The Jews could not presume on their favoured position as a nation and have a "right" to the kingdom of God. Only faith in Christ can ensure a right relationship with God and a place in heaven.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 35-41

The people had a wrong idea of what the kingdom would be like. They expected it to come suddenly as a tremendous spectacle. They believed Christ would suddenly appear, set the Jews free from the oppression of the Roman empire, judge all the wicked, and rule the world from Jerusalem. Jesus taught in parables to show the true nature of the kingdom of God.

He taught that the kingdom had already commenced, only it was like a silent seed - small, insignificant, seemingly unimportant. Yet it would grow into something big. The king had come, and those who received His word and obeyed Him are like the good soil which receives the seed (verses 8 & 20). The word of Christ would bear fruit in their lives.

The story in verses 35-41 is interesting when you consider that Jesus directed the disciples to cross the lake. That is why He rebuked them for showing a lack of faith when they feared. In our lives, we often meet trials, troubles and even persecution in doing His will. Faith remembers that He directed us, and that He is with us in our 'boat'. When the time of testing is over Jesus says, "Peace! Be still!" and we experience a great calm.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

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Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

55 MARK - Chapter 5

Passage for meditation: verses 35-43

Satan is the powerful ruler of this world, and the three stories today are pictures of how Christ has defeated him. The first man was overpowered and controlled by demons. He was helpless to free himself. Christ set him free and sent him to tell his family and friends. When you trust Christ as Saviour, you are called to "declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The woman with a flow of blood was "unclean" because of her condition. In a similar way, we were unclean because of our sin before we trusted Christ. Note that Jesus makes the woman confess publicly what had happened. Jesus does not want any "secret disciples".

The third area in which Christ has defeated Satan is in the realm of death. In Hebrews 2:14-15 we read that it was at the cross where Jesus fought the battle and won the victory over death.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 30-44

It is interesting to compare the way Jesus was received in His home town with His reception elsewhere in Israel. His neighbours and friends found it difficult to believe in Him, as they had known Him from childhood. He was just one of the local boys from a poor family who had become famous, but to believe that He was the Messiah was too much to ask.

Further from home, however, Jesus was admired and followed by large numbers. He scarcely had a moment to Himself, so He called His disciples to turn aside to a quiet place. However, a great throng found them on a hillside by Lake Galilee. Though weary and needing time out to relax, He did not turn the people away. He taught them all that day, and then performed one of His most convincing miracles. He was a servant in the truest sense of the word. He gave Himself to His people and we must give ourselves in the same way to others.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Thinking it Through #8

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

1. We need to be certain of what is true. In court this is established by the testimony of a witness.

Who is the witness concerning the Son (1 John 5:9)?

Where is the record of this witness to be found (John 5:39)?

What does the record (witness) promise (1 John 5:11)?

2. If you hear and believe God's Word concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, three things are promised (John 5:24).

What do you have now?

What you will avoid in the future?

What has already happened?

3. Christ calls those who believe in Him as 'My sheep'. He knows them. They hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27-30).

What do they have?

What will not happen?

Who keeps them safe?

The Word of God can make us sure of salvation. However, there is something else that makes us safe from the judgment of God. It is not works, your prayer, or your baptism.

What is the one thing that redeems us (buys us back) to God (1 Peter 1:18-20)?

5. Forgiveness can only be based on one thing. What is it (Heb. 9:22)?

6. In what are you trusting for your salvation?

Passage for meditation: verses 6-19

The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law interpreted God's law to suit themselves. Jesus takes one example of this to show how false and hypocritical their teaching had become. They ignored the clear commands of the law (verse 10) by teaching that if a person's money is "corban" (consecrated to God) they were excused from the duty of taking care of their ageing parents. We can fall into the same trap today. We can use the Bible incorrectly to justify our own selfish pursuits. The Pharisees honoured God with their lips while their hearts were far from Him.

Jesus tested the faith of the Gentile woman in order to see how genuine it was, and by so doing strengthened her faith (verse 27). In our prayer life we may seem to get an unexpected answer from the Lord. But if we are praying in faith we will persevere in our prayers as the woman did, trusting in the Lord's goodness and love.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

58 MARK - Chapter 8

Passage for meditation: verses 27-38

The Pharisees demanded a sign from the Lord Jesus that would be undeniable proof that He was the Christ of God. Jesus refused. People were not to be forced into believing in Him. God has always required faith. In the same way today, God will not do something miraculous for people who say they want proof of His existence. However, the miracles Jesus did perform were sufficient for those who had faith. That is why Jesus reprimanded His disciples for being so slow to understand who He was.

Jesus did not tell His disciples that He was the Christ. He wanted them to discern this themselves. As soon as they recognised who He was, He started teaching them the next great lesson they had to learn - that He, the Christ, must suffer and die. They were like the blind man in verses 22-26. They had only partially received their sight when they recognised that Jesus was the Christ. They needed more sight in order to understand that He must suffer and die on the cross.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

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HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 2-10

What a wonderful experience it must have been for Peter, James and John to be with Jesus on the mountain and be "eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-18). In chapter 8 the disciples expressed their faith in the words, "You are the Christ (the Messiah)". Then six days later their faith is rewarded by their seeing His glory.

Immediately after the mountain experience, Jesus is confronted with a picture of the work He has come to accomplish - to free the world from the bondage of the Devil. The boy with an evil spirit could not be helped by anyone - not even Jesus' disciples. Similarly, only Christ can deliver a person out of the dominion of darkness into His own kingdom of light.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

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Passage for meditation: verses 32-45

When Christ comes into a person's life He gives a new set of values. In today's chapter we find the disciples having to adjust their values in response to the Lord's teaching.

a. Moral values are restored to the standard that God desires. Marriage is for life - in God's eyes adultery is a grave sin.

b. Jesus restores the value of people whom others consider small and insignificant. Children and adults, the weak and the strong, the wise and the simple, are all important to God and they should be just as important to us.

c. Next we see Jesus showing a rich young ruler that the real values in life are not "treasures on earth" but "treasures in heaven." If we lay up treasures on earth we will be the losers for all eternity.

d. Finally, James and John, along with the other disciples, show a desire for prominence and position. Jesus tells them that the values in His kingdom are opposite to those in the world (verses 41-45). He gives the example of Himself. He had the right to demand the highest position and expect everyone to serve Him. However, He came to serve us, and He did this even though it meant He had to give up His life for us.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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Passage for meditation: verses 11-25

Hundreds of years before the event took place, the prophet Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah would ride into Jerusalem on a colt. Jesus presented Himself to the nation of Israel as the promised King by entering Jerusalem in this way. Although many rejoiced and praised God at the time, Jesus knew the heart of His people. They were like a fig tree which had leaves but no fruit. Their enthusiasm was outward, with no fruit of repentance and faith.

Jesus cursed the fig tree, not because it was unproductive, but because it was being false. It proclaimed by the presence of leaves that it had fruit, when in fact it did not. (A fig tree produces figs at the same time the new leaves appear).

Jesus cleansed the temple of the defilement of greedy and thieving traders, a fitting sequel to the cursing of the fig tree. The people honoured God with their lips but their heart was set on their own interests. Evidence of this was seen a few days later when He was crucified by the same people who had shouted "Hosanna".

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

62 MARK - Chapter 12

Passage for meditation: verses 35-44

In Jesus' parable the tenants in charge of the vineyard are a picture of the Jewish leaders. For centuries God had sent His servants to call them to repentance, but they had killed the prophets and stoned the messengers God had sent. Now that God has sent His Son, they would treat Him in a similar way - He would be rejected and crucified. But the One who would be rejected as worthless will become the most important of all (verses 10,11).

Jesus shows in verses 35-37 that although the Jewish teachers were right in saying that the Christ would be a descendant of David, they had missed the clear teaching that He would be far more. He would be "Lord". David addressed Him as Lord in Psalm 110.

The final story of the poor widow's meagre offering is a perfect contrast to the showy hypocrisy of the Teachers of the Law. In God's reckoning she gave more than they did. The amount we have left over after giving to God should influence how much we give.

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Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 24-37

Jesus predicted the signs that would accompany the end of this present age, when Christ will come in glory. It is noteworthy that part of the prophecy was literally fulfilled when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70. The temple was left a ruin with every single stone prised off the other. Bible prophecy often has a double fulfilment - in part, shortly after the prophecy is made (to show the prophet was not false), then later when it will be totally fulfilled (verses 24-25).

Jesus promised to return, and many of the signs of His coming are being literally fulfilled before our very eyes today. The fig tree, a picture of Israel, is again putting out its leaves. It is flourishing. Israel became a nation again in 1948 and has grown in size and strength since that time. Therefore, we must be awake! We must be ready and watching for our Lord's return. IT COULD BE TODAY!

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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Thinking it Through #9

MEETING TOGETHER

1. When the people were saved and baptised, to what were they added (Acts 2:41)? In your opinion, why was this so?
2. What were the four activities of the early church (Acts 2:42)?
3. On what day did the church meet and what did they always do at their meetings (Acts 20:7)?
4. Believers are collectively called the Church, a word meaning 'those called out'. In what way were they called out (1 Peter 2:9)?
5. The Church was often called by the name of the town. For example; in 1 Thessalonians 1:1, what is the name of the church?
6. Groups of local churches were called by the name of the province where they were located. In Galatians 1:22, what were they called?
7. Who is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)?
8. What are the local Church leaders called (Acts 20:17, Titus 1:5)?
9. What are the responsibilities of the people to the leaders? What are the responsibilities of the leaders (Hebrews 13:17)?
10. What is the warning given in Hebrews 10:25? Why do you think this is necessary?
11. Have you become a part of a local church fellowship since you became a Christian?

Passage for meditation: verses 1-11

Every scene in this first part of today's chapter points to the nearness of the death of Christ, the climax of Mark's Gospel.

The anointing of Jesus with the expensive oil hastened Judas' plan to betray Christ. In contrast to the greed of Judas, Mary of Bethany was moved by a deep love and sincere devotion to her Master. In her search to find a way to express her love, she had no satisfaction until she poured her fragrant treasure onto the head of her Lord. Other women brought similar oils and perfumes a few days later, and were planning to anoint the dead body of Jesus in the tomb, but they were too late - He had risen. Don't wait till you get to heaven to express your love to Christ - do it now!

Jesus took the annual "remembrance" feast of the Israelites, when they remembered how God delivered them from bondage in Egypt, and instituted a new "remembrance" feast for Christians. Christ's death on the cross was the fulfilment of what the Jewish Passover pictured. He is the true Passover Lamb who was slain to free us from the power and penalty of sin. (See John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

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HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

65 MARK - Chapter 14:27-72

Passage for meditation: verses 27-42

Peter was so sure of himself! He would not deny his Lord and Master! He was willing to die for the Lord Jesus! How easy it is for us to say things which sound brave and courageous. Yet how hard it is to put our words into action! Let us remember the lesson that Peter learned the hard way.

Jesus was greatly distressed because He anticipated the “cup” of suffering. There have been many brave men and women who have faced death with unflinching courage. The difference with Christ was the awesome knowledge of the depth of suffering and hell He would endure on the cross for our sins. Betrayed by a friend, deserted by His followers, He was taken by force to stand trial.

The Jewish leaders were not permitted to put anyone to death. They had to find a charge that would induce the Roman governor to sentence a prisoner to death. Bitterness, hatred and jealousy had filled the hearts of the chief priests and the elders. Their eyes were blinded towards justice. They hated Jesus “without a cause”.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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Passage for meditation: verses 16-39

Pilate perceived that the chief priests handed over Jesus because of jealousy - he knew that Christ had done no wrong, certainly nothing worthy of death. But justice gave way to expediency. He set the criminal Barabbas free in order to please the crowd, and had Jesus whipped and then crucified on the cross intended for Barabbas.

Jesus did not drink the wine, as the anaesthetic effect would have removed some of the suffering He had to endure. In the three hours of darkness, the Lord Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for our sins. For three hours He was cut off from His Father. For three hours He literally endured hell as He suffered on the cross. The loud cry (verse 7) was recorded in John's account - "It is finished!" At the end of the 3 hours of darkness He had finished paying the price for our sins. He knew He had finished the work of salvation for the human race, so He gave up His spirit and died.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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67 MARK - Chapter 16

Passage for meditation: verses 1-8

In spite of the many predictions by the Lord Jesus that He would rise again, His followers were startled, and slow to believe when told that He had indeed risen from the dead. Jesus appeared on various occasions, sometimes to large numbers of people. When they saw Him they were fired with a new zeal. They received courage to face persecution and death in order to spread the good news that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for the sins of the world, and rose again, a living Lord and Saviour.

The touchstone of faith is the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen, our sins have not been forgiven, we have no basis for believing the message of the gospel. However, the resurrection of Christ is historical fact and is proof that Jesus has power over death and will also raise up those who trust Him as their Saviour.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

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Passage for meditation: verses 1-11

The Acts of the Apostles is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. It's chief purpose is to explain how the apostles accomplished the mission Christ gave them. Verse 8 is like a summary of the whole book. In Acts we have the story of the infant church growing and spreading, changing people's lives and bringing them into the fellowship of the living Church of Christ. The apostles were told to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit, who would empower and direct them in the vital mission they were called to undertake.

Judas Iscariot had committed suicide, and it is important to see the criteria Peter used in choosing a successor. An apostle must be a witness of the resurrection, and must be one of the group of followers who had been with Jesus during the whole of His public ministry. Matthias was chosen and assumed the very important responsibility along with the other apostles. There are no apostles today as no one would be able to meet the requirements Peter laid out in these verses.

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Passage for meditation: verses 1-24

Here we have an account of the birth of the church. The Holy Spirit had been promised by God, and on this momentous day, the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came down and indwelt every believer. All the millions who have believed since that time, including us today, have also been baptised by the Spirit into the Body of Christ.

God showed that the church was His creation by the outward signs. The gift of speaking in other languages and the loud noise which accompanied the coming of the Spirit showed that this new movement was not dreamed up or engineered by men. God had done it.

In his sermon, Peter demonstrated from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah, and His death was part of God's plan (verse 23). He accused the Jewish nation of crucifying the Messiah, and he then bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Many believed, were baptised and devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread (communion) and to prayer.

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Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 1-16

The very first miracle in Acts is important as it shows the whole purpose of miracles in the early Church. Read again verses 6, 12b, 15 and 16. The apostles were saying that Christ had risen from the dead. How were the people of Israel to know whether or not their message was true? What evidence was there that Christ had risen? They had not seen Him! He had only appeared to the disciples.

The miracles were all done "In the Name of Jesus" - that is, they were still miracles of Jesus Christ identical with those He had performed before He had been crucified. The people could not deny the power and wonder of the miracles, and were forced to the conclusion that Jesus was alive and working through them. God's blessing to the whole world which was promised to Abraham (verse 25) was offered to the Jewish people (verse 26). The blessing was that of turning them from wickedness and blotting out their sins. This blessing was later offered to the rest of the world, but for a short time all the members of the Church were Jews.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

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Thinking it Through #10

CONTROLLED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

1. Who is the Helper promised by the Lord Jesus (John 14:16-17)?
2. When and how does the Helper come into your life (Ephesians 1:13)?
3. Where does the Helper live (Romans 8:11)? Why is this an advantage to us?
4. Is it possible to be a true Christian and not have this help (Rom. 8:11)?
5. What does this make the body of every believer (1Cor. 6:19)? How should this affect our attitude?
6. What are we commanded to do as believers (Ephesians 5:18)?
7. What does alcohol do to a drunken man? What does the Spirit do to a yielded believer in the comparison of Ephesians 5:18?
8. What can a believer do to the Helper (Ephesians 4:30)? Can you suggest some examples of what might cause this in your life?

Passage for meditation: verses 13-31

Peter and John are brought before the same council which condemned the Lord Jesus to death a few weeks earlier. Peter, who once lifted his sword and cut off the ear of one who came to arrest Jesus, now submits to his own arrest. Where once he had denied the Lord Jesus because of fear, he boldly testifies of Christ. The striking courage and calm resilience of both the apostles impressed the council (verse 13). It brought to their memory the One whom they had recently crucified. Peter lays the blame of the crucifixion at their feet (verse 10): "whom YOU crucified ..." and goes on to say that the miracle of the healing of the cripple was in the name of Jesus Christ who is now risen from the dead. He alone is the One through whom we can be saved.

The church members who were gathered for prayer saw the events of the day as the beginning of persecution against God's people. They do not pray for it to stop, but for boldness to continue witnessing in the face of opposition. This is a prayer God delights to answer for any Christian who needs courage to witness for Christ.

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72 ACTS - Chapter 5

Passage for meditation: verses 25-42

The Devil always attacks the Church from two directions. These are illustrated in today's chapter.

First, within the Church he uses greed, selfishness, pride and insincerity of church members to bring dishonour to the Lord's Name. Ananias and Sapphira were openly judged by God because they were the first examples of sin in the Church, and we are left in no doubt about the attitude of Christ towards sins of this nature.

Secondly, from outside of the Church the Devil stirs up strife, opposition and sometimes even persecution. His aim is to halt the progress of the Church. Often he uses the jealousy of religious men (verse 17) who are supposed to be men of God, but are in fact men "against God" (verse 39). Jesus said, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Gamaliel's advice was right; the Church was and is unconquerable, despite the most vehement opposition.

The word "all" in verse 16 is important. In the early Church, as with the Lord Jesus before His death, no one was too sick or handicapped to be healed. No lame, blind or sick person walked away disappointed. When God is at work He never fails!

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Passage for meditation: verses 1-10

Again we see the Devil at work: causing a quarrel in the Church (verse 1) and then opposition to Stephen (verse 12). The church of that time was faced with many problems similar to the church today. People who, before they became Christians, had hostility to one another, were suddenly joined together in the one church. The apostles faced the problem and found a solution. They chose seven helpers who were themselves "Greek-speaking Jews" to attend to the distribution of money for the widows of that minority group.

One of these first "deacons" was Stephen. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and was a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. The elders and teachers of the law could not refute his arguments so they seized him and put him on trial. To be filled with the Holy Spirit means to be controlled by Him. It means His desires become your desires, His will becomes your will, His grace and power becomes your grace and power. The opposition against Stephen who was filled with the Spirit, became outright opposition against God.

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74 ACTS - Chapter 7

Passage for meditation: verses 51-60

One of the strongest arguments against Christianity at that time was the accusation that, if Jesus really was the Messiah, surely He would not have been rejected and crucified by His own people!

But, said Stephen, Israel, as a nation, had constantly resisted God's messengers. Joseph was rejected by his brothers (verse 9) and Moses was not recognised either (verse 35). Moreover, Moses, even after he was recognised as God's prophet, was not obeyed (verse 39), but the children of Israel rebelled and resisted his authority. Stephen asked in verse 52, "Was there EVER a prophet your fathers did not persecute?" They had always been a stubborn people, always resisting the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak God's message. The Jews at the time of Christ were only living up to their name when they murdered the Messiah.

Stephen's pointed condemnation was too much for the members of the religious council. They rushed at him like a pack of mad dogs and stoned him to death. The contrast between their hatred and Stephen's calm prayer for their forgiveness is striking.

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Passage for meditation: verses 1-25

The Devil stirs up persecution, but instead of putting out the fire, he scatters the flame far and wide. God will always overrule all that the Devil tries to do to hinder His work. He uses the opposition for His own ends. Note how the ones who were scattered did not quietly slip into a town or province and "hide their light under a bushel". They spread the message of Christ to all they met. Until this time only Jewish people had become members of the Church, but with the Samaritan's believing (they were a mixed race of Jew and Gentile), the apostles had to lay hands formally on them so they could enter into the blessings of the Christian life. They did this so that there could be no doubt that it was the will of the Lord to include the Samaritans in His church (1:8).

Simon Magus "believed and was baptised. And he followed Philip everywhere ..." yet subsequently he clearly showed that his faith was not genuine. Tradition has it that he later became a bitter enemy of the Church. There will always be counterfeit Christians like Simon Magus in the outward visible Church.

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76 ACTS - Chapter 9

Passage for meditation: verses 1-22

One of the Jewish religious leaders, probably a member of the same council before which Stephen and others had been brought, was Saul of Tarsus. So zealous was he for the tradition of his nation that he actively sought out Christians who were a threat to their religion and persecuted them. He thought his actions were pleasing God.

He was on the road to Damascus when he was suddenly confronted by Jesus Christ who said: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" We understand from this that any persecution of the church, is not merely against Christians, but against Jesus Christ Himself.

Immediately after his conversion, Paul gave powerful and convincing arguments that Jesus is the Son of God. No doubt he had been fighting the truth and refusing to acknowledge the proofs he was confronted with. Finally he was brought face to face with the risen Lord Jesus Christ. When people oppose Christians they can be resisting the work of the Holy Spirit, and may be close to salvation, so keep on praying and witnessing!

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Passage for meditation: verses 34-48

Chapter 10 marks such an important step in the life of the Church that the story is repeated in chapter 11, where Peter gives an account to the church leaders in Jerusalem of what had happened. The Jewish nation had become very exclusive. The thought of Gentiles entering the Church, especially without being circumcised, was very hard for some to accept. God had to work in a very clear and unmistakable way to show that He accepted Gentiles on the same basis as Jews.

Peter's vision prepared his mind to go to them and preach the good news, but he did not expect what happened (verse 45). The Lord gave to the Gentiles the same gift of the Holy Spirit He had given the Jewish believers. They spoke in foreign languages, just as the Jews had done on the day of Pentecost (chapter 2). It is clear from Peter's words in 11:15, ("as He had come on us **at the beginning**"), that speaking in an unknown language was not the usual occurrence when someone first received Christ. It occurred only on those strategic occasions when God wanted to leave no doubts that He was at work. It was an unmistakable sign that God's gift of the Holy Spirit had been given.

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Thinking it Through #11

SHARING YOUR FAITH WITH OTHERS

The following questions and verses are designed to help you work through the gospel with someone in an orderly way.

THE PROBLEM:

Never show others how to get right with God until you have first confirmed that they know why they need to be saved.

1. Who is a sinner and how is sin defined (Rom. 3:23; Isaiah 53:6)?
2. What is the penalty of sin (Romans 6:23)?
3. Spiritual or second death separates the soul from God (Revelation 20:11-15).

In verse 13, what is in the books?

What is the Book of Life?

What is the second death?

THE REMEDY:

1. Go through 1 Peter 2:24 carefully.

Who is the sin-bearer?

Whose sins were borne?

What two effects are mentioned?

2. Write out the phrases from Isaiah 53:4-5 which parallel the above answers.

Who struck Jesus for our sins?

In what way is the truth of Ephesians 2:8-9 related to the above facts?

THE REQUIREMENT:

Only when you have verified a person's understanding of the problem and the remedy should you seek an active response.

1. What accompanies faith in Jesus Christ? (Acts 20:21).
2. What must I do with Jesus Christ? (John 1:2).
3. Who is Jesus Christ? (John 1:1,14).
4. What is the promise of John 5:24 and 1 John 5:12?

Passage for meditation: verses 1-17

The first apostle to be martyred was James. King Herod was the new instrument of the Devil to try to stop the advance of the Church. James, and John his brother, had previously asked the Lord Jesus if they could have seats of honour next to Him when He sits in glory. Jesus at that time replied, "Can you drink the cup I drink?", speaking of His death. They answered "We can," to which the Lord said, "You will..." (Mark 10:35-40). James was the first of the apostles to die, and John was the last.

Herod threw Peter into prison intending to kill him also. God intervened, however, and an angel was sent to free him. God sometimes acts in a miraculous way to answer prayer. People have been healed, some have escaped danger or been set free from prison by the hand of God. However, like James, some have not seen the Lord come and deliver them. God is sovereign, and prayer is not twisting His arm to do our will, but seeking to pray in the will of God, and submitting to Christ as the Sovereign Lord who knows what is best.

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79 ACTS - Chapter 13

Passage for meditation: verses 1-15

(Turn to the maps in the back of your Bible and follow the journeys of Paul each day).

Paul and Barnabas, chosen and sent by the Holy Spirit, left their church at Antioch and undertook a missionary journey to Cyprus (the home of Barnabas) and then on to Pisidia and Galatia. The first few verses show us clearly how the church today should send out missionaries. The Holy Spirit takes the initiative. All the church, both leaders and members, recognise the will of the Lord and, after much prayer and serious consideration, send them out to spread the gospel and start new churches. We need to recapture this vision today, and become more missionary minded.

The response to the apostles' preaching was good, but once again the Devil was at work to oppose them. At Antioch in Pisidia, the Jewish Teachers of the Law were jealous of Paul's great success, and stirred up the leading men and women in the city. It has been said, "The greatest hindrance to the mission of Christ is the selfishness of men." Nevertheless, many believed and experienced the fullness and joy of the Spirit of God.

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Passage for meditation: verses 19-28

Paul and Barnabas made quite an impact on the cities they visited. Can you imagine a whole community divided just because two men arrived and started preaching the good news of God's love and forgiveness! Once again the enemy of the gospel was hard at work.

The people of Lystra were superstitious and extremely fickle. Not long after worshipping Paul and Barnabas as gods who had come down to them, they turned on Paul and stoned him.

In every city the ones who believed were formed into churches with elders appointed to lead, teach and care for the members. The New Testament church was not led by individuals. A group of elders in each local church were given the responsibility of teaching and shepherding their congregation. Some were gifted pastors and teachers while others were evangelists.

Paul and Barnabas encouraged the new Christians to continue in the faith and to remain true to what they had been taught. However, years later Paul wrote to these same believers because many had not remained true. They had been influenced by false teachers (Read Galatians 1:6-9; 3:1).

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81 ACTS - Chapter 15

Passage for meditation: verses 1-21

Here we have a record of the first general "council" of the church. A number of the strict Pharisees who had become Christians had begun to teach that the Gentiles (non-Jews) who became Christians had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. In short, they were saying that a person must become a Jew outwardly before he could be accepted as truly Christian.

Peter stood up and brought to their remembrance the events of Acts, chapters 10 & 11. There was no doubt that God had saved the Gentiles and given the gift of the Holy Spirit without any such conditions. He concludes that the old law was a burden too heavy for the people of Israel to bear and was more so for the Gentiles who knew nothing of the discipline of law-keeping. No, he says in verse 11, "We believe it is through the **grace** of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

The new wine of the Church could not be contained within the old wineskins of the Jewish religion. God accepts Jews and Gentiles on the same ground - faith in Jesus Christ.

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Passage for meditation: verses 6-15

Paul and Silas set out on the second missionary journey. At first they visited the Galatian churches which had been commenced on the first journey. Paul took a young man called Timothy with them to help in the work of church planting. If you read the letters of Paul to Timothy in the New Testament you will gain insight into the relationship which grew between Paul and this young man.

In verses 6-10 the Spirit of God guides the small group to cross the sea to Europe. A characteristic of the early church was that the Spirit of God was clearly in control. Someone has even suggested that this book could be re-named "Acts of the Holy Spirit".

There is a transition in verse 10 from "they" to "we". Luke was the author, and whenever he wrote "we", it was because he was accompanying Paul and the others at that time.

Both Lydia and the jailer were saved and baptised **with their households**. This does not relate solely to their families. Both were wealthy people who had servants and maids.

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83 ACTS - Chapter 17

Passage for meditation: verses 16-34

News of Paul and his team had spread throughout the empire. The Jews of Thessalonica who were opposed to the gospel complained: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here". It is interesting to note the different responses to the gospel message recorded in this chapter.

Many Thessalonians believed despite the strong opposition. The Jews at Berea showed interest and eagerly examined the Old Testament Scriptures to see if Paul's message was true. Many of them, therefore, believed. In Athens, the response was different again (verses 32-34). Some mocked, others put off making a decision, and a few believed.

If only more people were like the Jews at Berea, then the gospel would penetrate much further. A receptive heart and an earnest desire to search out and find the truth will always be rewarded by God (John 7:17; Hebrews 11:6).

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Passage for meditation: verses 18-28

During the 18 months that Paul spent in Corinth, many believed and were baptised. The vision Paul had applies to our own situation also. God has made us witnesses for Him and put us in our neighbourhood, home, school or work place, so that we will tell others about Christ. "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent," said the Lord. There are many people with whom you will rub shoulders, whom God knows will be receptive to the gospel. You don't know who they are, but you are responsible for telling them the way of salvation.

Among the many admirable qualities of Apollos which are listed at the end of the chapter, one is worthy of special note. He was a humble man who was willing to be corrected when shown to be wrong (verse 26). Some people find this very hard to do. Knowledge often makes a person proud, but honesty and humility please God. Remember this as your own knowledge grows.

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Thinking it Through #12

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

1. What is a false statement that some people may believe to be true (1 John 1:8,10)?
2. What does it mean to 'walk in the light' (1 John 1:7)? Does it mean to be perfect? If so, how? If not, what does it mean?
3. What may indicate that a person who thinks they are a Christian is not born again (Note the continuous tense of the verb: "continue to..." - 1 John 3:9)?
4. What is God looking for in a person who confesses to God (Proverbs 28:13)?
5. In 1 John 1:9, what is the Christian's responsibility, and what is God's promise?
6. The word confess includes the meaning "to agree with". How does this understanding of the word help us know what God expects of us when we confess our sin to Him.
7. What is the basis for God's forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7; Revelation 1:5b; Hebrews 9:22b)?
8. What will be true of a person who is truly a child of God (2 Timothy 2:19b)?
9. What is the basic teaching of 2 Corinthians 6:14-17? What is the danger of ignoring this command?

Passage for meditation: verses 1-20

Paul now enters one of the areas where the Spirit of God had previously forbidden him to go (16:6). In Ephesus he met some disciples who were not true Christians. They had been followers of John the Baptist before he was executed, but had never put their faith in Jesus Christ. They knew about Christ but because they had not trusted Christ as Saviour, they had not received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Like many today, they identified themselves with the Christian church but had never been born again. When they believed and were baptised, they received the Holy Spirit. The outward sign of speaking other languages showed everyone that they had received the Spirit of God.

After two years of effective work in Ephesus, Paul determined to visit the churches in Europe which he had planted on his previous trip. He then intended to return to Jerusalem before going to Rome. In his letter to the Romans, his desire is mentioned a couple of times. Read Romans 1:11-15 and 15:19-23. He was a pioneer missionary and, with his work in one region complete, he sought new areas to work in.

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Passage for meditation: verses 17-31

Paul and his band of helpers spent a week at Troas where a very significant event is recorded. In verse 7 we see that the church at Troas was in the habit of meeting on a weekly basis to have communion. The service was held on the first day of the week. The last day of each week was the Sabbath which would end at sunset on what we call "Saturday". The first day of the week, then, was either Saturday night or more probably Sunday. The significance is that the church was not following the old Jewish law of keeping the Sabbath. Sunday is the day when our Lord rose again and, therefore, it is much more suited as a special day of worship and service. As Christians we should be eager to keep Sunday as the "Lord's day," a day which is set aside for the Lord.

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Passage for meditation: verses 7-26

Rumours had spread to Jerusalem, accusing Paul of teaching Jewish people who lived in the region he had visited to forsake the teachings of Moses. With many keen Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, it was necessary that Paul demonstrate that he had a genuine respect for the law of Moses. He did this by observing one of the old customs.

Pilgrims from Ephesus saw Paul at the temple and stirred up the people with lies and exaggerations. All Jerusalem, a city of about 2 million people, was aroused (verse 30) and Paul very nearly lost his life. The people shouted "away with him" (verse 36), the same words they had used when they called for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ a number of years earlier.

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Passage for meditation: verses 17-30

The pride and bigotry of the people was so strong that it was unthinkable for them to believe that God would accept the Gentiles equally with the Jews. They regarded themselves as God's chosen people, but they had forgotten the promise of God to Abraham, "and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). When God established Israel as a nation, Moses said to the people: "The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people" (Deut. 7:6). It was only by God's sovereign grace and will that the Israelites existed as a nation.

When Paul mentioned the word Gentile in connection with his commission by God, the proud hearts of the people were stirred up. They cried out for his blood. Paul, a Roman citizen by birth, narrowly escaped being "flogged and questioned" (verse 24). This was the same whipping which Christ received from Pilate, where a prisoner was flogged until he confessed any crime, or until the soldier grew too tired to continue.

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Passage for meditation: verses 19-32

(You may wish to read chapters 23-25 at your own leisure)

Paul had appealed to Caesar to decide his case after two years of imprisonment. Festus, who became governor of the province when Felix was recalled to Rome in A.D. 59, was responsible to send Paul to Nero, the emperor, with a report of the charges brought against him. Festus was not sure what to write because, in his opinion, Paul had not committed any serious crime. When King Agrippa (son of the Herod of Acts 12:1) visited the district, Festus sought his advice, as Agrippa had a good knowledge of Jewish beliefs and customs. Agrippa would be able to help him decide what to write in the report. Festus calls Paul a madman and King Agrippa, not wishing to lose face with his colleague, laughs it off. Proverbs 29:25 says: "Fear of man will prove to be a snare".

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Passage for meditation: verses 13-44

Luke and Aristarchus, close companions of Paul, joined the apostle on his eventful journey to Rome.

Paul was constantly in touch with God. This gave him courage and faith in life's difficult circumstances where other men gave up hope. Our lives may be completely different from Paul's, but we can also know strength and security Paul experienced if we walk with God as he did, and trust His Word completely. Like Paul, we can help others to find hope by sharing our faith in the Lord. We can say with him: "keep up your courage ... for I have faith in God that it will happen just as He told me". Christians need never 'go it alone' through life's storms. Our Saviour is with us in the boat. "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

A Christian's courage and stability in the face of disaster can speak to many who otherwise have no time for Jesus Christ. Use the storms of your life as God-sent platforms from which you can share proclaim the message of life and peace to those around you.

WHAT TRUTH HAVE I LEARNED TODAY?

Write down truths you learn about God, Jesus Christ, The Holy Spirit, the church, Christian living, future events, the evil one etc...

WHAT LESSON OR CHALLENGE CONFRONTS ME?

Write down any command to obey, example to follow, sin to forsake, or lesson to heed.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO MY LIFE IN A PRACTICAL WAY?

Write down what changes you should make in your life as a result of what you have read.

Passage for meditation: verses 11-31

Rome at last! Paul was held in custody for a time, but was given the freedom of a normal house to live in. This enabled him to serve the Lord by teaching and encouraging the Christians who came to him, sharing the gospel without the usual opposition. He also wrote letters to churches that needed counsel or help. He was later set free and returned to visit many of the churches he had established before he was finally imprisoned and executed in Rome about A.D. 67. There is evidence to suggest he also pioneered gospel work in Spain during the interval of freedom.

The spread of the gospel message from the small beginnings in Jerusalem to the farthest boundaries of the Roman empire had followed the directive of Christ in chapter 1:8. "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We are continuing to follow that same directive today. The torch has been passed on to us, and we must hold it and run boldly for our Lord.

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92 2 PETER - Chapter 1

Simon Peter, along with the other apostles, had done all he could to strengthen and equip the saints to continue after he had departed. He is confident that the churches would not die out as some revolutionary cause might do, because of three important reasons:

1. Verses 3-15. God's provision of all things needed by even the weakest Christian to grow strong and mature: the power of the indwelling Spirit (verse 3) and their knowledge of the truth (verse 12). The combination of these two things would cause God's people to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (3:18).

2. Verses 16-18. The confidence of basing the Christian faith on historical events which were accurately witnessed and recorded for us in the Bible.

To build faith upon myth would be disastrous in the scientific world of the 20th Century.

3. Verses 19-21. The hope that is inspired in a Christian's heart because of the many prophecies of Scripture - especially our hope in the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ and His eventual rule in the world.

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Thinking it Through #13

1. Discuss with your friend or counsellor any of the following subjects that may still be a problem to you:-

- a. Doubt
- b. Temptation
- c. Guilty conscience
- d. Baptism
- e. Witnessing
- f. Hypocrisy in other Christians
- g. Discipleship

2. Talk about your plans for future Bible devotions. Ask the counsellor to show you samples of: Scripture Union Notes, "Every Day With Jesus" and similar aids to daily devotions.

3. Discuss how best you can develop any gifts or talents you may have (or think you have).

4. Ask the counsellor or friend how you can go about studying the Bible. Ask for samples of Emmaus Bible Correspondence Courses, Navigator Courses and similar material.

5. Write down in your own words what your top 3 goals will be for the next year.

1.

2.

3.

CUT OUT AND MEMORISE ONE VERSE PER WEEK

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God"

John 1:12

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast"

Ephesians 2:8-9

"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures"

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

"I write these things to you who believe in the Name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life"

1 John 5:13

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"

1 John 1:9

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your Word."

"I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You"

Psalms 119:9,11

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you"

Hebrews 13:5

"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" Matthew 7:7-8

"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose" Romans 8:28

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him" James 1:12

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" Galatians 5:22-23

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" Matthew 7:1-2

"Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you" 1 Peter 5:7

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body"

1 Cor. 6:19-20