

Only JESUS

January 2017



Who is Jesus ? In infancy he startled a king; in boyhood he puzzled the doctors; in manhood he ruled the course of nature. He walked upon the billows, hushed the sea to sleep, and healed the multitudes without medicine.

He never wrote a book, yet not all the libraries of the world could hold the books written about him. He never wrote a song, but he has furnished the theme of more songs than all songwriters combined. He never marshalled an army, drafted a soldier or fired a gun yet no leader ever made so many volunteers. He is the star of astronomy, the rock of geology, and the lion and the lamb of zoology. Great men have come and gone, yet he lives on. Herod could not kill him, Satan could not seduce him, death could not destroy him and grave could not hold him. That's my Jesus !!!!

January 1, Sunday 2017

READ : JOHN 1:1-14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

REFLECT : We begin our new year with the simple staggering truth found in the above mentioned scripture: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. Without doubt this one is the most amazing statements made in Scripture. William Barclay, the Bible commentator said, " It might well be held that this is the greatest verse in the New Testament.

‘The Word became flesh’ phrase separates Christianity from every other religion on earth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not merely an exhortation(telling us to do something) but an exhibition(showing us what God has done for us)

Let this truth astonish us today : The one who is infinite became finite. God became man and dwelt with us. Jesus is the link between heaven and earth(like the vision that Jacob saw in Genesis 28:12 of a stairway resting on earth and its top reaching to heaven)

ACT: Share with someone about Jesus coming to earth

January 2, Monday

READ: MATTHEW 9:14-17

14 Then John’s disciples came and asked him, “How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?”

15 Jesus answered, “How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

16 “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

REFLECT: One of the amazing facts we find when we read the New Testament is the way in which language had to bear a whole new weight of meaning with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. When Paul says, “ we are conquerors through Him who loved us” in Romans 8:37 and then adds we are more than conquerors, is it an exaggerated statement. No - it’s a fact.

The new wine of God's amazing salvation had to be put into new wineskins of ministry and facts. Facts that are new to us. To be a conqueror is one thing; to be more than a conqueror is another. The word 'more' allows us to see the unlimited nature of our resources and growth that lies before us. In Christ we do more than survive. We thrive (flourish).

ACT: Let us fast today to understand the unlimited power of Jesus and what we can do in and for Him.

January 3, Tuesday

READ : 1 JOHN 1:8-10

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

REFLECT: Being 'more than a conqueror' does not guarantee freedom from making mistakes or sins. The key words are "if we confess our sins" - we receive forgiveness and get purified. Though we must be totally committed to living for God, we must not forget there's a provision for us when we sin. We may lose a fight with Satan but not lose the battle. We may even lose a battle but not lose the war.

There's a difference between a sheep and a pig when they fall into a mud hole. The sheep will bleat and bleat till it's pulled out. But when the pig falls into the mud hole, he loves it and wallows in it forever. When we fall into sin, do we sink deeper into the mud by not confessing or are we crying out to the shepherd.

ACT: Find a friend to confess any darkness (sins) that may have come over you recently so that Jesus can bring you back to light.

January 4, Wednesday

READ: 1 JOHN 5:1-5

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

REFLECT: Many of us allow Christ to function in certain areas of our lives while other areas are withheld. This introduces the principle of duality in our lives that causes inner division.

Between 1921-1937 the British devised a system of government whereby power was shared between the British and the Indians. That kind of government is called a 'diarchy'. The system failed and any kind of spiritual diarchy will fail too. The answer is in verse 5 if we believe in Jesus as the son of God we will overcome the world. We can't serve two masters. No one can be truly happy when there's an inner division. There must be unity within or else we will spiritually collapse. If we do not allow Christ to enter the core of our being and take control of our lives then we live in a state of tension.

We are naturally self-centred and we can think we are doing things for Christ's glory, when, in reality are doing it for our own glory.

ACT: Recommit yourself to making Jesus the Lord of your life. Pray and make Jesus king and get rid of all half-gods from your heart.

January 5, Thursday

READ: ROMANS 7:7-25

7 What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.”[a] **8** But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. **9** Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. **10** I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. **11** For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. **12** So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

13 Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognised as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

14 We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. **15** I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. **16** And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. **17** As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. **18** For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature.[b] For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. **19** For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. **20** Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. **22** For in my inner being I delight in God’s

law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

REFLECT: Why do we resist surrendering every area of our lives to Jesus ? It's because we like things to be under our control. The sin that Adam and Eve committed in Eden was a declaration of independence.

We all like to be in control of our lives and when Jesus stands before us asking for complete control of our lives , a feeling of total helplessness arises within us. Our nature dislikes this feeling and so we arrive at some kind of compromise. A life of true peace involves total surrender to Jesus, where we stop living a self-centred life and start living a Christ-centred one. We are fools if we believe He isn't enough.

ACT: Decide to give up something for Jesus today

January 6, Friday

READ: GENESIS 3:1-19

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. **7** Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. **9** But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

11 And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

12 The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust

all the days of your life. **15** And I will put enmity

between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

16 To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you.”

17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

REFLECT: All of us have our fears. The roots of our fear is an inner division. The remedy of our fear lies in a unified self- a self made whole by Christ. Perfect love drives out fear and imperfect love draws fear into our heart.

Before Adam sinned, he was a whole person who enjoyed the full measure of God’s love. By disobeying, he put up a barrier to that love and the first thing that swept into his life was fear. Notice his words: ‘I was afraid’. When love flows in fear flows out; when fear flows in, love flows out.

The way to get rid of fear, we need love. It narrows love down to one man - Jesus. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says ‘For Christ’s love compels us’ meaning ‘the love of Christ narrows us’. We must become single-minded, with one consuming passion that eats up the lesser passions of life. That does not mean we will have no love for others, but our love for others become secondary to our love for Christ. We will love others better when we love Him better.

ACT: Follow-up on five people and remind them to come to church.

January 7, Saturday

READ: MATTHEW 17:1-13

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

4 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

9 As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

10 The disciples asked him, “Why then do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?”

11 Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. 12 But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” 13 Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.

REFLECT: We see here the transfiguration of Jesus. The heart of Peter was divided in its loyalty - wanting to keep Moses representing the law, Elijah representing the prophets and Jesus representing the new revelation. He wanted to put them all in the same level. In Verse 4 he says I will put up three shelters, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.

Peter lacked the full understanding of Jesus's supremacy. As Peter was uttering these words, a cloud overshadowed them and God's voice announces, " This is my son, whom I love..... listen to him !" God was not letting them get away thinking Jesus was at the same level as Moses and Elijah.

Their response: fell face down to the ground, terrified. The fear arose because they heard the voice of God and didn't understand the fullness of Jesus's deity.

ACT: Do something that Jesus would do(preach, visit the sick, encourage someone , share the gospel) LISTEN TO HIM

January 8, Sunday

READ: COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your[a] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. [b] 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

REFLECT: We have to understand what amazing power we possess because of Christ. When our circumstances and surroundings are favourable, and life is going according to plan, we can carry on. But life is not always like that. We face disappointments, challenges and we are let down. And that is when we are tested to the very core of our being.

There are three types of Christians: rowing boat type, sail boat type and the engine driven type. The rowing boat type looks like a Christian but, under test, prefers to rely on his power and starts rowing. The sail boat type depends on the winds. If the wind is there he moves else he stays. Direction of the wind also determines his direction. The engine driven type will move whether the wind is favourable or not. They are not self-dependant like the first, or circumstance-dependant like the second but Christ-dependant.

What type of a Christian are you ?

ACT: Share a scripture with someone to teach them to be Christ - dependant.

January 9, Monday

READ: MATTHEW 3:1-17

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3 This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

**“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.’”**

4 John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. 5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. 6 Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. 9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 10 The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 “I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” 13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. 14 But John tried to

deter him, saying, “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?”

15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

REFLECT: Very often we try too hard to live a good life. It seems like we are leading a strained Christian life. When we live like that it’s not very inviting to others who want to follow Christ.

One of the processes that take place while making tin sheets is to subject them to intense heat. After this process the molecules are so harmonised that, when the tin plates are bent, they would not break. Our text tells us today that Christ would baptise not with water, but with fire.

Isn’t that what we need? A fiery baptism that will purify and melt us and, in a sense, set the molecules of our souls in right relation to each other so that when the pressures come upon us, we won’t break. When we have Christ in our hearts, all the inner strain is taken away and we are left with only peace.

ACT: Share your faith with someone so that they can experience the peace of Christ

January 10, Tuesday

READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-58

35 But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?” 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. 37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. 38 But God gives it a body as he has deter-

mined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. 39 Not all flesh is the same: People have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. 40 There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendour of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendour of the earthly bodies is another. 41 The sun has one kind of splendour, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendour.

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 43 it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 45 So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. 46 The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. 48 As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

50 I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true:

“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”⁵⁵ “Where, O death, is your victory?”

Where, O death, is your sting?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

REFLECT: If there is a formula for victorious living in one sentence it would be: To be a conqueror in Christ we must first be conquered by Christ. To be victorious we have to allow our will, emotion and mind to be captured by Jesus. We are like wild, untamed horses and should be ready to hand over the reins of our lives to Jesus.

Among some African tribes there is a belief that when one man conquers another, the strength of the one conquered passes into the conqueror. I don't believe in that concept but something like that happens to us spiritually. By allowing Jesus to conquer us his power comes into us making us stronger and to enable us to fight the next battle. Secondly, we are able to pass the victory on to others.

ACT: Share about your victory over some weakness with someone and encourage them to trust Jesus.

January 11, Wednesday

READ: JOHN 14:1-14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

REFLECT: Even though words are a powerful medium of communication, we cannot express fully what God is like. We can’t understand God’s wisdom, his power, his humility etc. But God wants us to understand him. His desire for us to understand him is so great that he sent ‘A life’, someone divine, so that we could get a better understanding of God at a deeper level.

Two thousand years ago a life came down to us from heaven and lived among us. We then could understand what

love is when people saw him saying ‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23:34). Now when we reflect on the word ‘God’ we need not rely on our imagination. The nature of God has been uncovered in human terms through Jesus. As Jesus reveals in v9 ‘anyone who has seen me has seen the Father’. The way to God is ‘only Jesus’.

ACT: Thank God for Jesus and the special place he has for all the faithful ones in heaven

January 12, Thursday

READ: LUKE 1:67-80

67 His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

**68 “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.**

**69 He has raised up a horn[a] of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David**

70 (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

**71 salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—**

**72 to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,**

73 the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

**74 to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear**

75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

**76 And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,**

**77 to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,**

**78 because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
79 to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”**

80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit; and he lived in the wilderness until he appeared publicly to Israel.

REFLECT: Verse 68 says Jesus came to redeem his people. In John 1:14 it says Jesus made a dwelling among us. The thought behind these words are someone tabernacling with us or pitching a tent in our midst.

Jesus could have passed us in a cloud and revealed himself and thrown a line to fish those he wanted. But he chose to be born on earth, amidst poverty, temptations, problems, disappointments. Jesus spent 33 years on this earth, from manger to the grave. It was not long by earthly standards, but life depends not on the hours you put in but what you put into the hours.

He revealed the character of God in the same sort of surroundings where your character and mine is developed. The only difference between us and him is that he displayed total dependence on God at all times. He lived among us and showed us how to live - by living.

ACT: Get involved in a bible study with someone to share with them about Jesus and what he has done for us.

January 13, Friday

READ: HEBREWS 4:1-16

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to

them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.
3 Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

“So I declared on oath in my anger,
‘They shall never enter my rest.’”

And yet his works have been finished since the creation of the world. 4 For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: “On the seventh day God rested from all his works.” 5 And again in the passage above he says, “They shall never enter my rest.”

6 Therefore since it still remains for some to enter that rest, and since those who formerly had the good news proclaimed to them did not go in because of their disobedience, 7 God again set a certain day, calling it “Today.” This he did when a long time later he spoke through David, as in the passage already quoted:

“Today, if you hear his voice,
do not harden your hearts.”

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the

faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

REFLECT: Jesus was tempted by the devil in Matthew 4. The first temptation was to not live *apart* from us(eat as we eat). The second was to live *above* us(throw yourself down and angels will carry you to safety). The third was to live *as* we live(worship him, adopt his ways and gain the kingdoms of the world)

Jesus rejected all the temptations and challenged it by using scriptures. A soldier during the war saw a little girl who was starving and offered her a bite of his sandwich. ‘No’, she said, ‘it might be poisoned.’ The soldier said, ‘I’ll take a bite, then you take a bite.’ She agreed. The bible says in Hebrews 2:9 that Jesus tasted death for every one of us. But it’s also true that he tasted life for every one of us.

Truly Jesus tasted life for every one of us. He asks us to do nothing that He has not done. He was tempted in every way as we are - yet without sin.

ACT: Have a time of prayer with someone where you talk about your temptations and your plans to overcome it.

January 14, Saturday

READ: HEBREWS 12:14-29

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal

sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

25 See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our “God is a consuming fire.”

REFLECT: A good question to ask ourselves is - what are the anchors in my life ? What are some deep convictions and disci-

plines that hold me firm ? If we belong to an unshakeable kingdom then why do we get shaken so easily ? All around us we see men and women building their lives on power, pride and position but these are shakeable.

Throughout time we have seen governments and empires built on earthly ideologies and values which they thought would last for thousands of years. But where are these empires now ? Are we building our lives on the rock of Godly convictions or on the sands of worldly ideas which will crash ?

ACT: Make a list of things that we believe in and find scriptures to support them.

January 15, Sunday

READ: 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-28

12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil.

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

25 Brothers and sisters, pray for us. 26 Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

REFLECT: An area that can make us all feel guilty is when we are asked about our prayer life. We all feel bad about our inconsistencies in our quiet times. We sink lower when we hear Paul saying in verse 17 'pray continually'.

It's important that we develop our own prayer life.

Of course we can learn from others too. But the joy of connecting with our maker is and should be unique to each individual. When we were new in our faith we were taught how to pray in the ACTS format? But as we mature in our faith, we should develop our own prayer life that is personal and satisfying. The gospel of Mark records Jesus getting up early when it was still dark and going to a solitary place to pray. Luke says 'Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray'.

We sometimes read a book and get inspired by someone's prayer life. But we feel guilty because we can't match up to their standards. Remember no one can pray your prayers better than you.

ACT: Make a plan of how you want to improve your prayer life. Maybe more time, a prayer list, praise God more etc.

January 16, Monday

READ: EXODUS 33:11-23

11 The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

12 Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have

found favour with me.’ 13 If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people.”

14 The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

15 Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16 How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

17 And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

18 Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”

19 And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.”

21 Then the Lord said, “There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. 22 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

REFLECT: Prayer is a conversation with God. Conversation is an informal exchange of ideas by spoken words. If prayer is a conversation then it involves both talking and listening. Our progress in prayer can be marked by increasing our desire to hear God than speak ourselves.

The scripture is such a beautiful picture of a divine-human conversation where we are told that God spoke to Moses

‘ as a man speaks to his friend’. When we talk to God we need to express ourselves in the same language we use when we are talking to our closest friends. Be bold, be honest and be real. Lets also remember to revere him. And God, like all good fathers ,delights in the natural and uninhibited approach of His children.

ACT: Enjoy a conversation with God today !

January 17, Tuesday

READ:

Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent the people in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 And no one takes this honour on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,

**“You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.”**

6 And he says in another place,

**“You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.”**

7 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was

designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek.

11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

REFLECT: Verse 7 talks about Jesus offering prayers and petitions. There are several reasons for why we need to present our petitions to God.

- 1) God's purposes are accomplished through our prayers
- 2) God has asked us to make requests, we obey and benefit
- 3) It keeps us dependent on God and helps us realise who's in charge

God always answers all our prayers. His answer is, 'Yes', 'No', 'Wait' or 'I'll give you something better'.

If the request isn't right He answers 'No'

If the timing isn't right His answer is 'Slow'

If you aren't ready yet His answer is 'Grow'

When everything is ready and right His answer is 'Go'

ACT: Thank God for his perfect timing

January 18, Wednesday

READ: JOHN 14:1-14

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will

come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going.”

5 Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

6 Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

9 Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. 12 Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. 13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

REFLECT: Why do we end our prayers with the words, ‘ In Jesus’ name’. By praying in Jesus’ name , we mean praying in harmony with His will.Are we certain that when we ask in the saviour’s name we are in line with Jesus’s course of action. Don’t we ask for things that we are certain God may not want us to have ? At such times its wise to admit that uncertainty and say, as Jesus did: ‘ yet not my will, but yours be done’(Luke 22:42)

C.S.Lewis - Prayer is request. The essence of request, as distinct from compulsion, is that it may or may not be granted. And if an infinitely wise being listens to the requests of finite and foolish creatures, of course He will sometimes grant and sometimes refuse them.

ACT: Pray that our prayers will be in accordance to His will

January 19, Thursday

READ: HEBREWS 4:12-16

12 For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

REFLECT: The words that God has spoken through the biblical authors are not dead. His words are alive and active and sharper than a double-edged sword. Reading the bible and prayer completes the conversation with God.

John Stott - 'If we are cut off during a telephone conversation we do not jump to the conclusion that the person on the other end has died.' We need to adopt the attitude of Samuel, who said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening' (1 Samuel 3:10)

We can either read the Bible first and then pray or pray first and then read the Word. The order is not important. What's important is to complete both speaking and listening to Him. - Sometimes we confuse reading the Bible with listening to God. We should not only read scripture but listen to it too. We should turn our eyes into ears. Jesus said in John 10:27 - ' My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me'.

ACT: Decide to read the Bible daily and consistently and practise what you read

January 20, Friday

READ: MATTHEW 19:16-30

16 Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, 19 honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'" 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said.

"What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" 26 Jesus looked at

them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”²⁷ Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

28 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

REFLECT: In the passage above we see Jesus giving three challenges to a young man who wanted eternal life: ‘Go, sell.... and give’. Today, maybe Jesus has similar challenges for us.

Go - be willing to identify the things that are preventing us from being the man/woman God wants us to be. What’s stopping you from being spiritual ? Where is God calling you and you are not heeding that call ?

Sell - get rid of whatever is preventing Jesus from being the Lord of your life. Eg throwing out books/magazines or websites or social media that is drawing you away from God. Make time to invest in His word, prayer, investing time with disciples and non-disciples.

Give - change the orientation of your life so that you no longer are at the centre. God designed us to be other-centred not self-centred. You will function best when you are more concerned about others than you are about yourself.

Sometimes we get discouraged that we can’t change the world and let go of the smaller things that are before us. ‘You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things’ (Matthew 25:21)

ACT: Go and do something that you have been wanting to do but not done. Stop doing something that you have been wanting to stop but not stopped.

January 21, Saturday

READ: JOB 1:6-22

6 One day the angels [a] came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan [b] also came with them. **7** The Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the Lord, “From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it.” **8** Then the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”

9 “Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. **10** “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. **11** But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” **12** The Lord said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.”

Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

13 One day when Job’s sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, **14** a messenger came to Job and said, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, **15** and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!” **16** While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

17 While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept

down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”¹⁸ While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house, ¹⁹ when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

²⁰ At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship ²¹ and said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”

²² In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

REFLECT: Believing in God is not easy and maintaining that belief is sometimes hard. It’s easy to believe when life is good but what happens when tragedy strikes. We sing God is good, all the time. But can we believe it at a difficult time.

Job is a successful man with great wealth, father of a large and happy family. Then bad news hits him like a bolt of lightning. Suddenly his oxen and donkeys are gone, his sheep and camels are gone, his servants are gone, his sons and daughters are gone. And Job hearing this numbing news v²¹ says he falls to the ground to worship.

Does our worship fluctuate with the coming of good and bad news inner life ?

Job 2:9-10 - ⁹ His wife said to him, “Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!”

¹⁰ He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?”

In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Can we worship God when times are challenging ? That can reflect the stability in our relationship with God

ACT: Commit your loyalty to Jesus, mane Him Lord again if he has lost ground in your life.

January 22, Sunday

READ: MATTHEW 15:29-39

29 Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. 30 Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. 31 The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

32 Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

33 His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

34 “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

35 He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. 36 Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. 37 They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 38 The number of those who ate was four thousand men, besides women and children. 39 After Jesus had sent the crowd away, he got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.

REFLECT: One of the characteristics of those who possess deep spiritual strength is a thankful heart. Before Jesus took the loaves and fish and handed them to the disciples He gave thanks. Jesus made it a practice to thank God for His goodness in all things.

What's the first thing we do when we get up ? Do we check the phone for WhatsApp messages, reach for the newspaper which is anyway flooded with bad news ? We all seem to gravitate towards bad news.

Read Psalms and pray through it and you will have so much good news to praise God for.

ACT: Praise God for the good things he has blessed you with: good health, family, our salvation, the church etc

January 23, Monday

READ: 2 SAMUEL 23:8-17

8 These are the names of David's mighty warriors: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. 9 Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated, 10 but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead. 11 Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. 12 But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory.

13 During harvest time, three of the thirty chief warriors came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. **14** At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. **15** David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” **16** So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. **17** “Far be it from me, Lord, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it.

Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.

REFLECT: Today’s passage records an incident that took place when David was repelling an attack by his old enemies the Philistines. David looks across the valley towards Bethlehem, the town where he grew up. He was thirsty and thought of the well at which he had often drunk. Verse 15 he loudly expressed his desire to drink from the well.

Without much thought three mighty men risked their lives drew water from the well and returned safely to David’s side. Stunned and amazed by their devotion, David accepts their costly gift and then pours it out on the ground in thanksgiving to God. I wonder how the three men must have reacted to this ! I think David’s action was not due to a lack of appreciation but of a deep desire to give something that was so precious to him back to God.

ACT: Give up something that you really likes an act of devotion to God.

January 24, Tuesday

READ:MARK 12:28-34

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” 29 “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

32 “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. 33 To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

34 When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

REFLECT: Today we will focus on being strong inside by being generous and loving. There are close to 200 references in the old testament that talks about having a concern for your neighbour but it was Jesus who put the emphasis on loving your neighbour ‘as yourself’. Paul emphasises in Phil 2:4 that we should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. It’s almost like keeping an eye on the interests of others as well as your own.

Generally people interpret this as concentrate on loving yourself and then you will be able to love others better. But what Jesus is saying is that our concern for our own welfare is natural and should be matched by our concern for others. Whatever we want for ourselves, we should want it for others. Self-interest and other-interest are to be balanced.

ACT: Do for someone today that you would have done for self.

January 25, Wednesday

READ: MATTHEW 6:19-24

19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

24 “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

REFLECT: Let us focus on verse 22 which talks about the eye being good or healthy then your whole body is full of light. The original text means if the eye is generous then the whole body will be lit up. The eye is our outlook in life, our whole way of looking at things. So, when our eye is generous then our whole personality is illuminated (lit up).

Jesus is our example in everything. He was generous with his time and efforts towards everyone and because of that His whole personality was full of light.

In John 6 there’s a little boy who’s eye was generous enough to share his tiffin box containing bread and fish and 5000 people benefitted. The boy could have kept his food hidden but his generosity led to the crowds witnessing one of the most sensational miracles that Jesus initiated.

ACT: Be generous with someone today and feel the light of Jesus invading you.

January 26, Thursday

READ: JOHN5:1-19

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. 2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. 3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. 5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, 10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” 15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

16 So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. 17 In his defence Jesus

said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” 18 For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

19 Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.

REFLECT: We live strained spiritual lives because we don’t understand God’s ways. Jesus is the perfect example of someone who had the knowledge and understanding of the Father’s ways. Jesus was never in a hurry and adequate in every situation that confronted him.

In today’s passage Jesus walks past the crowd of desperate people sitting by the pool of Bethesda and said to just one person: ‘Do you want to get well?’ Why didn’t he ask that question to all? Weren’t they all in need? Why focus on one? The answer is found in verse 17 & 19: My Father is always at his work... and I too am working.....the son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing....’

Jesus got his guidance not from what happened around Him, but what went on above Him. Jesus always looked up to heaven to see what God’s plan was to not heal all but one. Do we enquire of God before doing anything?

ACT: Share your faith with at least 5 people today to let them know they need spiritual healing.

January 27, Friday

READ: ISAIAH 55:1-13

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. 4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. 5 Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.” 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. 8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. 9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

13 Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord’s renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.”

REFLECT: God’s ways are so different from man’s that they sometimes appear to be completely opposite. We have a certain approach to life - but God has another. We may think leadership

is getting others to serve us. However, Jesus says ‘Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant’ (Matthew 20:26). The great are not those who have the greatest number of servants, but those who serve the greatest number. We may think to surrender our life to God is to lose it but Matthew 16:25 says you surrender to God and you find it. We hear the keys to good health are food, sleep, exercise. God says in 1 Timothy 4:8’ godliness has value for all things....’ Now a good diet, rest and exercise are important but not nearly as important as a godly lifestyle.

We hear a healthy diet is important. Media says ‘ you are what you eat’ It is not so much important what you eat but what is eating you that is important.

ACT: Do something opposite of what you would normally do to be in line with God’s ways

January 28, Saturday

READ: MARK 12:35-44

35 While Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, he asked, “Why do the teachers of the law say that the Messiah is the son of David? 36 David himself, speaking by the Holy Spirit, declared: “The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.”” 37 David himself calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his son?” The large crowd listened to him with delight.

38 As he taught, Jesus said, “Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, 39 and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. 40 They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

41 Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others.

44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

REFLECT: As disciples of Jesus we have to go through spiritual training. One of them is financial discipline. Verse 41 says Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put into the temple treasury and I believe he still watches today.

I believe giving is a heart issue not a money issue. Our purse strings and heart strings are connected. How are we faring in the money test ? Is it in proportion to our income ? When our salary increases does our giving increase ? Are we living within our means ? 10% to God, 10% to savings and live of the rest. Do we have a budget ? What changes do we need to make in our giving to pass the money test ? Remember Jesus is watching !!!

ACT: Modify our giving that will make Jesus smile !

January 29, Sunday

READ: COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

REFLECT: Another aspect of spiritual discipline is the time management. Jesus watches not only what we put in the treasury but also how we use our time. In the words of John Wesley, the master user of time: 'Never be unemployed and never be triflingly (unimportantly, trivially) employed.'

In photography, the quality of picture depends, not only on what you put into it, but what you leave out. Similarly, our capacity to 'No' determines our capacity to say 'Yes'. We have to say 'No' to lesser things in order to say 'Yes' to greater things. Can we pass the 'time' test? Can we give 10% of our time back to Jesus daily? He has give us 24 hours, can we give back 2.4 hours to him (prayer, bible study, time spent with disciples and non-disciples)

ACT: Make a list of things that you will start doing and by doing so we are not going to have the time to do certain things.

January 30, Monday

READ: JAMES 1:12-18

12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. 13 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

REFLECT: People often ask the question: why does God allow temptation ? The original Greek word for temptation means to test, to try and to prove. Biblically speaking it means to put a person to test for the purpose of deepening his or her qualities of character. Oswald Chambers said, ' God can, in one single moment, make a heart pure, but not even God can in a single moment give a person character'.

Character would not be precious if it could be acquired without a struggle. D.L. Moody says ' Character is what we are the dark'. Reputation is what others think of us - character is what we are on the inside. Let us face our temptations head on and we grow. And as we grow we develop character.

ACT: Share your struggles and temptations with someone.

January 31, Tuesday

READ: MATTHEW 11:1-19

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. 6 Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written:

**“I will send my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’**

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence, and violent people have been raiding it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 Whoever has ears, let them hear.

16 “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 “‘We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”

REFLECT: Doubts are necessarily a bad thing. We can use it to ask questions that in turn will enable us to take firmer grip on Jesus. The disciples asked in our passage today - ‘are you the one who has to come, or should we expect someone else?’ Jesus didn’t reject Thomas because of his doubting attitude but invited him to put his finger in his hands and sides and challenged his doubts by saying stop doubting and believe (John 20:27).

John the baptist said ,’ look the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world !’(John 1:29). But later entertained some doubts Jesus. How did Jesus respond to his

doubts? Jesus responded with love and sensitivity: ‘Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk....’(Matthew 11:4-5). Those who doubt and use their doubts to ask deep questions of God and scripture, will find their faith getting stronger than ever before.

ACT: Re-dedicate yourself to Jesus today, renew your love for Him and make Him the Lord of your life again. Make plans to deepen your relation with Him.

VICTORY

***"Some people look at things that are and ask why;
I dream of things that never were and ask, why not?"***

George Bernard Shaw, Irish playwright

"Every man dies; but not every man truly lives."

Sir William Wallace, 13th century Scottish patriot

"You may have to fight a battle more than once to win it."

Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister 1979 to 1991

***"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The
weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.***

***But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Paul, Apostle of Jesus Christ, to the Corinthians, First Century A.D.

***"You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory -
victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror,
victory, however long and hard the road may be;
for without victory, there is no survival."***

Winston Churchill, British Prime Minister, 13th May 1940

VICTORY STORY

*From Eden, Nazareth and Gethsemane,
to the British Isles at the close of the 20th century*

Here in the British Isles, we have a long history. Conflicts and peace, victory and defeat, economically, spiritually and politically. The theme of the July 1997 Quiet Time series is taken from the title of the 15th Anniversary Service of the London Church of Christ - "Victory". We have had our ups and downs, but praise God that where true discipleship of our Lord Jesus is followed, the end result is always the same - "Victory!" for the gospel and the saints who proclaim it! A congregation of 8 disciples in 1982 growing to over 16,000 in 60 churches spanning the British Commonwealth, First World, Third World, Hindu, Muslim and free countries - the facts proclaim an unparalleled victory, loudly and clearly, for the spread of the gospel, for which people everywhere should give thanks to God!

The Quiet Time series is taken from the book of Luke. Lessons will be drawn from the victorious birth of Jesus and Christianity against all the odds, and quotes from Britain's history used to inspire us, not politically, but in the spiritual battle God began in 1982 in the British Isles. The war began long ago in the Garden of Eden, and in the book of Luke we see its most incredible stage unfold as the Messiah is born.

The Quiet Time series is in four parts:

	<u>Luke chapter</u>	<u>Dates</u>
1. VICTORY - THE YEARS OF PREPARATION	1 - 6	July 1st to 9th
2. VICTORY PROCLAIMED	7 - 13	July 10th to 16th
3. THE LONG ROAD TO VICTORY	14 - 19:27	July 17th - 23 rd
4. JERUSALEM: VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER	19:28 - 24	July 24th - 31st

On our journey with the disciples and with the angels who watched this journey progress, we will learn about a God whose purposes cannot be stopped; ordinary humans whom God used to accomplish his eternal purpose; other people whose lives were changed forever by contact with Jesus, and about a Saviour who won victory for us by his submission to his Father's will.

To benefit from this series you are encouraged

- (a) to set aside enough time each day to be able to concentrate on the passages and comments. Beneficial Bible study requires not just reading but meditation (Psalm 1:2, 2 Tim 2:7). Half an hour should be sufficient.
- (b) to take your own notes as you get insights
- (c) to do the projects and challenges, not legalistically but with the word in your heart. Beneficial Bible study means Bible study put into practice daily! (James 1:25)
- (d) to pray for God to use this series to change your life for ever.

And as we follow the story, living our lives for Jesus in July 1997, let's keep on our hearts the words of that old song, Victory in Jesus!

*I heard an old, old story, how a Saviour came from glory,
How he gave his life on Calvary to save a wretch like me,
I heard about his groaning, of his precious blood atoning,
Then I repented of my sins and won the victory!*

*Victory in Jesus, my Saviour, for ever!
He sought me and he bought me with his redeeming blood!
He loved me 'ere I knew him, and all my love is due him,
He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood!*

Commitments Schedule for 21st September 1997 - “Dare to Dream”

The goal for every disciple is to have 2 visitors at 21st September. We need to all commit ourselves to making this goal, with leaders leading the way.

<u>Target Date</u>	<u>Target Commitments</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Sunday 13 th July (Victory Service)	2	
Sunday 27 th July	3	
Sunday 17 th August (Sunday 24 th Aug, conference)	4	
Sunday 31 st August	5	
Sunday 7 th September	6	
Sunday 21 st September	“Dare to Dream”	

Evangelism Schedule for 21st September 1997 - "Dare to Dream"

We all share the greatest dream of all - to see a lost world evangelised in this generation. We all have a personal dream to help as many people we meet go to heaven as possible. This year as we evangelise for our service on 21st September let us dare to dream of the Victory God can bring. Just think: if every disciple shared his or her faith with at least one person every day from now until the 21st September, we would have invited at least 139,410 people! The goal for every disciple is to have 2 visitors at the service. We need to all commit ourselves to making this goal, with leaders leading the way.

June

- Week 1* Mon 23rd **“Start your Chart”** Create a chart to record all your commitments for the 21st.
- Tues 24th **“Call and Commit All!”** Follow up on all who came to Secret of Success service on 22nd, and all who promised to come and didn’t, and invite them to Dare to Dream.
- Sat 28th **“Radical Sabbatical”** Take part in your Sector’s/church’s evangelism day

July

- Week 2* Tues 1st **“Pray Day”** Pray today for everyone in your follow-up book
- Sat 5th **“Scavenger Hunt”** Take part in your Sector’s/Church’s evangelism day
- Week 3* Sat 12th **“Six O’Clock News”** Invite at least 6 people today and share about it with another disciple at 6 pm

Sun 13th “VICTORY!” LCC 15th Anniversary Service, 12 noon, Apollo Theatre, Hammersmith

- Week 4* Sat 19th **“Salvation for Old Friends on You Depends!”** Follow up on old friends e.g. with cards, phonecalls. Include old school friends, colleagues etc...

Sat 19th CHURCHWIDE CHILDRENS’ MINISTRY FUN DAY

- Week 5* Tue 22nd **“Bring God to your Job”** Talk to colleagues today about your faith, inviting them to 21st

August

- Week 6* Sat 2nd **“Happy Families”** Invite all your relatives to the 21st

Sat 2nd AFRO-CARIBBEAN DAY, venue t.b.a.

- Week 7* Sat 9th **“Love Thy Neighbour”** Introduce yourself to at least 2 of your neighbours and invite them to 21st.

- Week 8* Thur/Fri 14th/15th **“Unite in the Fight”** Share your faith with your family group tonight

- Week 9* Sat 23rd **“No Fear”** Today, do something different out of character which forces you to be radical, e.g. preaching on the tube or inviting someone who really intimidates you.

Fri 22 - Sun 24th U.K. CHRISTIAN CONFERENCE, “The God who Dares”, Wembley, London

- Wk 10* Sat 30th **“Feel and Heal”** Have a conversation today with someone you know you is hurting e.g. someone who is homeless, ill, in hospital etc.

September

- Wk 11* Sat 6th **“Follow Up by Doubling Up”** Call all your commitments again today to make sure they are definitely coming to the 21st September.

- Wk 12* Sat 13th **“Talk Everywhere you Walk”** Invite someone during every journey you make today e.g. walking to the shops, travelling on the bus etc.

- Wk 13* 14th - 21st **“Pray Days”** Pray every day for every contact and commitment you have.

Part I

Victory - the Years of Preparation

In World War II, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister and his Cabinet plotted Hitler's defeat from the Cabinet War Rooms in Westminster. The free world and Western Civilisation as it had been known depended on their effort.

In the first 6 chapters of Luke, we see God's plan to rescue the world and defeat Satan being put into effect. On Day 9, you will be asked to write down how you see God's plan being revealed. Keep this in mind as you do the studies over the next 8 days.

Day 1 (Tues) The Victory Story. About our journalist. 21 Sept: Pray Day

The book of Luke was written by a companion of Paul's. Look up the passages referred to as we are introduced to our journalist of the Victory Story.

Luke was a doctor (Col 4:14) and companion of Paul for many years. He was a Greek-speaking Gentile (= non-Jew) by birth, who had received a good education and possessed considerable intellectual ability. He was probably one of the early converts of the first mission in Antioch or Lystra. Nothing is known about his life until he met Paul at Troas about AD51. From Troas (the City of Troy in ancient times) he went with Paul to Macedonia, where he became the Evangelist of the church in Philippi that was distinguished by its zeal and loyalty to its founder, Paul (Philippians 4: 10-20). The "brother" mentioned in 2 Cor 8:22 may have been Luke.

When Paul returned to Philippi on his third journey, Luke rejoined him and went with him to Palestine. During Paul's two-year stay in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Caesarea, Luke is not mentioned, but then he rejoins Paul on his journey to Rome and records their shipwreck experience together in Ac 27. He is mentioned in Colossians and Philemon, both letters written from Paul in prison. From this point on, we know little, except that he was with Paul at the end of Paul's life during his last imprisonment (2 Tim 4:11).

Now read Luke 1:1-4

Was Luke merely an academic? Why was it necessary to write this book? What were Luke's sources? Why is this significant? Going through his brief life history above, when do you think he had the opportunity to interview Mary and others who give us the material in Luke's gospel that is unique to Luke?

Can you name any other Gentiles who wrote the Bible? As a Gentile, which events in Jesus' life would he most appreciate? What sort of people would he most want to write about?

Notes:

Challenge/Prayer: Pray through every name in your follow-up list. Allow 10 minutes or more for this so you can pray for them each by name properly and specifically.

Day 2 (Wed)

God's Preparation - I

“God always gives the best to those who leave the choice to him.”

Luke 1:5-25. C: Elizabeth was barren, and she and her husband were well along in years (v.7). They had lost hope for having a child. But an angel appeared to Zechariah. The angel said in v.13 that “your prayer has been heard.” Q: Wouldn’t that be encouraging, if an angel appeared to you and said that God had heard *your* prayers? C: But Zechariah was not sure of this. It can’t have been a recent prayer. Probably, he and his wife had prayed earnestly about this when they were in their 30’s, and as they grew older, they gave up hope. But God had heard their earlier prayers and decided to answer it in their old age, for his glory!

Think about it. *If you were them, would you rather have had any old child at an early age, or wait a few years, have John the Baptist and a place in the Bible as part of God’s preparation for the Messiah? Zechariah learned that God often answers later in order to answer better. God always gives the best when you leave the choice to him!*

See Daniel chapter 10, esp. 12-13 for another example of God answering prayer immediately, but it taking a while for the answer to come to Daniel! See also Psalm 84:11 and 34:10.

Where else in the Bible does God prove he is the Lord of physical fruitfulness by giving children to women who are barren? There are at least three places...

Write down when last you brought someone to the Lord who is still faithful. If never, write never.

Notes:

Challenge: Write about something you had to wait a long time for in your life.

Prayer: Thank God that he has heard every one of your prayers to be fruitful (Isaiah 65:24). Fruit comes from God. Ask him to give you 2 commitments for 21st Sept by Sunday 13th July.

Day 3 (Thur)

God's Preparation - II

1. Nothing is impossible with God. Luke 1:26-38. C: V.26 says that God sent the angel Gabriel to a town called Nazareth. God loves all our own towns. He loves Rye, Woking, Stroud, Mevagissey, Cromer, Macclesfield, Tralee, Galashiels, Bakewell and Studland. But what is the sixth month? The sixth month of what?

Mary was not sure about this angel (v.29). But the angel told her to not be afraid (v.30) and that the Holy Spirit would make her pregnant (v.35). The angel said, "nothing is impossible with God." Think about that. Nothing is impossible for God. He can solve every problem in our lives. He can take care of our futures. He can make us fruitful. He can easily give you 2 commitments for Dare to Dream by Sun 13th. He can help people even in the most hopeless situations. We need to believe this, and to help others believe it, too.

2. Babies Are Alive Even in the Womb. Luke 1:39-45. C: As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary, baby John jumped in her womb (v.41,44). Clearly, this baby was alive, and he knew that Jesus was the Son of God. In the same way, babies are alive as soon as they are conceived in the womb. Abortion is wrong. It is the murder of a child. Birth control (using measures to prevent oneself from getting pregnant) is OK for married people, but abortion is a sin. And Elizabeth was very encouraging to Mary (v.45). Let's make sure we encourage all the pregnant people we know. It is a great gift from God to be expecting a child. The pain and the money are worth it.

3. Praise God in Prayer. Luke 1:46-80. C: Both Mary and Zechariah prayed amazing prayers. Every verse in their songs of praise are full of meaning. For example: Mary glorified God and rejoiced in him (vv.46-47); she thanked him for remembering her (v.48); she said that God's name is holy (v.49); she praised him for his mercy (v.50), and for the way he helps people of all generations (v.50); she praised God for his mighty deeds, and for how God opposes the proud (v.51); she was amazed at how God can pull down rulers and lift up nobodies (v.52); she thanked God for feeding the hungry (v.53); she thanked God for his love to the nation of Israel (vv.54-55).

We can learn from these great prayers. We, too, when we pray need to praise God from our hearts. Prayer should not simply be a list of requests from us, like a beggar on the road to a man in a car. Prayer is a conversation between child and Father. We must encourage God as we pray.

Notes:

Challenge: Encourage someone who is pregnant or has just had a child today.

Prayer: Pick either Mary's or Zechariah's song, and pray it to God today, meditating on the words and themes. If you can, try making up some music from your own heart as you sing it to God!

Day 4 (Fri)

D-Day!

“veni, vidi, vici” (I came, I saw, I conquered.)

1. Born in a Manger. Luke 2:1-7. C: There was a census taken during that time, and so everyone went to his home town (v.3). Joseph went back to Bethlehem from Nazareth (v.4). He and Mary went to register there (v.5). While they were there, baby Jesus was born (v.6). Because of all the people who had come to town, there was no room in the hotel. So they had to sleep outside, with the animals, and Jesus was placed in a manger, a hay-bin for feeding cattle (v.7). It is amazing. D-Day was the code name for “Deliverance Day”, the days when the Allies landed in France to begin the liberation of occupied Europe from the Nazis. In Luke 2 we read about another D-Day - “Delivery Day” for the baby Jesus! Yet the Son of God was not born in the Cromwell Hospital, London or a BUPA hospital. He was born into a bin of ordinary hay. God is so humble.

C: Jesus never demanded expensive things, or a nice place to live. He had no place to lay his head (Luke 9:57-58). Sometimes we complain because our bills are too high, or it is too hot, or we don’t have a car. We complain because we are tired, or thirsty, or we have a long journey to work or the Central line plays up. But Jesus lived without all of these things, and he was happy. Next time you feel like complaining, remember the Son of God.

2. Sing and be happy!. Luke 2:8-20 (the shepherds),. **Luke 2:21-40** (Simeon and Anna) What did the shepherds, Simeon and Anna *have in common?* What was *different* about their situations? Why did they all rejoice, and why did the angels rejoice?

When Jesus was born, the angels had a party! It was a great day. God had come to the earth.

Q: Do you rejoice when you think about Jesus? How would you feel if you met an angel? C: It was an amazing time to be alive when Jesus was born. And today, as the gospel spreads around the world, it is also a great time to be alive. We need to appreciate how lucky we are and celebrate, just like the angels.

3. Jesus Knew the Bible! Luke 2:41-52. C: Here is a very famous story from the life of Jesus. When he was twelve, the family went to Jerusalem for the Passover (v.42), where they lost him for 3 days. When they found him, he was sitting in the temple courts, talking to the teachers, asking them questions (v.46) This little episode about Jesus tells us a lot about his early life. His family was religious—they went every year to the Feast. And he loved God’s word from the beginning.

Notes:

Challenge: Go back over these Q.T. notes so far and write in notes for any day you have missed.. Making notes daily is a good habit to help you get the most out of your study. You can write in this booklet or in a fresh notebook. And for the brothers’ 2 Tim class, our challenge is to teach the Bible to someone else in a study in the next 7 days.

Prayer: Pray about the childhood of Jesus. Praise God for his birth, and that he was saved from being killed by Herod. Praise God that he learned to be a carpenter from Mary’s husband Joseph (Mark 6:3, Matthew 13:55). Praise God for your childhood, thanking him for how he prepared you to become a disciple!

1. The Herald's Message. Luke 3:1-9. C: John the Baptist was related to Jesus (Luke 1:36). He was also Jesus' herald, telling people to be ready for what was to come. He went out and preached that people needed to repent (v.3) John was a radical prophet. He called people to produce fruit in keeping with their repentance (v.8). He warned them that God's axe was ready to cut them down if they did not change (v.9). C: John clearly taught that repentance is not just saying "sorry, bro." When we repent, our behaviour changes, and everyone can see it. There is fruit from our repentance. Q: Think about your life. What is the #1 area in your life you need to change? Are you good at confessing, but never change and then do the same things again and again? Are you discouraged, or do you believe you can change? God can do great things through you when you decide to be different.

2. Repentance Is Practical. Luke 3:10-20. C: The crowd asked John for advice (v.10). He told them that the man who has much wealth should share with poorer people (v.11). He told tax collectors not to cheat (vv.12-13). He told soldiers not to threaten people for money (v.14), and to be happy with their pay. He explained that the Messiah would come soon (v.16). John was totally humble. He admitted that he was nothing, and Jesus was everything (v.16). He said, "I don't even deserve to untie his sandals" (v.16). Very few religious leaders today would say, "I am nothing, but someone else is awesome." But John had a deep love for the truth.

C: Repentance is not a warm feeling in our hearts. Repentance leads to practical decisions in our lives. When a person becomes a Christian, his life changes. Jesus becomes #1. He starts having quiet times. He gives up sin. He starts sharing his possessions with others, and giving money to God. He starts telling others about God. But sometimes, after we start to change, we slip back into our old ways. Q: Think about it. Have you slipped back?

3. God Encouraged Jesus. Luke 3:21-38. C: Some of us did not have encouraging human fathers. Some of us did not grow up with our fathers at all. God is a father to all of us now. How did he encourage Jesus? Are you encouraged when you think of your heavenly father? He loves us even when we mess up. But when we do special things to please him, he breaks through and we feel his pleasure. Have you ever done something for God where you knew he was smiling at you?

C: Also, we see in vv.23-38 that God had been working out his plan for the salvation of the world for 1000s of years, preparing for the birth of Jesus. He's been working 1000s of years to lead to our births, too! He's loved us for a long time. You are where you are today because God has put you there. It is very encouraging to think how much God personally cared about us, and how he has worked to make sure that we are saved.

Notes:

Challenge: Take part in today's Scavenger Hunt. . (If you can't make it due to work, make sure you get a copy of the Scavenger list so you can be unified with the group and do it in on you own or with another disciple at another time today.) Later today, write down the names of 10 people you spoke to.

- | | |
|----|-----|
| 1. | 6. |
| 2. | 7. |
| 3. | 8. |
| 4. | 9. |
| 5. | 10. |

Prayer: Your life has changed in many ways since your baptism. Thank God for all the ways that your behaviour has changed since you've become a disciple.

Day 6 (Sun)

Personal Preparation

“If you can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same...

*If you can keep your head when all around are losing theirs
.. you’ll be a man, my son.”*

*Today we see Jesus facing four trials: 1. Temptation 2. Praise from men 3. Patronising family
4. Persecution They prepared him for what lay ahead.*

1. Temptation. Luke 4:1-13. C: Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert (v.2). Q: Have you decided a day to fast yet, like we challenged you on July 2? C: Make sure you set aside a time to fast. It will change your life. C: When Jesus fasted, the devil tempted him. He told Jesus to make the stones into bread (v.3). He told Jesus that he would become wealthy if he worshipped Satan instead of God (v.7). Satan tried to make Jesus arrogantly jump off the temple (v.9). Jesus was tired, alone, and hungry. Satan chose the perfect time to tempt him. It was the beginning of his ministry. He had not yet had great victories. That is just the way Satan works. He tempts us as soon as we are baptised. He tempts us when we are sick, alone, and discouraged. He will tempt you when you least expect it. Verse 13 says that he left Jesus so that he could come again and tempt him at “an opportune time.” C: Jesus faced each of these temptations by quoting the Bible to Satan. Q: Are you resisting temptation in your life through the Word of God? Or are you giving in?

2. Praise from men. Luke 4:14-21. C: Jesus went into a synagogue and started reading the book of Isaiah (v.17). He announced that the Scripture was fulfilled by himself (v.21)! This was confident. He believed that he was the one chosen to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom, and recovery of sight, and to release the oppressed (v.18). Jesus really believed that he had been chosen by God. Do you believe that God has chosen you? The Bible says in 2 Thess 2:13-14 that you have been chosen by God. When you believe this, you will share your faith confidently with everyone you meet, no matter how impressive they may seem.

3. Patronising family. Luke 4:22

4. Persecution. Luke 4:23-44. C: At first the people loved his message (v.22). But then he specifically challenged them (vv.23-27). He told them that Israel had often rejected the truth, and so God had gone outside Israel to find righteous people. Jesus was not afraid of opposition. As a result, the people angrily tried to throw him over a cliff (vv.28-29). But by God’s grace, he escaped. Make a decision never to be intimidated by opposition.

He went to a new town. Did he change his approach or conviction? (v.32) Did he ever slow down? (v.44) Why not? (v.43) Did he only preach? (v.38 -41) But what was his mission? (v.43) Remember, by next Sunday our goal is to have 2 commitments each for 21st. God can give it to us, but are we being like Jesus going out purposefully to seek and save the lost?

Notes:

Challenge: Have a visitor at Church with you today.

Prayer: Jesus did many great miracles. Praise God for all of his miracles that you can remember.

Day 7 (Mon)

Summon the Troops

*“He never marshalled an army, drafted a soldier, or fired a gun -
Yet no leader ever made more volunteers.”*

1. The Calling of the First Disciples. Luke 5:1-11. Up to this point, Jesus did it all on his own. Now he realises through the Holy Spirit that he needs to call disciples to help him spread the message and to be a model to the world of his Kingdom on earth. So he calls Peter, and later in this chapter, several others. He summons the troops!

C: What reaction did Jesus get from Peter at the beginning? (v.8). Sometimes we feel like running away from Jesus and his church. We feel like failures. We feel guilty. But that is the time Jesus says to us, “don’t be afraid, from now on you will catch men (v.10).” Peter and the guys pulled their boats on shore, left everything, and followed Jesus! It must have been incredible! Did Jesus offer them power? Money? Prestige? Just the opposite! What did he offer that made Peter and the others change their minds and sign up as his volunteer disciples?.

2. The Man With Leprosy. Luke 5:12-16. C: A man with no hope approached Jesus. He had leprosy. He asked Jesus to help (v.12). He had been rejected by the world, but the Lord did not reject him. Jesus said, “I am willing. Be clean!” (v.13). Jesus had the power even to heal the lepers. He had compassion and felt this man’s pain. In the same way, he feels your pain and my pain. The news about Jesus spread more and more (v.15). But no matter how busy he was, Jesus always took time out to pray. Q: Do you take time to pray every day? C: We all need God.

3. Jesus Heals a Paralytic. Luke 5:17-26. C: Some men tried to bring a paralytic to Jesus. But the crowd was in the way (v.19). They did not let this stop them. They really wanted their friend to get to Jesus. So they went up on the roof, and made a hole in the roof. Q: Can you imagine if someone broke into your home through the roof? C: Imagine if someone came into your family group through the roof because there were too many visitors! These guys were fired up. Jesus forgave this man because of **their** faith (v.20). If **we** really have faith, we can help others to be healed by Jesus. We’ve got to believe that the people we bring to church can change. Our faith can impress Jesus enough for him to change them.

4. The Calling of Levi. Luke 5:27-32. C: Here again we see that Jesus personally shared his faith. Jesus did not look at him in a worldly way. He saw an opportunity for God to work in a great way. So he invited Levi. And Levi came with Jesus! Then Levi invited all his friends to meet Jesus (v.29).

C: Some people complained that Jesus spent a lot of time with sinners (v.30). He explained that he was a doctor, and that he spent time only with the spiritually sick (v.31). Jesus did not come to call people who think that they are righteous, but those who know that they are in need of help (v.32).

Why did people want to spend a lot of time with Jesus? Write down at least 3 things about Jesus that made people want to follow him. Also write down who got critical. Do you think they had many friends? What sort of friends do you think they had? Were Jesus’ friends easy to get on with? Does Jesus love you?

Notes:

Challenge: Write about what made you want to follow Jesus.

Prayer: Pray to have a heart to love every kind of person, the way Jesus did.

Day 8 (Tues)

Appointing the Officers

“You have deeply ventured; but all must do so who would greatly win.”

1. Do Good Every Day. Luke 6:1-11. Why were the religious leaders upset? Was Jesus sinning? No. He simply did good every day. Q: Think about it. Are you afraid of people who criticise you? Or do you have the courage to do the right thing, even if people do not like it? Do you do things more for people, or for God? Which motivation makes you more secure? Why?

2. Appointing the Apostles. Luke 6:12-16. C: Just like we do sometimes, Jesus spent the night praying to God (v.12). He had an important decision to make, and he needed God’s guidance. He had to choose his 12 apostles, the 12 main leaders of the movement of God. Why did it take him all night to pray? Do you have peace in your heart about your future? About your children? About your dream? About your career? About your role in the Kingdom? Are there any issues in your life that you have prayed through fully and do not yet have peace about?

C: It is encouraging to see that in our movement we also have a main group of leaders, the “World Sector Leaders.” These men have a great love for Jesus, and a great love for each other. They will lead us to evangelise the world in this generation.

3. Blessings and Woes. Luke 6:17-26. Jesus told us to leap for joy if we are persecuted. Q: Do you feel happy when someone opposes you? Do you leap for joy? C: Let’s make a decision that the next time we get spiritual opposition, we will leap for joy!

4. Love Your Enemies. Luke 6:27-36. C: This passage contains some of Jesus’ most revolutionary teachings. It does not occur in any other world religion!!! Here he tells us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us! He says to be kind to those who abuse us, and pray for those who mistreat us (vv.27-28). This is an amazing teaching! The world does not know how to love its friends. Jesus teaches us to love even our enemies. What an awesome God we serve!

What sort of people do you find it hardest to love? v.36 Are you glad God loves the ungrateful and wicked?

5. Do Not Judge. Luke 6:37-45. C: Jesus warns us against judging others here (v.37). If things are going well in our lives, we are tempted to judge and criticise others.

C: Verses 39-40 show us the key to Christian growth (discipleship). They say that a student will become like his teacher. Q: Are you changing to become more and more like your discipler? Do you imitate them? Do you think, “what would my discipler do in my situation?” Or do you criticise them, getting attitudes (v.41)? C: Bad attitudes will destroy us spiritually. Jesus warns us to take the plank out of our own eyes before we criticise others (v.42).

6. The Wise and Foolish Builders. Luke 6:46-49. C: Many people call Jesus, “Lord,” but they do not obey his words. We must make sure that we are building our Christian lives on the right foundation, Jesus Christ.

Notes:

Challenge: Do something kind for someone without them knowing. Perhaps make an anonymous gift in an envelope or clean up after someone at work or at home.

Prayer: Pray for the people who have hurt you the most in this world. Pray that God will bless them.

Day 9 (Wed)

And it will be done

“Our mandate from the Prime Minister is to destroy the Axis forces in North Africa; I have seen it written on half a sheet of notepaper. And it will be done. If anyone here thinks it can't be done, let him go at once; I don't want any doubters in this party. It can be done, and it will be done; beyond any possibility of doubt.”

Today we will be re-reading **the first six chapters of Luke**.

God had a plan. Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), and were expelled. Their son Cain murdered his brother Abel. By Chapter 6, the earth was so wicked that God sent a flood to wipe out mankind because he was so grieved by man's sin. After the flood, man in his arrogance starts to build cities and towers to try to reach God, and to frustrate them, God broke up their common language in Genesis 11.

In Genesis 12, the curse is reversed. God promises to bless the whole world and rescue man from sin. He will do this through the offspring of his servant Abraham. The Bible tells us that God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Eph 1:11).

Through the OT, God taught the Hebrews the principles of sacrifice, faithfulness and righteousness and made them aware of sin. His plan was always to bring Jesus to the earth to be that sacrifice, the Lamb of God, that takes away our sins.

“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29

“you were redeemed...with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish and defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake..” 1 Peter 1:18-21

“No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” 1 Cor 1: 7,8

Could world events stop the victory of Jesus when he came to the earth? Do you believe world events can stop God's plan today? What evidence do you have that the opposite is true, that God is using world events to facilitate the evangelisation of the world in our lifetime?

As you go back over **the first six chapters of Luke**, write about all the ways you can see the hand of God

1. preparing the way for Jesus,
2. fulfilling Scripture, and
3. preparing for the evangelisation of the world after Jesus' ascension to heaven

Notes:

Challenge: Be happy today

Prayer: Pray for world evangelism. Pray especially for religious freedom to come to the Middle East and China.

Part II

VICTORY PROCLAIMED

Luke was a Gentile (non-Jew). He was the only Gentile to write part of the Bible. Prior to Jesus, all Gentiles were outsiders, and made to feel that way. That's why he really appreciated Jesus. As you would expect, he stresses in his gospel that Jesus is good news for the outsider. In this part, we will see Jesus with his disciples going about bringing good news to the poor, women, sick, hungry and outcasts of society. He sends his disciples out twice to proclaim the good news of this new kingdom.

Day 10 (Thur)

Good News for the Only Child

1. The Faith of the Centurion. Luke 7:1-10. C: This is the only man in the Bible who amazed Jesus by his faith (v.9). Let's see why. In this world, most masters would fire their servants if they were sick. But he cared. And Jesus noticed this. When Jesus came close to his house, the centurion sent friends to tell him, "Do not bother to come. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed" (vv.6-8). He knew that Jesus could do anything, though he never saw him. He really believed. Q: Do you have real faith today?

2. Jesus Raises a Widow's Son. Luke 7:11-17. Women and children receive special notice in Luke's gospel. Three times Jesus performed miracles on an only child. (Luke 7:12, 8:42 and 9:38) This was one of these. Does Jesus' compassion move you? Jesus had that special, gentle, kind touch with people. Can you see how he showed it? Q: Do you help others? Do you do special things for them? Do you comfort them when they are sad like Jesus did for this woman?

3. Even John the Baptist Doubted. Luke 7:18-23. C: The amazing thing we see here is that even a man as awesome as John the Baptist had doubts sometimes. He was weak, like you and me. But he saw the greatness of Jesus, and died as a martyr for God. The next time you have doubts, remember that even John had his doubts in his dirty prison cell. But Jesus reminded him of his miracles to help John get fired up!

4. Eating and Drinking. Luke 7:24-35. C: John was serious and hard-line, like a man singing a funeral dirge (v.33). Jesus had a great time, laughing, eating and drinking (v.34). And the people rejected both of them. C: If you spend your Christian life trying to become popular or accepted by the world, you will never succeed! However, so long as we are not sinning or becoming distracted from our purpose, God wants us to enjoy the creative, sporting and other gifts he gives us.

5. Jesus and a Sinful Woman. Luke 7:36-50. Jesus told Simon a story about two men who were both bankrupt, but for different amounts. The man cancelled the debts of both (v.42). Jesus asked Simon, "who will love the man more?" Simon said that the man who owed more money would love the moneylender more. He thought he did not owe God very much. However, both were bankrupt. The woman just appreciated it more because she was humble. Jesus made the woman feel secure

Notes:

Challenge: Find someone who is sad today and reach out to them with compassion. It could be someone you know or someone you just happen to see today in your city.

Prayer: Ask God for a miracle by a certain date. Believe he can do it, just as the centurion believed.

Day 11 (Fri)

Good News for the Outcast

“There are no setbacks in the Christian life; only lessons to be learned.”

1. The Parable of the Sower. Luke 8:1-15. C: Jesus was supported in his work from his followers' own money (v.3). We all must give our contribution so that the gospel can be preached. Q: Do you give 10% of your income to help spread the gospel?

C: The thorns and weeds choke the seed on the third soil (v.7). Life's worries, riches, and pleasures can distract disciples from the truth, and they gradually fall away (v.14). Q: Think about it. Are you getting choked spiritually? Or are you growing stronger and stronger? The final kind of seed hear the word, and by persevering produce a crop of new souls (v.15). Q: Have you been persevering in your evangelism? Or do you quit easily? Have you been doing your follow-ups? C: We must never quit. We cannot judge who is open and who is not open.

2. The Lamp on a Stand. Luke 8:16-18. C. In the same way, God does not want those he has lighted (Christians) to be covered up. He wants us to show the world our faith! Q: Are you shining like Jesus' light in this lost world?

3. Jesus' Mother and Brothers. Luke 8:19-21. C Jesus did not allow his family to pull him away from the work God had given him. Q: Do you get intimidated by your family when they oppose you?

4. Jesus Calms the Storm. Luke 8:22-25. C Jesus can calm every storm in your life. Trust him. He is in your boat, and he won't let you sink.

5. The Healing of the Demon-Possessed Man. Luke 8:26-39. C: Jesus loved this man in a personal way. He asked him, “what is your name?” (v.30). When he had healed him, Jesus told the man to return home and preach about what God had done for him (v.39). C: In the same way, we also can share the story of how God has changed our lives.

6. A Dead Girl and a Sick Woman. Luke 8:40-56. C She had the faith to reach through the crowd and touch Jesus (v.44), and his power healed her. Jesus explained that her faith had healed her (v.48). Faith is not simply an intellectual belief in God. It is a belief that changes our behaviour. It makes us reach out for God and try to touch him. If we believe, he can do anything in our lives, too.

Notes:

Challenge: Be a lamp on a stand to a family. Invite someone with children to the Children's Ministry Fun day next Saturday 19th July.

Prayer: Pray for the mentally ill and clinically depressed, and all who are lonely.

“Every man dies; but not every man truly lives”

“Personally, I’m always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.”

1. Jesus Sends Out the Twelve. Luke 9:1-9. C: What was the plan? What were they told to do? What not to do? What did Jesus want to teach them? Did they use advertising?

It is exciting to see that the early disciples did the ministry in the same way that we do it today. They went to people’s homes, they preached, they ate together, and they left the people who were not open. Let’s make sure that we are active in reaching out to others today as we invite “six before six” and as we go to their homes to teach them the Bible and follow up on them.

2. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand. Luke 9:10-17. C: It must have been so exciting to see the bread and fish multiply so that everyone could eat. They must have been so happy, sitting together with Jesus, sharing their hearts and lives together. We can see from this example that God can take the little that we have and do a lot with it if we let him.

3. Peter’s Confession of Christ. Luke 9:18-27. C The crowds weren’t sure who Jesus was, but Peter knew that Jesus is the Son of God. Being disciple is not natural for any of us. You cannot follow Jesus just as you are. You will have to deny at least some of your own desires! (v.23) V. 24 teaches that you have to die to yourself to have eternal life.

4. The Transfiguration. Luke 9:28-36. C: As usual, Jesus went to pray. But this time he took three disciples, Peter, James and John, and they went to a special place. Q: Do you have a special place to pray? Is it private? Do you have awesome times with God? Or are you like the disciples, falling asleep (v.32)?

5. Competitiveness. Luke 9:37-45. C: Jesus cared about an impossible situation. As a parent, what is your worst fear for your children? The disciples tried to heal the boy, but they failed (v.40). But Jesus healed the boy. *There is no problem Jesus cannot solve.*

Read **Luke 9:46-56.** C: The disciples were arguing about who was the greatest (v.46). Why? What had just happened in v.40? Were they humble after their failure? How can you tell?

Then in v. 49, they get self-righteous. Someone outside the group was doing better than they had done in v.40. So they got critical! Then they got harsh with the Samaritans. How do you react when someone does better than you, or when you find out you have a lot to learn?

6. The Cost of Following Jesus. Luke 9:57-62. C: Jesus cares about funerals. He raised the widow of Nain’s son from the dead (Luke 7). He went to Lazarus’ tomb (John 11). But we must never let preparations for funerals, births, and weddings come ahead of God. Similarly, in v.61, a man asked to say “good-bye” to his family. Jesus told him that we must not start ploughing in the kingdom and then look back. If we plough with our eyes looking back, we’ll make a mess of the field.

Notes:

Challenge: Reach out to 6 people today, and share about it with another disciple at 6 p.m. You could do this in person or on the phone.

Prayer: Go find a special place and have a great prayer, just like Jesus did on the Mount of Transfiguration. Pray about Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and Peter, praising God for them!

Day 13 (Sun) Good News and Rejoicing!
“Victory!” LCC 15th Anniversary service, Apollo Theatre, 12 noon

1. Jesus Sends Out the 72. Luke 10:1-16. C: There had been 12. Now there were 72. Amen! We see Jesus’ disciples multiplying. And they are not just converts who come to meetings, but real disciple who help Jesus preach the word and heal. Every true disciple must go out to preach and heal.

2. True Joy. Luke 10:17-24. C: The 72 disciples came back totally fired up. In today’s service, we will all be celebrating like these disciples did! God had blessed their work incredibly. And God has blessed us too! When Jesus heard this, he told them that God was with them (v.19). While he did not say it was wrong for them to rejoice like this, he stressed that they should have a permanent joy coming not from the results of their work, but rather from the fact that they are saved (v.20). Even if everyone we invite does not come and our friends fall away and we lose our jobs, we can still be happy because we are going to heaven.

C: When Jesus prayed in v.21, he prayed with joy that God had revealed the truth to simple people and children rather than the wise and learned. Look around you at Church today. It is amazing to think of all the educated, rich and famous people in Britain. **Yet God has chosen us to be saved and to be his messengers to Britain!** We are simple, ordinary people, but God loves us! Praise his name.

C: In vv.23-24, he reminded his disciples that many prophets and righteous men had longed to see Jesus’ day, but they did not see it. In the same way, today we are living in awesome times. The gospel is being preached all over the world. We will have churches in every country with a city of 100,000 or more people by the year 2000. We are planting churches in all the 1-million cities of the world in the next 10 years. For 2000 years people have waited for a movement like this, and now we are lucky enough to be a part of it!

3. The Good Samaritan. Luke 10:25-37. C: The religious people left this bleeding man on the side of the road (vv.31-32). But a Samaritan man came and helped the man. He felt pity on him (v.33). There is pain all around us in Britain and Ireland. We must not just be into numbers and techniques. We must feel pity on the people that we see. Are you ready to help people today? Or are you too busy with to notice their needs? Are you too overwhelmed about your own problems to think about the needs of others?

C: Jesus explained that the Samaritan had acted like a true neighbour to the injured man (v.37). He told the religious man that he should also do this if he wanted eternal life (v.37).

4. Mary and Martha. Luke 10:38-42. C (v.39,42). Q: Who are you in this story? Are you Martha, tense and busy? Or are you Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus? C: It is possible to be busy doing things for Jesus, but still not doing the right thing. We must have good quiet times, not just run around. Q: How are your quiet times? Are you happy, or are you getting bad attitudes? C: The good news is that you can change now and become like Mary.

Challenge: Write down your name below as you would like it to appear in the book of life!

Notes:

Prayer: Pray for today’s service, for Doug Arthur and his family, for our elders and Church leaders as they seek to serve God and us.

Day 14 (Mon)

Good News for those who Pray

“It is necessary only for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph.”

1. Teach Us to Pray. Luke 11:1-13. C: Jesus was praying, and his disciples came and asked him to teach them to pray (v.1). He gave them a sample prayer in verses 2-4. From this prayer, we can see that Jesus prayed using a structure. He started by praising God in v.2. Then he asked that the kingdom should come to earth (the church should grow!). In v.3, he prayed for daily bread. In v.4, he told them to pray about their sins, and about those who had sinned against them. C: It is difficult to just randomly pray for one hour. But if we pray with a structure, we can pray a long time.

C: In vv.5-10, Jesus told a parable to explain how we should be bold in prayer. If we go to a friend at midnight and ask him for bread, he won't get up for us out of friendship. But if we keep bothering him, he'll get up because of our boldness (v.8). In the same way, if we ask, God will answer us when we pray (v.9). If our son asks for a fish, we would not give him a snake. If he asked for an egg, we would not give him a scorpion. So God will give us, his children, the Holy Spirit and everything else when we ask him (vv.11-13).

2. Fill Up Your Life With Righteousness. Luke 11:14-28. When evil is driven out of a man, it searches for a new place to live. Then it tries to go back to the man. If the house is empty, it goes into the house with 7 other evil spirits (v.26). And the man is even worse off than before. This is what happens to us when we get rid of sin in our lives, but we don't replace it with good things. We must fill up our lives with righteousness: helping the poor, praying, loving people, serving others, evangelism, teaching others the truth. See Galatians 5: 16 - 26 if you want to study this more.

2. The Sign of Jonah. Luke 11:29-32. C: Jesus expected people to repent and change in response to his message alone. This is important for many religious people to understand. The only sign he would give was his own death and resurrection on the third day.

3. The Lamp of the Body. Luke 11:33-36. C: If your eyes are good (if they see good things), then your whole body will be full of light (v.34). But if your eyes are bad (that is, if they focus on bad things), then your whole body will be dark (v.34). The way we look at things is very important. We must assume the best about others. We must not be critical and negative, and learn to trust. We must see the good and the beauty in things, just like Jesus.

4. Six Woes. Luke 11:37-54. C: The dinner guests were into their image, doing the bare minimum, and no-one knew their hearts. They also tried to keep people who were interested from following Jesus. Often our most zealous opponents are religious people too! Let's make sure that none of these woes can describe our lives. Be open and honest, real disciples.

Challenge: Jesus taught his disciples to pray using a structure. Make a structure for your prayers, writing it below. Perhaps it might be: • Praise. • Thanksgiving. • Problems. • Sins/character. • Family group members. • Church Leaders. • Lost.

•
Members of family; people at work. Write down your structure:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Prayer: God gave us many great stories in the Old Testament, like that of Jonah. Praise God for all the great Old Testament stories that you can remember.

Day 15 (Tues)

Good News for the Poor

1. Watch Out for Hypocrisy. Luke 12:1-12. C: Thousands had gathered, but Jesus focused on his own disciples. He warned them of the danger of hypocrisy (v.1). He explained that all of our words and actions will one day be exposed (vv.2-3). We must not fear those who can kill the body (v.4), but we must fear the God who can send us to hell (v.5). But in case that overwhelms us, Jesus tells us God even knows about the sparrows (v.6); and we are worth much more than that to God! He wants us to repent.

2. The Rich Fool. Luke 12:13-21. C: This story is important for so many people in the British Isles today. A man was fighting with his brother about inheritance money (v.13). Jesus explained that he is not the judge of such things. But he told the man a parable to warn him of the danger of greed. In the parable, God called the rich man a fool (v.20). He was more concerned about money and position than God. The lessons are clear: life is more than the amount of money we have (v.15), and we must be rich and generous towards God (v.21)

3. Do Not Worry. Luke 12:22-34. C: We are all so tempted to worry about our jobs, futures, money, problems, etc. But worrying will not even add 1 hour to our lives (v.25). Lilies do not worry, but God clothes them (v.26). We must not set our hearts on food and drink (v.29). That is what pagans run after (v.30). God knows that we have needs. He takes care of these needs himself. We do not need to be tense and worried. Instead, we should seek his kingdom (v.31).

C: Verses 32-34 are very inspiring. He tells us to sell our possessions and give to the poor. He tells us that our treasure shows where our heart will also be. Let's make sure that God is our treasure, not our comfortable life.

4. Be Ready. Luke 12:35-48. C: Jesus told them to be ready for his return (v.36). Jesus explains that he will come back at an unexpected time (v.40), so we should be ready all the time

5. Jesus Brings Division. Luke 12:49-53. C: These are surprising words. Jesus says here that he has come to bring fire to the earth, not peace (v.49,51). Most people think of Jesus as a gentle peacemaker. But actually he is a radical preacher. He explains that his message will divide families (vv.52-53). Have you faced opposition from your family? At work? Your neighbours? At college? How are you reacting to the persecution? Have you compromised? Or would Jesus be proud of you?

6. Get Your Relationships Right. Luke 12:54-59. Is there anyone today that you do not like? If there is, it is time to "try hard" to make things right between you (v.58). Q: Do you have very many friends in the church? If you don't, it is time to find many great new friends in the church. Make the time to be close to several people, so that you won't have to depend on the main leaders.

Notes:

Challenge: The rich fool was worried about his money, but not his soul. God commanded that we sell our possessions and give to the poor (Luke 12:33). Go give a possession to a poor person, or sell it and give the money to the poor.

Prayer: Pray for your financial situation. Thank God for your job, your house, your money. Pray to be generous towards others. Pray about the poor in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who we are giving to next month.

Day 16 (Wed)

No Turning Back.

“U-turn if you want to. The lady’s not for turning.”

“I am not hard - I am frightfully soft. But I will not be hounded.”

1. Expert or Example. Luke 13:1-9. C: In the newspapers today, we can read all kinds of bad news. It is interesting to discuss other people today, as it was in Jesus’ time. What challenges did he give the “discussers”? Why did he tell them twice? Why did he then tell them the parable in verses 6-9? How did it relate to them? If you have been a Christian more than a year and not been fruitful, why not? Are you more an “Expert” or an “Example” of fruitfulness in the Kingdom?

2. A Crippled Woman. Luke 13:10-17. C: A woman who had been crippled for 18 years came to Jesus. When he saw her, he healed her. The Pharisees hated this, because it was done on a Sabbath. Jesus felt her suffering (v.16—“18 long years”). Jesus saw her faith (v.16—“daughter of Abraham”), and he healed her. Don’t you feel mad at the Pharisees’ response? They were blinded by religious tradition.

3. The Spreading Kingdom. Luke 13:18-21. From last Sunday’s service and the brochure you received, how is God’s movement today like this? Is HOPE like the shelter the tree gives birds?

4. The Narrow Door. Luke 13:22-30. C: A man asked Jesus if only a few people would be saved (v.22). Jesus told him the same thing he told everyone else: **you** must make every effort to go to heaven, or **you** will not make it. Don’t discuss others’ sin or lostness: help them be saved!

5. No turning back. Luke 13:31-35. C: Jesus got the bad news that Herod wanted to kill him. But even this did not discourage him. Instead, he announced that he would continue preaching and healing people until he reached Jerusalem (v.32). He would not let anything stop him from reaching his goal. That should be our attitude as disciples: “nothing will stop me from reaching my goals as a disciple.”

In vv.34-35, as Jesus thought about Jerusalem, he cried out for it. He longed to be a parent to the city, gathering her chicks under his protective wings. But the people were not eager for it! They had missed God’s time of coming to them.

Challenge: What dreams have you prayed about this year, perhaps New Year’s Resolutions, that you have given up on? Write one down.

Notes:

Prayer: Start praying for this thing every day for the rest of July.

Part III

THE LONG ROAD TO VICTORY

“We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.”

After he had said this, Churchill covered up the microphone and added, *“And if we can’t do that we’ll hit them on the head with bottles!”*

In the following chapters Jesus continues discipling, teaching about the nature of God and raising the profile of the widows, the sinners and tax collectors. He also confronts the Pharisees’ hypocrisy and re-emphasises the cost of discipleship.

Day 17 (Thur)

The Generous Host

1. Jesus at a Pharisees’ House. Luke 14:1-14. C: As Luke in 7, Jesus again went to a rich Pharisee’s house. He was being watched (v.2). So he healed a man (v.4). And then he told them that they should not fight with each other for the places of honour at the table (v.10). He explained the importance of humility, not pride.

2. The Parable of the Great Banquet. Luke 14:15-24. C: Here is a great parables about excuses. God is the master in this story. The disciples are the servants. The world are the invitees. Everyone is invited. Then it is time for the follow-ups (v.17). But people are not ready. One by one they come up with lame excuses why they couldn’t come. One wanted to see a field (he could have done that when he bought it—v.18). Another wanted to try out his oxen (he should have done that before, too—v.19.) Another just got married (he didn’t think of bringing his new wife to the banquet—v.20). God views all excuses in the same way: “all alike” (v.18). The master was upset. He told the servants to find new people. He wanted a full house (v.23). In the same way, we must keep persevering when we invite people. We must follow up with old contacts. We must challenge their excuses. We must invite many new people.

3. The Cost of Being a Disciple. Luke 14:25-35. C: This is one of the most challenging passages in the Bible. Here Jesus says that we must “hate” our families and lives to be his disciples. This does **not** mean that we should go home after our baptisms and say, “Hi mom & dad. I hate you.” But it does mean that we should love Jesus so much more than everyone and everything else that by comparison, our love for other people and things looks like hatred compared to our love for God (Matthew 10:37-38). Verse 33 is super-challenging. A disciple must give up everything to follow Jesus.

Challenge: God didn’t accept the people’s excuses when he invited them to the great banquet. Follow up on at least 3 contacts, and challenge them to overcome their excuses and come on Sunday! And tell them about 21st Sept too! (Remember our goal of having 3 commitments each by Sunday 27th July.) Write their names:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Prayer: Pray that you will never make excuses in your Christian life. Pray for personal fruit by August 31st. Pray for the contacts that you wrote down above.

Day 18 (Fri)

The Generous Father

1. Lost Sheep and Coins. Luke 15:1-10. C: Jesus was spending time with sinners, and people criticised him (v.2). So he told two stories to show how much God loves the lost. He spoke about a shepherd with 100 sheep. This man leaves the 99 sheep to find the one lost sheep. He doesn't quit easily—he goes after it “until he finds it” (v.4). And when he finds it, he carries it home and celebrates (v.6). In the same way, God has a party in heaven whenever someone repents (v.7). The second story is about a lady with 10 coins. She loses one. But she keeps searching the house until she finds her lost coin. And she also celebrates when she finds it (v.10). That is how God feels about the lost. That is how we should feel, too. We must keep searching for the lost until God gives us a fruit. If one study bombs out, we should find someone else. If someone comes once, we must get them to come twice. We must follow up zealously, and invite people persuasively. God loves the lost; so we must also love them.

2. The Lost Son. Luke 15:11-24. C: Jesus told another parable to show God's love for the lost. There was a greedy son, who got his father to give him his inheritance even before the father died (vv.11-12). This boy went off and partied, wasting all the money his father had given him (v.13). Then he was in trouble, and he had to get a job feeding pigs. He sat in the mud with the pigs, discouraged and hungry (v.16). Finally, he decided to go back and apologise (vv.17-19). But his father was already waiting for him with open arms (v.20). That is how God welcomes the lost into the kingdom. He hugs them and forgets the past completely. The waters of baptism are the beginning of a new life of forgiveness and joy.

Q: Think about it. Are you like God, searching for lost souls in the fields? Are you ready to celebrate when people get baptised in your family group? Or are you worried about money, and having a comfortable life?

3. The Older Brother. Luke 15:25-32. C: The brother had a bad attitude about the party, because he felt that his father had noticed all of his hard work (v.29). He did not love his own brother, but called him “this son of yours” (v.30). So he missed the party because of his bad attitudes. The father pleaded with him to come inside. Q: Are you like the older brother, riddled with complaints and bad attitudes? Are you always thinking about how others have mistreated you? Do you get a bad attitude when you are not mentioned in the sermons? Have you been thanking God for your salvation lately? Have you thanked the person who converted you lately? C: We must never forget the grace that God has shown us in allowing us to be saved.

Challenge/Prayer: Write a thank-you note to your father in heaven for having you back home and read it out to him.

18th July 1997

Dear Dad,

Day 19 (Sat) The Righteous Judge
CHILDREN'S MINISTRY FUN DAY

21st Sept: Salvation for Old Friends on You Depends

1. The Shrewd Manager. Luke 16:1-15. C: Jesus told an interesting parable here about a manager who was about to lose his job. Before he left the job, he called everyone who owed his boss money. He told them, "quick, come here. I'll cut your bill before I leave" (vv.5-7). This man would then have friends after he lost his job (v.4). In the same way, before we leave this world, we can help people cut their debts to God and be forgiven. Then when we go to heaven, we'll have a lot of friends (v.9). Our special contribution this year will bring souls to God. Jesus explained that we must choose between money and God. We can't serve both (v.13). Q: Who is #1 in your life? Is it your money and job, or is it God? Are you giving your contribution? Are you using your life to make disciples?

2. The Laws of God Can't Be Broken. Luke 16:16-18. C: Here Jesus reminds us that God's laws are eternal. The good news of the kingdom can't be changed. So we need to be serious in following them. In areas like divorce, we can't compromise. A disciple can't divorce and remarry, except in the case of adultery by his partner (Matthew 5:32).

3. Heaven and Hell. Luke 16:19-31. C: This parable is one of the scariest stories in the Bible. There was a poor disciple named Lazarus, who was so sick he had to beg for a living (v.20). A rich man totally ignored him, and lived in luxury every day (vv.20-21). The disciple went to heaven, the rich man went to hell. The rich man had a lovely burial. The disciple was probably just thrown into a pit (v.22). But in hell, the rich man longed for water. He was in agony. He could see heaven, but he couldn't touch it (v.23). He begged for mercy (v.24). But it was too late (v.26). And then he got evangelistic towards his brothers. He wanted someone to rise from the dead to warn them. But Abraham said that the Word of God was enough for them; he would not send someone from the dead to invite them (vv.29-31).

Think about it: seeing hell for one day would motivate a person more than all the sermons in the world combined.

Notes:

Challenge: Follow up on old friends today e.g. with cards, phonecalls. Include old school friends, in this country or overseas, former work colleagues, friends from ante-natal classes...

Prayer: Thank God for giving you the Bible.

Day 20 (Sun)

The Attitude of Gratitude

1. Forgive Again and Again. Luke 17:1-6. C: In verses 1-2, Jesus explained that we should never cause others to sin. And in vv.3-4, he tells us to challenge our brothers who sin, and forgive them when they repent. He says we must forgive again and again. This is hard, because if someone does not change, we feel that they have not really repented. In the world, if someone sins, then others will not challenge them directly. Instead, they will slander him behind his back. And they won't forgive him. But in the church, we openly confront anyone who we see is sinning. We do this not in frustration, but with Jesus' spirit of mercy in our hearts.

Hearing that they had to forgive, the apostles said, "increase our faith" (v.5). It takes trust in God to forgive people. It is hard to forgive those who have hurt us. Q: Is there anyone whom you have not yet forgiven? C: The time has come to forgive them.

2. Do Not Expect Thanks. Luke 17:7-10. C: Jesus tells a parable about a servant who was ploughing in the fields. When the servant came back, the master would not give him dinner. Instead, he would ask the servant to cook dinner for him! He would not thank the servant. It would be the servant's duty to take care of him. In the same way, when we serve God, or men, we should not expect thanks. We should do our duty. If you spend your life waiting for thank-yous, you'll be disappointed often and get very bitter.

3. Be Grateful. Luke 17:11-19. C: As Jesus travelled, ten leprosy patients met him. If you have ever met a leprosy patient, you know how bad the disease can be. It destroys the fingers, hands, toes and feet. It ruins the nose. It eventually causes blindness. Society rejects lepers and makes them live in colonies of their own. There were ten men with leprosy calling to Jesus, "have pity on us" (v.13). The world would not go near them. All of them were healed. But only one man decided to go back to Jesus. He fell at his feet to say, "thank you" (v.16). Jesus asked, "where are the other nine?" (v.17) Why didn't they come back?

Before you criticise them, think: have you said thank you to every one you should have done? For a present? For a challenge? For a sermon that helped you? To your parents for bringing you up? To your spouse? To people you see every day in the newspaper shop, those who work in the underground station you use every day? And have you thanked God for all your blessings, or are you like the nine lepers who forgot to say thanks because they had more important things to be doing?

4. The Coming of the Kingdom of God. Luke 17:20-31. C: People were asking when the kingdom of God would come (v.20). Jesus explained that the kingdom of God is within us and among us (v.21). He went on to explain that he would come back suddenly, like lightning (v.24) How much did people change in Sodom or in Noah's day when they were warned? Similarly, on judgement day, stocks will be bought and sold. Shops will be open. There will be weddings and parties. And Jesus will come back. Q: If he came back today, would you be ready? Would your family be ready? Would your neighbours and workmates be ready?

5. Don't Look Back. Luke 17:32-37. C: Jesus tells us to remember Lot's wife (v.32). She was fleeing from Sodom just as the angels were about to destroy it. She had been warned to not look back (Gen. 19:17), but she looked anyway, and became a pillar of salt. In the same way, we cannot look back at our old lives. We must flee from them and into God's kingdom. Q: Is there any sin in your old life that is calling you back? Is there any pleasure that you really miss? Are your worldly friends still pulling on you? Do you miss the success and the selfish ambition that you were chasing after?

Notes:

Challenge: Write about a storm you remember. And bring a visitor to Church!

Prayer: Thank God for all the great things he has done for you since your conversion.

Day 21 (Mon)

Victory through Persistent Prayer

“Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more...”

1. The Persistent Widow. Luke 18:1-8. Jesus liked telling stories about widows. A widow is also the focus of Jesus’ attention at the beginning of chapter 21. He often used them as examples to encourage them and to convict the marrieds and singles. We need to share about great examples too.

Our God loves us. He is far more generous than the judge. If we keep coming to him, he definitely will hear our prayers (v.7). Yet in v.8 Jesus asked, “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Even though God hears our prayers, very few of us truly believe. Q: Do you persevere in your prayers? Is there anything that you have been asking for day after day? Is there anything that you once prayed about, but now you have lost hope? We must keep on praying and not give up

Are you still praying for the recaptured dream you wrote down last Wed (Day 16)?

2. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Luke 18:9-14. C: This is a very convicting story. There were two men who went to pray. One was religious, like us. He gave 10% contribution, like we should also give (v.12). He fasted twice a week (more than most of us). The other man was a sinful tax collector. He knew he needed forgiveness. He simply looked down and prayed, “God have mercy on me, a sinner” (v.13). Q: As you look at these two men, which of them is more like you? Are you humble before God, confessing your sins and begging for his mercy? Or are you proud, looking down upon others?

3. The Little Children and Jesus. Luke 18:15-17. C: People kept bringing babies to Jesus. The disciples did not like this. Babies are messy. They drool, they cry and moan. Yet Jesus loved babies. The disciples were harsh. But Jesus explained that the kingdom of God was made for those who are like children. In fact, to enter the kingdom of God, we must behave like little children.

C: Sometimes we as adults can be very insensitive to the needs of children. Q: Have you been involved in the childcare of the church? Are you giving when you go there? Do you try to teach the kids about God? Or do you simply endure your weeks of service? How do you feel about the children of other Christians? Do you baby-sit for them? Do you hug the kids and reach out to them? Or do you ignore them, leaving all the loving to the sisters? What about with your own kids? Are you being spiritual with them? Do they have a friendship with you, or are they only afraid of you?

4. The Rich Young Ruler. Luke 18:18-30. Jesus asked this man to sell his possessions and give to the poor. Then he could follow Jesus (v.22). But this was too much for the young man. He went away sad.

C: The disciples were amazed. They must have thought to themselves, “Why is Jesus letting this sharp guy get away? He would be a great member for our group. He could give a lot of contribution.” But Jesus did not want half of this guy’s heart. He wanted 100%. Jesus explained that when we give up everything for God, we receive many times as much back from God in this life (v.30), and eternal life in the age to come (v.30). Q: Is there anything in your life that you are unwilling to give up for God? C: If there is, you must give it up today.

Challenge: Write down the name of one baby or pre-teen child you can encourage. It could be a child in your neighbourhood, or a child you can fellowship this midweek.

Notes:

Prayer: When you pray today, beat your breast with godly sorrow today about sin, and fall on God’s mercy, like the tax collector.

1. Zacchaeus the Tax Collector. Luke 19:1-10. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. Many other tax collectors worked under him. These men often were corrupt, cheating the people and accepting bribes from the people. Worse than that, they had contact with Gentiles, even were the tools of Gentile oppression of the Jews as they collected taxes from their fellow Jews to hand over to the Romans.

How many reference to tax collectors can you find in the book of Luke? Remember Luke is the gospel of the outsider. Why does Luke include so many reference to them? Are they generally his villains or heroes? What does this tell you about Jesus?

In v. 5, Jesus called Zacchaeus by name. How did he know his name? It could have been by direct inspiration. But generally Jesus did not use his powers this way. How else might he have known who Zacchaeus was? Where might he have met him before? (5:27-29) But he wasn't open then.

Read Leviticus 6:1-7 for the legal requirements for cheats wanting to repent. What can you tell about Zacchaeus' repentance from v.8? Matthew (formerly Levi) was Jesus on this journey. How do you think he felt about someone from his old profession making it? Do you have vision for your workmates to change like this? Dream a little...

2.. The Parable of the Ten Minas. Luke 19:11-27. C: This story is about God and the church. He has left us after the time of Jesus. He will come back. He left us in charge of the church. He has given each of us opportunities to make the church grow. If we do not take these opportunities, he will not be happy. It is important to remember that our purpose as disciples is to make new disciples. Let's make sure that we are being faithful with the serious responsibility God has given us.

N.B. When Jesus met Zacchaeus, he was passing through Jericho. Where was he going to? Was he going to come back? This was Last Chance Saloon for Zac! Likewise, do not wait around to evangelise at your workplace. Be intense about building up relationships, inviting them, and have a plan. You never know when they or you might move on. And you are almost certainly their best opportunity to be saved, and possibly their last.

In v. 28 Jesus arrives at Jerusalem and starts the final week of his life. This will be the scene for the final part of the Victory Story which we will start studying out the day after tomorrow.

Notes:

Challenge: Invite someone at work today to "Dare to Dream."

Prayer: Pray for at least 10 people at your work-place (or all of them if there are less than 10). If they say yes, make sure you put them on your follow-up chart for the "Dare to Dream" service.

"I do not like the atmosphere I find here. It is an atmosphere of doubt, of looking back to select the next place to which to withdraw, of loss of confidence in our ability to defeat Rommel... All that must cease. Let us have a new atmosphere....Here we will stand and fight; there will be no further withdrawal. I have ordered that all plans and instructions dealing with further withdrawal are to be burnt at once.

I understand there has been a great deal of belly-aching out here. By "belly-aching" I mean inventing poor reasons for not doing what one has been told to do. All this is to stop at once. I will tolerate no belly-aching. If anyone objects to doing what he has been told, then he can get out of it; and at once."

Day 23 (Wed)

The Road to Victory

Let's back-track for a day.

"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."

Luke 9:51. One of Luke's themes is Jesus' road to victory. He travelled there via Jerusalem and the grisly Place of the Skull, where he was crucified. Satan tried to keep him from this road in the temptation in chapter 4. He tempted him to leave the appointed path to Jerusalem, to persuade him that God's will lay in self-indulgence and self-glorification through miracles, to get down from his physical cross (through the mouths of the rulers 23:35) and even to do a deal with Satan! (4:6)

Read the following verses, tracing his journey from the villages of Galilee to his arrival in triumph at the gates of Jerusalem.

Luke 9:51 (above), 9:57, 10:1, 13:22, 13:33, 17:11, 18:31, 19:1, 19:28, 19:41

Record your impressions of Jesus, his handling of conflict and even his own fears along the way. What strikes you? Did he try to avoid his cross?

What progress have you made this year in your spiritual life? Is there a character weakness or sin that you are just not overcoming? Is your ministry growing and changing? Have you settled for mediocrity? **Settling for mediocrity is entering a truce with Satan himself.** We are in a war against Satan, and our spiritual blood must be spilt along the way if we are to follow God's road to victory for us.

In World War II, the road from Normandy to Berlin, from D-Day to VE Day was a long and bloody road. Hitler did not give up any of his dominions lightly. The Allies' resolve was tested all the way. How much blood, sweat, toil, tears and human life could have been saved if they had simply let Hitler keep Europe or even just Germany and had a peace. The Germans were and are a great people. However, Nazism which controlled their thinking was evil. The Allies were dedicated to stamping the evil of Nazism out in Europe. Consider the determination in the following quotes:

"We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us: to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, What is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory - victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival."

Churchill also warned against neutrality with Hitler: *"Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last."* When we do not aggressively fight sin, we are allowing the crocodile Satan to live on. If he lives on long enough, he will come back and eat us.

Who has more conviction: Churchill about Hitler, or you about Satan?

Challenge: Write down one thing you have been tempted to give up on in your spiritual life. It could be weight, timidity, a relationship, quality Bible study or fruitlessness. Resolve to attack this area of your life today and talk to someone about what you intend to do about it. *(And don't forget to fellowship a child in midweek!)*

Prayer: Pray with indignation about what Satan is doing in the U.K., in our schools, through our newspapers, through music and in the lives of those who have left the Lord.

Part IV

VICTORY THROUGH SURRENDER

You could tell from the nature of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem that this would be no ordinary king. His destiny was Calvary, and death. Here was where his greatest victory would be won. That is why the crucifixion occupies such a large part of each of the four gospels. Jesus was not here as a teacher or prophet, but as a personal sacrifice. His finest hour was the hour of his death, when he submitted to his Father's will. In this moment of surrender lay his crowning victory.

Day 24 (Thurs) The Triumphal Entry

1. The Triumphal Entry. Luke 19:28-40. Here we see Jesus coming to claim the worship and welcome of his people (20:13) Yet instead of a welcome, he walks into a showdown. In v. 40, Jesus said if the disciples kept quiet, the stones would cry out. Imagine what that would have been like!!

2. Weeping for Jerusalem. Luke 19:41-44. C: As Jesus entered the city, he started to cry. He was not thinking of the buildings, but of all the lost souls in that city (vv.41-42). Jesus loved the lost so much that he wept for them. Q: When was the last time you cried for someone other than yourself? Have you ever wept for the lost around you?

C: Jesus was especially upset because he knew that one day (in 70 AD) the Romans would attack and destroy this city (v.43). He predicted this as a sign of God's judgement against them, because they had not recognised God's messiah, Jesus Christ.

3. Jesus at the Temple. Luke 19:45-48. C: Jesus could not stand religious hypocrisy. It made him sick. Religion should help people, not extort them.. If Jesus came to the religious world today, he would be sick too. Denominations invest their congregations' money in property deals, golf-course and yachting marinas. Leaders offer to pray for you in return for donations, they sell miracle-cloths, package deals to "holy places" and religious accessories. It is all a money-making racket to them. It all makes Jesus sick.

4. Jesus is interrupted. Luke 20:1-47. From chapter 19 and on into this chapter, we see several different groups trying to intimidate Jesus or make him look foolish. (19:39, 19:47, 20:1, 20:19, 20:20, 20:27) Jesus was always being attacked by religious people who wanted to argue with him. But he never wasted his time arguing. Instead, he just kept on helping people. And he gave his attackers great answers that really made them think. He cared about the city. He was not into looking good or winning arguments to put people down. Looking through this chapter, how did Jesus handle the interruptions?

In the Parable of the Tenants (Luke 20:9-19) the religious leaders were very upset because they knew that Jesus had told this story about them (v.19). Today's world is the same. If Jesus came today he would be murdered by the religious leaders, with help from the politicians.

Notes:

Challenge: We are sending teams to our cities because they are so lost. Jesus cried over Jerusalem. In the brothers' classes this week we will be encouraged to fast for the mission teams to Oxford and Cardiff. Let's all do this one day this week. Ask God to soften your heart as you fast and see the lost with Jesus' eyes.

Prayer: Pray for the lost people of your country. Imagine their pain, and try to cry for them like Jesus did.

Day 25 (Fri)

The Widow's Might or The Widow's Mite?

1. The Widow's Offering. Luke 21:1-4. C: Again, Jesus loves a widow. Why did he say she gave more? In the same way, it does not matter if you are rich or poor; God looks at our sacrifice when we give to him. In the Old Testament, people gave at least a tenth (10%) of their income to God (Malachi 3:10). God expects us to do the same, or more. Q: How much are you giving to God? Are you more worried about your debts, your family, your expenses, than you are about God? Are you trusting God and giving? C: At the end of this quiet time, we will ask you to write down a pledge for your regular monthly contribution and let your discipler know what it is. You should plan to give what you promise in this pledge starting in August, 1997.

This passage is sometimes called "The Widow's Mite." "Mite" means a tiny coin. This widow probably never knew she made it into the pages of the Bible, or even that the Messiah had seen her. But she has inspired more sacrifice among disciples than any other person apart from Jesus! When you take a stand against materialism and sacrifice, you feel great! This widow was stronger than many men are.

2. The Destruction of Jerusalem: God is With Us. Luke 21:5-19. C: The disciples were looking at the beautiful stones of the temple (v.5). Jesus explained that this temple would be destroyed one day (v.6). The disciples asked, "when will this happen?" Jesus explained that there will be wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines, and plagues before the destruction of the temple (vv.8-11). In the years before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, all of these things happened. There were terrible wars and suffering in all of Israel.

3. The Destruction of Jerusalem is Near. Luke 21:20-33. C: Jesus warned the Christians to flee the city at a certain time (v.21). In fact, the historian Josephus tells us that the Christians listened to these warnings and escaped from Jerusalem before the Romans destroyed it.

4. Do Not Get Overwhelmed. Luke 21:34-38. C: Life provides us many reasons to get emotionally overwhelmed: • sickness of loved ones • lack of money to pay bills • break-up of relationships • people don't become Christians • people we love move away • family pressure • failure in exams or work • marriage stress. Q: What is burdening you right now? Have you ever been tempted to commit suicide? Do you believe that God will help you overcome your problems? Have you talked about your burdens with a brother or sister? C: Make sure you pray about your feelings, and talk about them with Christians who are close to you. No matter what you feel, Jesus will help you overcome!

C: Each day Jesus spent teaching, and each night he spent on the Mount of Olives, undoubtedly praying as well as sleeping (v.37). And then again in the morning, people came to hear him preach in the temple. Jesus did not spend the last days of his life enjoying the pleasures of this world, but in preaching as much as he could. Q: What would you do if you only had a few days left to live? Would you live as Jesus did?

Challenge: The widow gave sacrificially to God. Write down in this quiet time book a pledge to God about how much you will give him every month. Tell your discipler your pledge, and plan to start giving this amount every month starting in August.

Pledge:

Other notes:

Prayer: Verse 34 talks about the anxieties of life. Pray about everything that you are worried about.

Day 26 (Sat)

Surrender Personal Interests

“A nation at war is at peace with itself.”

1. Judas Agrees to Betray Jesus. Luke 22:1-6. C: Jesus’ own disciple Judas went to the chief priests and offered to betray him for money. He did not expect that they would kill Jesus, and so later when Jesus was sentenced to die, Judas felt guilty and killed himself (Matthew 27:1-10). C: What started out in greed for money ended up in the destruction of Judas’ life.

2. Jesus Prepares a Special Supper. Luke 22:7-13. C: As usual, Jesus wanted everything to be perfect for him and his disciples, so he sent Peter and John to prepare their last meal together (v.8). He gave them specific instructions about where to go, who to meet, and how to prepare the meal (vv.10-12). When we organise events for others, we must be sure to think about the details. We must think: how many people will come? Will there be children? How should we decorate the place? How can we make people feel special? C: Jesus really wanted people to feel special. We also should make sure that we make those we are close to feel special.

3. Jesus Breaks Bread for the Last Time. Luke 22:14-23. C: Jesus sat at the table with his disciples. He told them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you” (v.15). He wanted them to feel close to him. He wanted them to always remember this time. Whenever you feel spiritually down, remember Jesus. His memory will lift you up!

4. Jesus Was a Servant. Luke 22:24-30. The disciples could not see the spiritual war going on. And so even at the last supper they were arguing! Sometimes we in the church squabble with each other about stupid things. In peace-time, the Army, Navy and Air Force fight each other. At war, they fight together. When the Gulf War began, crime fell in the U.S.A.! The criminals were all busy watching CNN! Let’s heal old wounds and be united!

5. Jesus Prayed Before the Cross. Luke 22:31-46. C: In verses 31-32, we see that Jesus specifically prayed for his disciple Simon Peter. He prayed that Simon’s faith would not fail. In the same way, we should specifically pray for others in the church. Not just, “Lord, be with _____,” but rather, “God help _____ to find a job within 10 days, and help his mother be happy with him, and solve his money problems through a gift from a relative.” Specific prayers are heard and answered by God.

6. Jesus Arrested and Disowned. Luke 22:47-62. C: Jesus was arrested by a crowd. It must have been frightening to be captured by a crowd of people. It must have hurt so bad to see his own disciple betraying him. But still, Jesus did not get angry. Verse 54 explains that “Peter followed at a distance” behind Jesus. Then Peter denied Jesus 3 times. When we follow Jesus “at a distance,” we will eventually leave him when the pressure increases. Q: Have you been following Jesus closely? Or are you starting to be like Peter, following Jesus, but at a distance? Have you been missing meetings? Keeping secrets from the Christians? Feeling small attitudes? Committing old sins again? Not coming to evangelise? Not sitting in on studies? C: If so, you are following at a distance, and it is time to change. We see in v.61 that Jesus heard Peter deny him and looked straight at him. That must have hurt Jesus a lot, since Peter was his close friend. Perhaps you have overheard someone slandering you. It hurts. Yet Jesus was willing to forgive Peter.

7. Jesus Beaten and Accused. Luke 22:63-71. C: We see Jesus being publicly spit on and beaten here. They mocked him and accused him. This is the same man who had spent 3 years healing and teaching people. But in his hour of need, there was no one who stood by his side to help him.

Notes:

Challenge: Plan well a meal or other hospitality for someone you get with today.

Prayer: Pray for people who feel guilty to be open, and be open yourself.

“...I would make three resolutions to support me through whatever was to come: no regrets, no false sentimentality, no self-pity.”

1. Jesus Unites Evil People. Luke 23:1-12. Verse 8 says that Herod had been waiting for a chance to see Jesus (Luke 9:9, Luke 13:31-35), but Jesus had not wasted his time. Now he and his soldiers mocked and ridiculed Jesus, dressing him in an elegant robe (v.11). Before this time, Herod the king and Pilate the governor had been enemies; now they became friends (v.12). Evil people unite in the face of Jesus' righteousness. Even in your life, sometimes you will see people who formerly had been enemies becoming friends because of their common opposition to your faith.

2. Pilate Lets the Crowd Make His Decision. Luke 23:13-25. C Pilate wanted to release him (v.16). But the crowd demanded that Jesus be killed, and the murderer be released (vv.18-19). Pilate tried to release Jesus again (v.20). But the people kept shouting (v.21). When someone is wrong, they will get angry and start shouting louder. Perhaps you have seen this in your home, or at work, or in your neighbourhood. Whoever gets angriest usually gets their way. Pilate gave in to the crowd here. The crowd made his decision for him! He liked Jesus, but he did not have the guts to stand up for him. Sometimes people want to follow Jesus, but their family, friends, or boss tries to stop them. Instead of standing up for the truth, they give in to fear, and they don't become Christians. This is so sad. Q: Think about your life. Are you standing up for Jesus? Or are you letting people intimidate you and control your spiritual life?

3. Jesus Doesn't Feel Sorry for Himself. Luke 23:26-33. C: Jesus was on his way to the cross. He could not carry it himself (John 19:17 says he carried it for a while, but this passage says Simon of Cyrene carried it at the end), so they gave the cross to a man passing by (v.26). Many women felt sorry for him and cried out (v.27). Jesus did not feel sorry for himself. He told the women not to cry for him (v.28), but to cry for themselves. What do you think the women saw that made them cry so much?

Even as he hung on the cross for six hours one Friday, he did not feel sorry for himself. We feel sorry for ourselves when we are too busy, something breaks or someone hurts our feelings. Jesus never fell into self-pity, even at the hardest moments of his life.

4. Jesus Forgives Even Criminals. Luke 23:34-43. C: As he hung on the cross, Jesus uttered the words that showed he is the Son of God: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (v.34). These words show the tremendous grace and love of our God. If it was you or me on the cross, we would probably be cursing or complaining. But Jesus was so patient and forgiving. Tomorrow we will spend more time focussing on the thieves on the cross.

5. Jesus Dies With Dignity. Luke 23:44-49. C: Jesus died as he had lived, full of courage and dignity. He prayed to God and offered God his spirit (v.46). The Roman centurion who saw Jesus die was convinced that Jesus was a righteous man (v.47). Others watch you when you are going through hard times - and your example can make the difference!

6. Joseph Takes Care of Jesus' Dead Body. Luke 23:50-56. C: Joseph was a Pharisee, but he had not agreed to the killing of Jesus (vv.50-51). He asked for Jesus' body and put it in his own tomb (v.53). This took courage, because Jesus' murderers might also turn on him. But he wanted to do the right thing.

Notes:

Challenge: Have a visitor with you at Church to hear about Jesus' death.

Prayer: Pray about the Centurion, the thieves, Joseph, Pilate, Simon and the women and what you can learn from them.

Day 28 (Mon)

Too Small a Price (Luke 23:39-43)

I woke to hear the jailer turn the key and push the door,
“Get out of here” he shouted, but I stayed there on the floor,
Frozen in the terror - it rose and filled my brain,
I knew what they intended - I could not face the pain

Then soldiers came into the cell and dragged me to the yard,
They threw me down before a cross and brought the whip down hard,
“Carry it!” they shouted as I struggled to my feet,
I put my shoulder under it and dragged it through the street.

I stumbled through a wall of screams as they drove me through the gate,
It seemed that thousands lined the streets their voices filled with hate,
Like a wolf-pack in the night that moves in for the kill
They closed the gap behind us as we stumbled up the hill.

Then it seemed I’d barely reached the top when they grabbed me from behind,
They threw the cross down under me and tied the ropes that bind
The arms close to the beams as they nailed my feet and hands,
Then they raised the cross up in the air and dropped it in its stand.

Though a blur of pain I saw the cross there next to mine,
There were people all around it so I looked to read the sign,
It was nailed there up above his head so the world could see the news,
That the man who seemed so helpless there was the “KING OF ALL
THE JEWS”.

And the crowd that stood around his cross made jokes about his name,
They shouted, laughed and spat on him so I joined in the game.
I said “Hey, if you’re the King, why don’t you get us down from here?”
But the taunt sounded hollow. It echoed in my ear.

As he looked at me with eyes that seemed to reach into my heart,
They shone a light on all my lies and tore my life apart,
There was more that lay behind that gaze than simply blood and clay,
And that knowing was too much for me - I had to look away.

But I chanced another look at him while he was looking down,
Where the soldiers who’d just crucified us drank there on the ground,
And although he spoke them quietly, somehow his words came through,
He said “Father, please forgive them for they don’t know what they do.”

Then as if they’d heard him speaking the crowd began to roar,
Whipped to frenzy by the priests who urged them on to more,
But the worse the accusations now the plainer I could see
The guilt of the accusers, not of the one there next to me.

But the man upon the other cross began to curse and swear,
And his voice was filled with venom as he hurled it through the air,
All the horror that was in him and had laid his life to waste
Came out in every syllable he flung in Jesus face.

Jesus only looked at him - but something rose inside of me,
In spite of all that was taking place it was clear for me to see
His righteousness and innocence were shining bright and strong
And I just couldn't keep my silence when that cursing still went on,

I cried out, "Don't you fear the wrath of God even at the end?
Will you curse us both into the pit, is that you intend?
We're only getting what we're due, we've sinned our whole lives long,
But don't you talk to him that way 'cos he's done nothing wrong!"

Then with all my courage in a voice not quite my own,
I asked him "Lord, remember me when you come into your throne,"
He answered me, and even then his love was undisguised,
He said, "Before the sun has set today you'll be with me in paradise."

The shouts and curses did not stop even when the sunlight ceased,
But somehow in the midst of it my soul had been released,
And though the agony continued, it was still too small a price,
To be allowed to hear those words and to die beside the Christ.

The darkness changed to morning and I heard the sound of voices,
The air was warm around me; I stood beside a stream,
And Abraham was speaking to the multitudes before him
The unfolding of the answer to our prayers, hopes and dreams,

When far across the chasm came a rumbling like the thunder,
And the Prince of Peace came shining - from his mouth the power
streamed!
And the walls and towers crumbled and the gates of hell went under,
As thousands sang the victory, " We have been redeemed!

JESUS IS THE LORD OF LORDS, JESUS IS THE LORD OF LORDS
JESUS IS THE LORD OF LORDS, WE HAVE BEEN REDEEMED."

Challenge: Write down who you are most looking forward to seeing in heaven.

Prayer: Pray about Jesus' suffering on the cross, thanking God for what he did for us.

Day 30 (Wed)

He's back like he said!

1. Jesus Kept His Word. Luke 24:1-12. C: Early on the first day of the week, Sunday morning, the women went to Jesus' tomb (v.1). They found the stone rolled away, and the body missing (vv.2-3). Just as Jesus had promised them, he had raised up from the grave! In the same way, Jesus has made many promises to us. He will keep each one of them! Some promises he will keep: • abide in Jesus and we'll bear much fruit (John 15:1-8) • seek God first and he'll take care of you (Matthew 6:33) • be pure and you'll see God (Matthew 5:8) • ask in Jesus' name and he will hear (John 14:14) • give something up for God and we'll receive 100 times as much back (Mark 10:28-31). Jesus keeps his word.

2. On the Road to Emmaus. Luke 24:13-24. C: Two disciples were talking about Jesus, who "was a prophet, powerful in word and deed" (v.19). They were disappointed that he had been killed (v.20). They had hoped that he would save Jerusalem (v.21) Sometimes we are like these men. We thought that coming to the church would make everything great in our lives. But then things do not go as we had planned, and we are disappointed. But we do not realise that sometimes God's plans are different from our plans. We must be patient. If we do what is right, in the end God will bless us.

3. Rebuked by Jesus. Luke 24:25-35. C: Jesus listened to these men. He saw their lack of faith. He saw their refusal to believe in the resurrection, even though they had known about it from the women and he himself had predicted it. He challenged them, "how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe..." (v.25). How would you have felt if you had been one of these disciples at the supper table the moment the truth dawned - that "he was back like he said"?

C: Perhaps you can remember a time that you came to church, and you heard the gospel preached. Maybe someone studied the Bible with you powerfully. And your heart was burning inside you. You were so fired up! You knew that this was the truth. Yet today this feeling no longer burns in your heart. It is time to get that burning feeling back! Jesus has been raised from the dead! He **can** do miracles in our lives. The future can be much brighter than the past. But we must believe, and follow him with all our hearts.

4. Jesus Appears to the Disciples. Luke 24:36-43. Do you have any relatives who have died? If you saw one of them again, would you know it? Would you be able to tell if you had really seen them, or it was just a hallucination? What if you had a meal with them, and they ate something?! Something convinced the disciples beyond all doubt. Jesus was back like he said. Really back. He had been raised from the dead! That is why these men spent the rest of their lives in poverty, preaching about him until they, too, were killed for the gospel. And that is why we also must follow Jesus to the end. Christianity is not a legend. It is a real religion based on true historical events.

5. Jesus Opens Their Minds. Luke 24:44-53. C: Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand the Bible (v.45). In verses 50-51, Jesus blessed them and then rose into heaven. They were filled with joy, and they continually stayed at the temple, praising God (vv.52-53).

C: Our Christian lives should be filled with joy and excitement, because we realise the truth about Jesus Christ. He has been raised from the dead, and in our generation the gospel is being preached to all nations again! Let us believe in him, and join him in his great mission.

Challenge: Many times our hopes are disappointed by circumstances. Write down 3 things you had hoped for that have not yet occurred in your Christian life.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Prayer: Now pray specifically that God will bless you by granting each of the 3 items you have written above.

Day 31 (Thurs) England expects...

“England expects every man will do his duty.”

“Ordinary people can accomplish the extraordinary through the power of God.”

The Sequel. Acts 1:2-8. The Victory Story does not end with Luke 24:53. Acts is the sequel to Luke’s gospel, written by the same author to the same man, Theophilus. Jesus finished his earthly task and returned to heaven, with Elijah the only man we read about ascending to heaven in this way. However, his victory was not the end of the story. It was only the end of a crucial chapter. He gave us an example to follow and a message to preach, that God had reconciled the world to himself through the cross so that now all men could be saved. The story that began in the Garden of Eden was only now reaching its most exciting part. God is the master of language. As he multiplied languages to destroy man’s unity in Genesis 11, here in Acts he gave the apostles languages, so that all men could hear the gospel and be united again in Jesus Christ. Abraham’s seed had come: but the blessing had yet to spread to “all peoples on earth” (Gen 12:3).

The Victory Story had many crucial chapters to run. There were just 120 believers (Ac 1:15) in an occupied corner of the Roman Empire. They possessed no written record of Jesus’ teachings. They were uninfluential and academically unimpressive (Ac 4:13). They had a catalogue of personal defeats, lack of faith and rebukes from the lips of the Lord to remind them of their weaknesses.

- Their only possessions: the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of Jesus.
- Their mission: the ends of the earth.
- The plan: every disciple to be Jesus’ witness.

Truly, every man was needed. And the ordinary accomplished the extraordinary through the power of God. Today, the call is the same. Collectively, to go to the ends of the earth to so that every human being can hear the gospel in this generation. With the World Sectors in place, we in the U.K. are not primarily concerned with China, Brazil or the United States. If we can evangelise the British Isles in our lifetime, the Indian churches evangelise India, the Middle East World Sector evangelise the Middle East, and so on, we will see the Victory Story spread all over the world and the world be won for Christ in our generation..

This chapter is still to be written for future generations, if God’s will is for them to be. Every single disciple in the London church is called to witness for Jesus every day, to come to all the services, to have daily Quiet Times, to stay pure sexually, to sacrifice financially and to love one another.

**Then we will all make it to heaven, “and the saying that is written will come true:
“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting.”

**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God!
He always gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”
I Corinthians 15:54-58

Notes:

Challenge: This starts with bringing someone to Church this Sunday!

Prayer: Pray for the evangelization of everyone in your country in your lifetime

***“This is not the end,
it is not even the beginning of the end.
It is perhaps the end of the beginning.”***

Winston S. Churchill

***“you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and to the ends of the earth.”***

Acts 1:8

***“Do not be terrified;
do not be discouraged,
for the Lord your God will be with you
wherever you go.”***

Joshua 1:9

VICTORY STORY

Source of quotes

Part I

- Day 2 Choice, Ronald Dunn, "Don't just stand there, pray something!" p.188
Day 4 Julius Caesar, 44BC
Day 6 From "IF", by Rudyard Kipling
Day 7 From "Jesus", author unknown
Day 8 Lord Byron, 1788 - 1824
Day 9 General Montgomery to Eighth army before Alamein, 13th August 1942

Part II

- Day 11 Setbacks: Douglas Arthur, British Commonwealth WSL, Washington D.C.
Day 12 Life: Sir William Wallace in the film Braveheart
Learning: Winston Churchill
Day 14 Edmund Burke, Ireland, 1729 -97
Day 16 U-turn, Hounding: Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister 1979 - 1991,
first woman P.M. in Europe

Part III

- Day 19 Beaches: Churchill 4th June 1940 to House of Commons
Day 19 Horatio, Lord Nelson, 1758 - 1805
Day 21 Shakespeare, Henry V, Act III Sc 1
Day 22 Montgomery, Alamein speech above
Day 23 Victory: Churchill, to House of Commons 13th May 1940

Part IV

- Day 26 Unknown
Day 27 Terry Waite, Taken on Trust
Day 28 Too Small a Price, by Don Francisco
Day 31 Duty: Horatio, Lord Nelson, 22nd Oct 1805, the day of Trafalgar and his own death
Extraordinary: Kip McKean, ICC International Missions Evangelist, L.A
Beginning: Churchill on the Battle of Egypt 1942

In using quotes from secular sources, we are following Paul's example e.g. quoting from Epiminides (a non-Christian) in his letter to Titus, without attempting in any way to condone the lifestyle or the military activity surrounding such quotes. Like Paul, we believe we can be inspired and learn many great things from contemporary and historical writers and speakers to apply to our spiritual lives.

JG

First Forty Days Quiet Time Series

Congratulations! You have made the most important decision of your life and chosen to serve God as a disciple of Jesus Christ. God created you for this purpose and you have now begun your new life as his child.

Your new challenge is to *“Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:12)*. Just as Jesus was tempted for forty days immediately after his baptism, Satan will begin his spiritual attack on your Christian life right away. These first forty days are perhaps the most crucial for your spiritual growth. Jesus knew how to fight Satan – with *“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17)*.

Now is the time for you to sharpen your sword and learn how to use the Bible to strengthen you in your relationship with God. Many people have helped you get to this point, and you must continue to stay close to disciples. But now, you must learn to find your strength in God, listening to his Word, obeying his voice through the scriptures, walking with him and finding the strength only he can give.

Here are some practical suggestions for using this booklet:

1. **Use a Notebook.** You won’t remember most of what you read, but you will remember more if you write it down. It will also help you make decisions and you can review your progress. Mark your Bible and any references you use.
2. **Be Consistent.** If you develop the habit of having quiet times at a regular time in a regular place, it will help you form a spiritual character.
3. **Be Creative.** Don’t just do the same thing in your quiet time each day. Use variety in what you read, where you pray, what order you read and pray, use outside books, etc.

DAY ONE: "Saved Completely"

What God has done for you through your baptism into Christ is truly AMAZING!

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

1. What was your relationship with God before today?

2. What had you done to make God your enemy?

3. What does it mean to be holy/without blemish/free from accusation?

4. What condition is there to staying saved (vs. 23)?

1 JOHN 3:1-4

1. As a "child of God", what should your attitude be?

2. How can you begin to "purify yourself"?

HEBREWS 9:24-28/ HEBREWS 10:19-23

1. What has Jesus' sacrifice done for you?

2. How can you draw near to God with a sincere heart?

PSALM 103:1-5

1. What has God done with your sins?

2. Write other "benefits" God has done for you (vs. 2).

APPLICATION: Praise God and thank him for saving you! Write a thank you prayer to God. Keep it in a special place to re-read later.

DAY TWO: "Tested and Tempted"

MATTHEW 3:16-4:11

1. What happened to Jesus after his baptism? What should you expect after your baptism?

2. How was Jesus tempted to question his relationship with God? God's plan for him?

3. How has Satan tempted you with doubts/insecurity/fears since your baptism?

4. How did Jesus use the Bible to fight temptation? How does the Bible expose Satan's lies? _____

EPHESIANS 6:10-18

1. How might the devil scheme against you?

2. What armor has God provided to keep you strong?

3. What is our only "weapon" against Satan (vs. 17)?

APPLICATION: Expect to be tempted and decide to be open about your struggles. Talk with another Christian today about your temptations and pray together.

DAY THREE: "Growing Roots"

LUKE 8:13

1. What happens to young disciples who don't grow roots?

ACTS 2:41-47/ACTS 4:32-37

1. What helped to keep these young disciples faithful?

2. Are you devoting yourself to the same things they did (2:42)?

3. How can you deepen your relationships in the church?

THESSALONIANS 1:2-10

1. What does it mean to have "deep conviction"? How can you develop conviction?

2. Who should you imitate? In what ways?

3. Are you becoming a "model" to others? How?

APPLICATION: Spend time this week with Christians you can imitate/encourage/learn from.

DAY FOUR: "Learning to Pray"

LUKE 11:1-13

1. Why does prayer need to be learned? Who are you learning from?

2. (vs. 2-4) How can you praise God's name? Do you pray for God's kingdom (church) to increase? Do you pray for daily needs and for forgiveness for yourself and to also forgive others? Do you pray for help and protection from temptations?

3. What else does Jesus want us to understand about prayer from verses 5-13?

A.C.T.S. - a simple outline for prayer is: Adoration (praise), Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication (requests). If you pray 10 minutes of each section, you will pray a powerful 40 minutes! Read the Psalms to learn how to really praise God.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

1. What does God want you to pray about?

2. What are some worries you can pray about today?

3. Do you feel at peace when you pray to God? Trust he will answer! _____

APPLICATION: Pray following the Lord's prayer outline or using A.C.T.S. Write down some of your prayer requests and see how God answers them.

Prayer Requests:

DAY FIVE: "The Grace of God"

ROMANS 5:6-11

1. How were you powerless when Christ died for you?

2. What proves God's incredible love for you?

TITUS 3:3-8/TITUS 2:11-14

1. Why do we need to be reminded about our old way of life?

2. What did you do to earn God's forgiveness?

3. How should you respond to the grace of God?

4. Describe how you can be self-controlled and eager to do good works.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-10 / 1 TIMOTHY 1:7-12

How did Paul show his gratitude to God?

APPLICATION: Write down (and do) 3 things today that will show God how grateful you are to be saved!

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DAY SIX: "Too Good to Keep"

2 KINGS 7:3-11

1. How were you starving and without hope like the 4 lepers before being baptized?

2. How is the kingdom of God like an unlimited feast?

3. How does verse 9 apply to being a disciple? Do you have the same attitude?

ROMANS 10:1-4/14-21

1. Do you feel like Paul does about the lost?

2. Who does God send to preach?

3. Will everyone accept the good news? Why?

4. Why is it important to preach no matter what response you receive?

PSALM 116:1-14

How can you repay the Lord for all his goodness to you?

APPLICATION: Set a "goal of faith" for yourself in evangelism today. Refuse to be discouraged!

GOAL: _____

DAY SEVEN: The Family of God"

MARK 3:31-33

1. Why did Jesus have to make a choice between his physical and spiritual family?

2. Who are the people you are closest to? What choices do you have to make? Are God's people REALLY your family?

1 PETER 1:22

1. What is "sincere love"? How can you love deeply, from the heart?

2. Who have you loved this much in your life before? How does your love for the disciples need to grow?

2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-17

1. What are some worldly ways you have looked at people before?

2. How do you need to change your way of seeing people? (Be specific)

1 TIMOTHY 5:1-12

Who are some people in your ministry that can become like spiritual "fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters" in your life?

APPLICATION: This week schedule time to spend with two Christians that you have not spent time with before.

1. Person _____ Date _____

2. Person _____ Date _____

DAY EIGHT: "The Hope of Glory"

1 CORINTHIANS 15:19

1. Why does your hope in Christ go beyond this earthly life?

2. Why are we as Christians to be pitied if there is no eternal life?

1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-58

1. What is the mystery Paul tells us (vs.51)?

2. Why do we normally fear death - and why should we no

longer be afraid of dying?

3. Why should we work for the Lord? What will happen when we give ourselves completely?

COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

1. When were you raised with Christ?

2. What should you be thinking about from now on?

3. What things should you stop thinking about so much?

APPLICATION: Think for a while about what heaven will be like. And don't forget to thank God every day for the opportunity to go to heaven!

DAY NINE: "Trials of Many Kinds"

JAMES 1:2-8

1. Why does God allow us to go through trials?

2. What should your attitude be about going through trials?

3. What are the trials in your life right now?

JAMES 1:12-15

1. How can you persevere through trials and stand the test?

2. Where do temptations come from? What things tempt you?

Have you talked about your temptations with God and with another disciple? _____

1 PETER 1:3-9

1. Why should we rejoice in trials?

2. How can you know if your faith is genuine or not?

3. Write a list of some of the tests that could come your way (financially, relationships, persecution, etc.) How can you prepare today for trials you may face later?

Trial -- _____

Trial -- _____

APPLICATION: Talk with another disciple today about the trials and temptations you face. Discuss your attitude about trials. Be happy!

Disciple _____

Trials Discussed _____, _____

DAY TEN: "Praying Like Jesus"

MARK 1:32-39

1. What sacrifices did Jesus make to go and pray? Think of his previous day. What excuses could he have made to not pray?

2. When do you feel the need to pray? Do you ever make excuses not to pray?

3. How has your prayer time been the past 10 days?

HEBREWS 5:7-10

1. What kind of prayer life did Jesus have?

2. What things, besides going to the cross, would have been difficult for Jesus to obey?

3. What things are difficult for you to do as a disciple?

4. Have you been praying with loud cries and tears for God to help you be obedient?

5. What situations in your life do you need to pray more about?
Make a list and be specific.

APPLICATION: Spend time today praying about the things you wrote about on your list. Be specific in your prayers. Try praying out loud and talking to God as if you could see him. Tell him how you feel about these things and what is difficult and why it is difficult. Being real and open with God will help you change things quicker.

PRAYER LIST:

DAY ELEVEN: "Holding to the Truth"

2 TIMOTHY 2:14-19

1. Why do some people like to quarrel about words and spread their own ideas around? Do you ever quarrel about words? Have you talked about it with another disciple?

2. How can you train yourself to be an approved workman?

3. Have you been involved in any discussions lately about God's word or the church that were pointless or even harmful?

4. How can you avoid godless chatter?

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

1. How can you fight the good fight?

2. How can a disciple "shipwreck" their faith?

3. Remember Hymenaeus (2 TIMOTHY 2:17-18) and Alexander (2 TIMOTHY 4:14-15).

What is the outcome of people who turn away from the faith?

How do they try to harm others?

1 Timothy 4:15-16

1. Are you watching daily your life (as a disciple) and your doctrine (understanding the Bible)?

2. Has anyone noticed changes in you?

2 TIMOTHY 2:22-26

What should your attitude be toward those who oppose you?

APPLICATION: Discuss with your discipling partner any questions about doctrine or the church that you do not understand

Questions:

DAY TWELVE: "Doing Good Things"

EPHESIANS 2:10

1. What has God created for us to do?

2. Make a list of some good works that you could do.

1 PETER 4:8-11

1. How does love cover over many sins?

2. Have you been offering hospitality to other disciples?

3. How can you improve in this?

4. Why do you think God wants you to be giving to others?

GALATIANS 6:9-10

1. Who does God want us to help?

2. Who in your Bible talk has special needs right now that you could help?

APPLICATION: If you see needs you can meet, do it THIS WEEK. If you don't know how you can help, ASK.

REMEMBER: We need each other. We are family.

Needs Met : _____

DAY THIRTEEN: "Saved to Serve"

MATTHEW 25:31-46

1. What will you be judged for on the last day?

2. Why is it not enough to simply give money to beggars?

3. Which of the six things listed in verses 35-36 have you done recently?

4. Who are we really ignoring when we neglect the needy?

DEUTERONOMY 15:7-10

1. What does it mean to be "hard-hearted" or "tight-fisted"?

2. What kind of giving does God expect from you?

3. Who are some of the poor and needy around you - and how are you going to help them?

MATTHEW 10:40-42

1. What are some small acts of kindness that will not be forgotten by God?

2. How can you help the needy even if you have little money?

JAMES 1:27

1. What is true religion in God's sight?

2. Who does God have a special concern for?

APPLICATION: Whom can you help today? Do it. Also, make plans with another disciple to help other needy people this week.

DAY FOURTEEN: "A New Creation"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

1. What are some of the "old" parts of you that are gone?

2. What are some of the "new" things you are becoming?

MARK 2:21-22

1. How new must you be?

2. What is the difference between adding on new habits and being changed from the inside?

3. Are you like an old wineskin or a new one? Why?

ROMANS 12:2

1. What are some examples of worldly thinking in your life?

2. How can you change your thinking?

EPHESIANS 4:17-5:2

1. How does God describe your old way of thinking and living?

2. Who were you created to be like? Why is it so important to keep on forgiving each other?

3. What does it mean to live a life of love?

APPLICATION: Ask your discipler or a Christian who knows you well how they see worldly attitudes or habits in your life.

DAY FIFTEEN: "The Hope of Heaven"

REVELATION 20:11-15

1. Imagine what the day of judgment will be like. Who will be there?

2. How will everyone be feeling?

REVELATION 21:1-8

1. Who is the bride of Christ?

2. Describe heaven.

3. Check yourself against verse 8. Are any of these sins in your life?

REVELATION 22:1-6

1. What other eternal joys will be in heaven?

2. Why does God want us to know these words are trustworthy and true?

REVELATION 22:14-15

Are any of these sins in your life?

APPLICATION: Pray about what God promises in heaven! If there are any sins you need to confess and change, do it TODAY!

DAY SIXTEEN: "Saved to Save"

1 PETER 2:9-10

1. What does it mean to be a royal priesthood?

2. What message should you be sharing?

3. Are you really declaring God's praises or just giving out an invitation? _____

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-21

1. How can you tell if you're living for yourself or living for Jesus?

2. What does it mean to be Christ's ambassador?

3. Would Jesus be pleased with the way you present him?

4. What does it mean to APPEAL to and IMPLORE people?

5. What attitude should you have toward the lost?

ACTS 17:16-34

1. Why was Paul distressed? _____

2. What are some sights around your city that should distress you? _____

3. Where did Paul share his faith? _____

4. Why did Paul begin his message by commending the Athenians for being very religious?

5. What does this teach you about preaching Paul's message?

APPLICATION: Write at least 4 things you have learned today about evangelism from this study. Share your faith with these things in mind.

DAY SEVENTEEN: "Distracted or Devoted"

LUKE 10:38-42

1. Why was Martha distracted?

2. How was she feeling?

3. What are some things you have let distract you this week?

4. Are you more like Martha or Mary?

5. What did Mary choose?

6. How was it better?

LUKE 8:14

1. What does it mean to be "choked"?

2. What is the result?

3. What are the worries/money and business concerns/pleasures that are keeping you from growing more?

LUKE 12:35-40

1. Why do we need to stay alert and ready for Jesus?

2. How does Jesus feel when we get distracted from our purpose and start doing other things?

APPLICATION: If you have been distracted or wasting time, try writing a personal schedule every day. Let other disciples help you. DISTRACTIONS:

DAY EIGHTEEN: "Learning from Others"

MATTHEW 18:1-4

1. What kind of heart does God want us to have?

2. What qualities of children do we need to imitate?

1 THESSALONIANS 5:12-14

1. Who is "over you" in the Lord? _____

2. Does it have anything to do with age or education?

3. Write the names of some Christians who work hard, set a good example and admonish you.

4. Are you showing them respect?

5. What kind of disciples need special help (vs. 14)?

6. Have you been admonishing for any of these problems?

PSALM 119:99-100

1. What gives us real maturity and understanding?

2. How is verse 100 opposite of how our society thinks?

3. What should your attitude be when you are being taught/disciplined/corrected by someone younger than yourself?

1 TIMOTHY 4:11-12

1. What does the Lord expect from young leaders?

PSALM 32:8-10

1. How can you not be like a horse or mule?

APPLICATION: If you have resisted learning from younger disciples, repent today and seek them out to ask questions. If you are young yourself, set the believers a great example!

DAY NINETEEN: "Powerful Prayers"

1 CHRONICLES 17:15-22

1. What was David feeling as he prayed to God? Why?

2. How has the Lord treated you with undeserved honor and blessings?

3. How did God bless Israel?

4. How has he done even greater things for his people today?

5. What attitude toward God does this prayer express?

GENESIS 24:10-27

1. Why do you think the Lord answers this prayer so quickly?

2. The servant's prayer was simple, but he had great faith. How can you tell?

3. What was the servant's first response to the answered prayer?

4. Are you remembering to thank God for every answered prayer?

JAMES 5:15-18

1. What makes prayer powerful and effective?

2. Do you pray eagerly and earnestly? _____

3. Do you pray with great faith? Have you been righteous this week?

APPLICATION: Make your prayer very special today. Pray with faith and gratitude!

DAY TWENTY: "Tempted by the World"

PSALM 73:1-14

1. What was the writer feeling as he looked at the wealthy, unsaved people around him?

2. Why did life seem unfair to him?

3. How have you envied people in the world?

4. Have you struggled with this since becoming a Christian? Have you talked about it?

PSALM 73:15-22

1. What did he realize about their final destiny?

2. How is the "good life" like a dream that will end on judgment day?

3. How was the writer thinking when he was envying them?

PSALM 73:23-28

1. What did the writer realize about his relationship with God?

2. Memorize verses 25-26.

1 JOHN 2:15-17

1. What things in the world are you supposed to hate?

2. What worldly things are still attracting you?

APPLICATION: Talk with your discipler about your feelings about the world. What temptations you have been having? Pray about them today.

FEELINGS/TEMPTATIONS:

DAY TWENTY-ONE: "Rejoice in Persecutions"

MATTHEW 5:10-11

1. What should make us rejoice in persecutions?

2. Have people insulted or spoken evil of you because of Jesus?

3. How did you feel? _____

4. Who else has been treated this way? _____

JOHN 15:18-23

1. How should we expect to be treated?

2. Why does the world hate us?

3. What makes people feel guilty when they see us become disciples? _____

ACTS 4:13-22

1. What made Peter and John so bold?

2. Has anyone tried to stop you from teaching, speaking or worshipping Jesus?

3. How have you responded?

ACTS 5:17-29

1. Jesus was persecuted out of envy (MARK 15:10); the apostles were arrested out of jealousy.

2. Why will we be persecuted or slandered?

3. By whom? _____

4. What was the apostles' reply when they were told to stop?

ACTS 5:40-42

1. What made the apostles happy?

APPLICATION: Let verse 42 be your theme today and every day.

DAY TWENTY-TWO: "Giving Living"

JOHN 13:1-17

1. How did Jesus show the full extent of his love?

2. What was he trying to teach his disciples?

3. How can we obey verse 17?

4. Give specific examples.

ACTS 9:36-42

1. Why was Dorcas so loved by everyone?

2. Who were her "special friends"?

3. Why do you think she did so much for them?

4. If you died today, what would you be remembered for?

5. What can we learn from Dorcas' life?

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-24

1. What made Timothy different from the others?

2. What shows a genuine interest in the welfare of others?

3. How can you be more like Timothy?

APPLICATION: Think of a practical way to show another disciple that you truly care. Do it today.

DAY TWENTY-THREE: "Confessing Sin"

PSALM 32:1-7

1. How do we feel when we are hiding/not confessing sin?

2. Have you felt this way since your baptism? Are there any sins you have been afraid to confess?

PROVERBS 28:13

1. Can we conceal our sins from God?

2. Who do we need to confess our sins to besides God?

3. What effect will unconfessed sin have in our life?

LUKE 8:17

1. Why is it foolish to try to keep our sins hidden?

PSALM 66:18-19

What else happens if we conceal or cherish sin?

APPLICATION: Take some time to think about any sins - attitudes, action, thoughts - that are troubling you because you haven't shared them. Write them down and make sure you talk about them even today!

DAY TWENTY-FOUR: "Family Pressures"

MARK 3:20-21

1. Why do you think Jesus' family was upset with him?

2. Has anyone in your family tried to stop you from serving God because they think you are hurting yourself?

3. What would have happened if Jesus had agreed with them?

JOHN 7:1-9

1. What did Jesus' own brothers think about him?

2. Why did Jesus do what his family wanted?

MATTHEW 10:37-39

1. List some examples of ways we can "love" our families more than we listen to Jesus.

APPLICATION: Discuss any pressures you are feeling about family expectations with strong disciples. Are there any changes you need to make?

DAY TWENTY-FIVE: "Being Open"

JOHN 15:15

1. What did Jesus share with his disciples?

2. Are you this kind of a friend to other Christians?

3. Do they really know all about your life?

2 CORINTHIANS 6:11-13

1. What does it mean to speak freely?

2. Are you opening your heart to others?

3. What are some feelings you aren't expressing to anyone?

PROVERBS 20:5

1. Are you helping others to disciple you by being open or does someone have to "draw you out" by asking many questions?

APPLICATION: Spend some time today writing down some feelings/plans/secret sins that you haven't been sharing. Discuss these things with another Christian this week. Be open!

DAY TWENTY-SIX: "Dealing with Doubts"

MATT 11:1-6

1. After all that John the Baptist knew about Jesus, why do you think he began having doubts?

2. What did John do to deal with his doubts?

3. What should you do when doubts enter your mind?

MATT 18:16-17

Does this surprise you? Read on and see what Jesus told his doubting disciples to do.

1 COR 15:11-14

1. What were the Christians in Corinth doubting? They had believed at first, but later some began to doubt.

2. What are some teachings you have doubted after believing?

LUKE 24:36-45

1. Where do you think doubts come from?

2. How did Jesus help them to find faith?

APPLICATION: Write briefly how you can overcome doubts through openness, the word of God, prayer and obedience.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN: "Learning to be Loyal"

First, what does loyalty mean to you?

1 COR 13:4-7

1. Write out this passage substituting your name in place of the word love. Now read through it again, thinking about some specific relationships you have.

2. What do you see about yourself that needs to change?

EPH 4:29

1. What kind of talk is harmful to others?

2. Have you been involved in talk that is unkind, slanderous or mocking? _____

1 THES 5:12-15

1. Who is "over you in the Lord"?

2. Is this based on how they live? _____

3. Write some names of Christians who work hard among you.

Do you respect them from your heart?

4. What is your attitude toward Christians who are weak or slow to learn?

APPLICATION: Write a note of appreciation to someone you respect, who is over you in the Lord and also to someone who needs patient encouragement.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT: "Disputable Matters"

ROM 14:1-8

1. What are some disputable matters among Christians today? (dress, taste in music, food and drink)

2. What should your attitude be toward those who see these things differently?

ROM 14:16-23

1. What does God care about the most?

2. Are you doing anything that could cause others to stumble?

3. What does verse 23 mean?

4. Do you feel good about the way you are living now?

1 TIM 2:9-10 & 1 PETER 3:3-5

1. What makes a woman beautiful to God?

2. In your own words, write what you think these passages are teaching about clothing and about godliness.

MATT 11:18-19

1. Why did the people criticize Jesus and John the Baptist?

2. Why do you think they were so different yet both were pleasing God?

APPLICATION: Do you have questions about what is right and wrong for a Christian? Find out from a mature disciple whether these are disputable matters and come to your decisions.

DAY TWENTY-NINE: "Jesus is Coming Soon"

2 PETER 3:3-14

1. Why do some people scoff (mock) at the promise of Christ's return? _____

2. What will the "day of the Lord" be like?

3. Are you living as though Jesus could come back TODAY?

1 THESS 4:13-18

Compare this passage to 2 PETER 3:7-10.

Will there be any "second chance" for those who are not ready to meet the Lord? _____

2. Why will this day be like "a thief in the night"?

3. What does it mean to be alert and self-controlled?

2 TIM 4:6-8

1. How does Paul feel about facing the Lord on judgment day?

2. Why is living for Jesus like fighting the good fight, finishing the race and keeping the faith?

3. What kind of effort does it take to be this way to the end?

APPLICATION: Live each day like it is your last!

DAY THIRTY: "Joined Together in Love"

PSALM 133:1-3

1. What is unity and why is it so important to have it in the church?

EPH 4:1-3

1. Explain verse 2 in your own words. What happens when we act the opposite of this?

2. Why does it take every effort to keep unity?

PHIL 2:1-5

1. What does it mean to be one in spirit and purpose?

2. How can you consider others better than yourself?

3. Whose interests have you been looking out for besides your own? What is the attitude of Jesus? Is yours the same?

MATT 18:15-17 & MATT 5:23-24

1. How does Jesus tell us to resolve conflicts and disagreements with one another?

2. Who should go to whom first? _____

3. Is there anyone in the church with whom you need to go and settle a problem? _____

APPLICATION: Think about your relationships today. Pray to be unified with all your brothers and sisters and reach out to and spend time with those you do not love as Jesus would.

DAY THIRTY-ONE: "Dealing with Discouragement"

The prophet Elijah had just experienced some tremendous

victories from God: The destruction of 450 false prophets, and the first rainfall in 3 ½ years because of his earnest prayer. (See JAMES 5:17-18)

But then he got afraid and discouraged.

1 KINGS 19:1-8

1. Why did Elijah feel so overwhelmed?

2. What are some things that have made you feel like giving up?

3. How did the Lord encourage him physically, spiritually and emotionally?

4. What do you normally do when you start feeling "down"?

5. How can you apply the 3 lessons from above the next time you are tempted to give in to discouragement?

1 KINGS 19:19-21

1. How do you think Elijah felt to be given a friend and disciple like Elisha?

2. Why did God wait until Elijah was "in action" again before sending him to Elisha?

APPLICATION: How are you dealing with discouragement today? Share what you have learned with someone else.

DAY THIRTY-TWO: "Walking as Jesus did"

1 JOHN 2:5-6

1. Think back over the past several days. Are you walking like

Jesus? _____

MARK 1:21-28

1. What was different about the way Jesus taught?

2. Are you teaching others with authority? _____

MARK 1:29-34

1. How late do you think Jesus worked that night? _____

2. Do you think he felt tired? _____

3. Why did he work so hard?

4. Are you willing to push yourself for others to know Jesus - even when it is very challenging? _____

MARK 1:35-39

1. Note how early Jesus got up the next day? Why did he?

2. How much do you feel the need to pray like Jesus?

MARK 2:13-17

1. What kinds of people did Jesus make friends with? Why?

2. How do you treat sinners and pagans?

3. Are you making new friends to share the gospel with? _____

APPLICATION: Write down two things from today's study that you can do to imitate Jesus. Do them!

DAY THIRTY-THREE: "Shining Like Stars"

PHILIPPIANS 2:14-16

1. How do we "hold out the word of life" to others?

2. What kind of example do we need to show those around us?

3. What have you complained or argued about lately? How can you change?

1 CORINTHIANS 9:19-23

1. How can you be a slave to everyone? (Give examples)

2. What are some ways you need to adapt to people in your life to help them be saved?

PSALM 126:6

1. Why should we be "weeping" as we go out to make disciples?

2. What is the promise for those who do?

DANIEL 12:3

Are you being wise?

APPLICATION: Pray for a heart that truly loves deeply as you share your faith today.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR: "Taking Correction"

GALATIANS 2:11-16

1. What was Peter's sin? _____

2. Why did Paul correct him publicly? (See 1 TIMOTHY 5:20 & MATTHEW 18:15) _____

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-13

1. Why did Paul correct and challenge the Corinthians?

2. How does God want you to respond to correction?

3. Has anyone corrected you lately? _____

4. How did you respond?

5. Were they encouraged by your response? _____

GALATIANS 6:1-5

1. What obligation do we have to help one another?

2. How can pride keep you from taking correction?

3. Why is it dangerous to compare ourselves to others?

PROVERBS 15:31-32 & PROVERBS 16:18

1. Which one describes you? _____

APPLICATION: Ask the person discipling you how you take correction. Do you need to repent?

Person Asked: _____ Date: _____

Notes: _____

DAY THIRTY-FIVE: "Worthy of the Name"

1 PETER 4:12-19

1. What kinds of insults and sufferings have you endured for Jesus? _____

2. What should your attitude be?

3. What does Satan want you to think and do when you are being persecuted?

HEBREWS 10:32-34

1. Have you gone through suffering like this? _____

2. What are you doing to encourage other Christians who are going through insults and persecutions?

HEBREWS 11:32-40

1. Have you faced lions, flames, swords, armies, tortures, flogging, imprisonment, chains - or even banishment for Jesus' sake? _____

2. How did God regard these people?

2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-29 & ROMANS 8:18

1. What kind of life did Paul live for Christ?

2. How did he feel about his sufferings?

3. Have you been rejoicing or complaining as a Christian?

APPLICATION: Would Jesus say you are worthy of the name "Christian"? _____

DAY THIRTY-SIX: "A Hope and a Future"

1. Do you worry about your future? _____

2. What are your hopes and what are your fears?

JEREMIAH 29:11-13

What does God promise to those who seek him with all their hearts? _____

Are you seeking him or something else? _____

PSALM 37:3-4

What are the desires of your heart? Do you believe God will give them to you?

PSALM 16:5-8

Do you feel this way about your life? Why?

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-10

1. What should make you content?

2. What will a desire for money and things do to your life?

3. How does someone "wander" from the faith?

4. What other desires could make us wander?

ROMANS 8:31-32

How has God proven his love for you?

APPLICATION: If you see anxiety or discontentment in your life, confess it as a lack of faith, and memorize one of these scriptures to remind yourself of God's faithfulness.

DAY THIRTY-SEVEN: "The Grace of Giving"

LUKE 21:1-4

1. What do you learn from this widow's example?

2. Think of at least 3 reasons she could have given to be "stingy".

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19

How should you live if you have money?

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15

1. Have you decided to give generously to God? _____

2. Are you giving that amount regularly? _____

3. What does God promise to those who give freely?

4. How does your giving benefit others, God, and yourself?

APPLICATION: If you think your financial giving has not been generous or faithful, decide what you will give and honor that promise to God.

Decision: _____

Date: _____

Signed: _____

DAY THIRTY-EIGHT: "Go and Make Disciples"

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-7

Compare verse 2 with MATTHEW 28:19-20.

1. What is Christ's "strategy" for evangelizing the world?

2. Describe a reliable disciple. Are you reliable in terms of keeping appointments, keeping time, following instructions?

3. How are you to follow the example of a soldier, an athlete and a farmer? Be specific.

4. Would Timothy or Paul have chosen you to teach others? Why?

1 CORINTHIANS 9:24-27

1. How is the Christian life like running a race?

2. What happens if an athlete does not train or "beat" his body?

3. What happens if you do not train and discipline yourself as a disciple?

APPLICATION: List ways you can be more disciplined in your Bible study and prayer, your evangelism and your use of time. Share it with the person who is disciplining you.

DAY THIRTY-NINE: "Faith is the Victory"

MARK 2:1-12

1. Why was this man so determined to see Jesus?

2. List at least 3 reasons the man could have given to not try to see Jesus. _____

3. What impressed Jesus about this man? _____

4. How can you be more like him? _____

MARK 5:21-43

1. What did Jairus and the bleeding woman have in common? _____

2. Why did Jesus help both of them? _____

3. Why is it important for us to depend completely on Jesus when we need help? _____

4. What are some ways you have not been depending on God enough? _____

5. Have you turned to other sources for help? _____

MARK 6:1-6

1. What was different in this place? Why? _____

2. Is Jesus amazed at your faith or your lack of faith? Why? _____

HEBREWS 11:5-6

Why do you think faith is so important for pleasing God? _____

APPLICATION: What are some things in your life (or someone else's) for which you really need God's help? Keep a prayer list and keep on praying!

DAY FORTY: "Good Heart, Good Deeds, Good Things"

LUKE 8:15

1. Do you have a heart like this? _____

2. What is your life producing? _____

PHILEMON 4-7

What are 3 things Philemon did that showed a good heart?

2 PETER 1:5-11

1. What do you need to do to keep growing as a Christian?

2. Define goodness, perseverance, and brotherly kindness.

3. What happens if you stop growing? _____

4. What does verse 10 mean?

3 JOHN 2-6

1. If a brother or sister came to visit you, what kind of report would they give about your Life? _____

2. How do you feel about your life in Christ up until today?

3. Are you growing? _____

4. In what areas do you need help?

APPLICATION: Now that you have finished your 40-days study, decide what you are going to study next and have a plan. Share these notes with the people you are leading to the Lord. Keep growing!

HAND OF GOD

All night prayer day

Psalm 8:1-4 LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

in the heavens.

²Through the praise of children and infants

you have established a stronghold against your enemies,

to silence the foe and the avenger.

³When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them,

human beings that you care for them

God's glory is revealed in the heavens (sky) as well as on the earth.

The most current estimates guess that there are 100 to 200 billion galaxies in the Universe, each of which has hundreds of billions of stars. A recent German supercomputer simulation put that number even higher: 500 billion (50,000 Crores). In other words, there could be a galaxy out there for every star in the Milky Way.

If we count each star per second in our own galaxy called Milky Way, it will take 2,500 years to count them. Then imagine the expanse of the universe??

Vs3 says 'When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars,

Which you have set in place'

It is wonderful to know that entire universe is the work of the fingers

of our father in heaven. Then how big is His hand? How powerful is he?

God says to Israel in **Isaiah 41:10** so do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

What if the almighty God whose fingers made and put the billions of stars in place, holds you in his hand! How wonderful it will be? Should you fear anything at all?

We are going to have a series of Lessons on the 'Hand of God'. This is going to help us build faith and great trust in our wonderful almighty father in heaven.

Exodus 6:6

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

People of Israel were slaves in Egypt for 100s of years. It was a mighty nation that oppressed them. People of Israel could have never got freedom by any of their own efforts. But God had mercy on them and out of his compassion he promised them deliverance.

God promised Israel that he will deliver them with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.

We know how his outstretched arm worked wonders and how through 10 plagues against Egypt and by parting the Red Sea he delivered them and established them as a nation in the Promised Land.

Later on God reasons out with them to remind them that there is no other God:

Deuteronomy 4:34

Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another

acts of God's people.)

On the Day of Judgment when Jesus returns, wedding of the Lamb will take place. Till then our responsibility is to prepare ourselves to be the bride worthy for the King of Kings.

Are you preparing yourself like that? Remember Jesus comes to give salvation only for those who are longing for his appearance. (Same message is in Hebrews 9:27,28)

Let us remember that Jesus is waiting in heaven prepared to place the crown of righteousness for all of us. Let us not miss the opportunity to receive that. Rather let us eagerly look forward for that amazing blessing by having genuine and sincere wholehearted love for Jesus and prove that love by pouring out our lives as a drink offering - living a life fully for our Saviour and Lord Jesus. Let us prepare ourselves every moment remembering that Jesus can come any moment and do only what will please him when he appears.

Let us also prepare all others around us for that day and for that crown. List out and make it a point to practise, the different ways in which you are specifically going to prepare yourself to receive the crown from God.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

our lives for others. This is how all the Apostles lived. They were willing to go anywhere do anything and give up everything in their lives out of love for Christ & others.

How are you living now? Are you pouring your life out like a drink offering? How was your evangelism this month? Have you given your best? How do you want to live the rest of this year and life ahead?

Or do you make excuses why you don't have time to share your faith or disciple some one or care for another disciple or serve the Church?

What reward was Paul expecting from Jesus for this kind of sacrificial life?

2 Tim 4:8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

He was so confident that Jesus is waiting in heaven to award him the crown of righteousness. Paul is also confident that the same Jesus is waiting to give the same crown to all those who are longing for the appearance of Jesus.

Do you want to receive that crown? What does it take to get that crown from the hand of God?

Longing for the appearance of Jesus - not just belief - there are so many in the world believe in Jesus but only few are longing for Jesus. Which one are you? Longing for Jesus means that you should be so much in love with Jesus like a girl who is engaged is longing for the day of wedding to be able to go and spend the rest of her life with the love of her life. That is why Bible explains our relationship with Jesus as bride and bridegroom. When we get baptised we got engaged to Jesus. Wedding is yet to take place.

Revelation 19:6-8 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous

nation, by testings", by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

Deuteronomy 5:15

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

What does that mean to all of us who are living on the same planet 1000s of years later?

Deuteronomy 7:19

You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the LORD your God brought you out. The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.

What will He do for us? The LORD your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.

Do you believe that the Hand of God is upon you? Our God is the same and His love for us is the same. He will certainly do unbelievable things even in our life time. We just have to 'fear' Him (Revere and Love Him).

Think of what are the situations you fear in your life or people? Submit those into God's hand and pray till you are sure that His hand will save you.

In few lessons that follow, we are going to see how this promise was fulfilled in the lives of people who lived after the Exodus.

Day 1

HAND OF GOD PROVIDES ALL WHAT WE NEED

Deuteronomy 11:1-4 Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always. ² Remember today that your children were not the ones who saw and experienced the discipline of the LORD your God: his majesty, his mighty hand, his outstretched arm; ³ the signs he performed and the things he did in the heart of Egypt, both to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his whole country; ⁴ what he did to the Egyptian army, to its horses and chariots, how he overwhelmed them with the waters of the Red Sea as they were pursuing you, and how the LORD brought lasting ruin on them.

Remember that the Lord did amazing miracles with his mighty hand, his outstretched arm, to reveal his love to the people of this world and to help them to love him in return.

We will see an incident that happened after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and reached the wilderness. God has been providing them with Manna from heaven every day for them to eat. Yet they were unsatisfied and started grumbling.

Numbers 11:4-6 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

God was angry about their ungrateful heart and grumbling. Moses was also really burdened to see the attitude of the people.

Numbers 11:11-15

So God gave a solution:

Numbers 11:18-23

Even though God was angry about their attitude he promised them meat!

me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

These few words describes how Paul lived for Jesus and what was he looking forward to.

In the last lesson we saw how our Saviour poured out his life for us. All of us who are following Jesus must have the same attitude to imitate him and pour out our lives for Jesus by serving one another.

Here Paul says that he poured out his life as a drink offering. In the Old Testament times when the priests used to pour the drink offering on the altar they took the vessel that contained the offering and poured it out fully till nothing was left in the vessel. That is the picture in Paul's mind when he writes these words here.

Jesus poured out his life for all of us even though we lived as his enemies! Pal poured out his life for others in response to the love of Christ.

Most people's favourite Scripture that they memorise is this verse in the Bible - John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Truly this is a great Scripture to memorise and trust. This Scripture reminds us of what Jesus has done for us and gives us hope that we can be saved. But what is our response to that love and gift of eternal life?

John the Apostle writes again in his letter how we should respond to that love: 1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another.

Is this your favourite Scripture? Is this the way you live your life? Do you remember how you learnt and experienced real love? Isn't from Jesus and his very sacrifice? What was the message of the Cross? Just as Christ sacrificed his life to bring salvation for us, we must lay down

HAND OF GOD THAT PLACES THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Read Acts 9:1-31

Saul of Tarsus was a persecutor of the Church. But Jesus appeared to him and turned his heart to him. Once when he understood that Jesus is the Messiah that all the prophets spoke about, Paul started preaching boldly about Christ whom he hated before. God used him to be a great Apostle and missionary in many nations to turn the hearts of 1000s of Jews and Gentiles.

He explained what made him to live such a life in **2 Cor 5:14,15** For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

As we understood from the last lesson, Paul was so convinced compelled by the love of Christ. That sacrificial love made him stop living for himself but to live only for Jesus his Lord who laid down his life for all of us.

How is your life today? Are you compelled by the love of Christ? How do you know that?

One way to know is to see if in any way you are still living for your self! Those who are convinced by the love of Christ will live only with one goal in life - 'pleasing God' - (**2Cor 5:9** So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.)

Almost towards the end of his life he writes to Timothy his son in faith.

2 Tim 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for

Then Moses had a doubt: Vs.21 but Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' 22 Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?"

23 The Lord answered Moses, "Is the Lord's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

There were more than a million (10Lakh) people!

Moses was wondering how in the world anyone can provide meat for more than a million people in the wilderness!

God was promising 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' God was willing to give them meat not for a day or two but for a whole month.

Moses felt it was impossible! He even expressed that plainly to God! What was God's answer?

Vs.23 The Lord answered Moses, "Is the Lord's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you."

What are some things that you feel as your need but feel like it is impossible for anyone to meet that need?

Have you prayed for something and gave up praying because you think it is not possible?

Most horrible thing that we can do against God is to despise him.

Despise means 'to regard with contempt or scorn'.

How can we despise God? By believing or expressing in any way to others that something is impossible for God! That gives the impression that God is weak!!

We are created by God to 'glorify Him' not to despise Him. (Isaiah 43:5-7) Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. 6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' And to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—7

everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”)(NIV emphasis added)

So what happened to God's promise to give meat?

Numbers 11:31-34

God sent a wind (Entire nature is under his power) and brought quail and scattered them in their camp. Quails piled up two cubits (3 feet) deep all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction (vs 31). Can you imagine that sight?

{Cubit is the distance from the elbow to the fingertips - that is around 18-20inches. So 2 Cubits mean almost 3 ft. Imagine the amount of quail to cover the area a day's walk distance (approximately 46kms) multiplied by 3ft!}

{homer is approximately 4 liters - so each one collecting 10 homers of quail means 40 liters of quail}

No one would have been able to count or measure the amount of quail that God sent them.

It was much more than more than a million Israelites could eat!

So how powerful is the hand of God? With his outstretched arm he could feed the entire nation with meat!

But because they doubted the power of God to provide them with meat (or anything they needed), God struck them with a severe plague and many people perished.

Sharing: Many years ago Church in Bangalore used to hire a hall in VishranthiNilayam for Evening Services and meetings for small groups. One of the session Beena & I were taking care was Christian Training Program. We had booked the hall for 3 days a week for few weeks. Every time we go there the authorities used to give us a lot of trouble. Either they will say we haven't booked the place, or they will change the location to some other hall in the same campus etc. As

Many years ago I fell off from a canoe while crossing a river and I was drowning because I had no idea about swimming. As I was going down to the depth of the river, I saw an outstretched hand approaching me and I did not know whose hand it was but suddenly grabbed that hand knowing that this is the last resort. Only after getting back to the canoe I realised it was the hand of my cousin who had quickly jumped into the river to save me. I am so grateful that God reached out to me through the hand of my cousin to save my life.

Prophet Isaiah is painting a beautiful picture of God of heaven stretching out his mighty arm and revealing it to us and rescuing us when we were drowning in our sins. That mighty and loving arm is our saviour Jesus Christ. Isaiah prophesied these incredible facts about our saviour around 700 years before Jesus was born. As we read chapter 53 we see how this 'arm of God' Jesus had to go through so much of suffering to save each one of us.

Vs.4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Do you see Jesus as the arm of God that is stretched out to save you through his incredible suffering and sacrifice?

Are you grateful for the outstretched arm of God -Jesus Christ going through all that sufferings to save you?

Meditate on the verses of these 2 chapters and pray through them experience the love of God and rejoice in it.

Share with a non Christian friend today about how the arm of God reached out to you.

Like Nehemiah - share with others what the hand of God has accomplished so that others can also gain faith.

Day 30

ARM OF GOD - JESUS OUR SAVIOUR

Deuteronomy 5:15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Out of amazing compassion God saved the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt with his outstretched arm. This happened 1000s of years ago. Our God's heart is still the same. His heart melts when he see his people suffer. Like a father stretching out his arm to rescue a child, our father in heaven stretches out his arm to rescue us in our times of troubles. That act was a sign of what he will do in the future for the entire mankind.

Mankind became slaves of sin! This slavery is much more painful than the slavery in Egypt. This slavery leads us to eternal suffering in hell. Even though it was our because of our fault, our merciful and gracious father could not sit there and leave us to suffer. God sent messengers or prophets to tell the mankind his plan of saving them from the slavery of sins. Isaiah was one of those prophets who brought the message of God's love.

Read Isaiah 52 & 53 (2 chapters)

Prophet Isaiah speaks of the arm of the Lord. These are some passages in Isaiah mentions arm of God - the arm will rule for God (Is. 40:10); Arm will bring justice to the nations (Gentiles) (Is. 51:4,5); the arm will redeem (Is. 51:9,10); and the arm will provide salvation (Is. 52:10).

Isa 52:10 The Lord will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.

Isa 52 & 53 describes the 'arm of God' as the Messiah who will come. (John 12:37,38)

disciples were coming from different parts of the city after work to learn from the Bible, we decided to buy a flask and take coffee for them. When we reached the place, the authorities stopped us and said 'you can't bring any food or drinks from outside!' We felt so sad! From that time we started praying 'God help us to be able to buy our own place in a very convenient place for such meetings!' We remembered **(Eph 3:20)** Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.. (NIV)) God is able to provide more than what we ask or imagine!

Very next day I bought an advertisement weekly (Free Ads/Admag) and checked for advertisements for commercial buildings for sale and there it was: an advertisement for a portion of a building for sale right in the heart of the city –walk able distance from Sivaji Nagar Bus station near Commercial street! The owner was kind enough to give it for a really low price. Usually people sell properties as and how it is. But this owner was willing to fix new doors, provide alterations as we specified with good quality materials, polished the floors and painted it well –all with his own money! It became ready to use! We had to just buy chairs, curtains and sound system!

In no time we could buy the building and the Church started having Evening services and any program for around 100 people. Being in a commercial location, no one is bothered about us singing, praying etc. Now no one can send us out! We have the freedom to make tea/coffee/food etc. **Truly God provides with HIS OUTSTRETCHED ARM**

Challenge:1. Make a list of all what God provided for you in your life. Thank him for all that. Share with others how wonderful is God.

2. Make another list of what you want God to provide for you (also for the Church).

Day 2

HAND OF GOD THAT PROVIDES FOR SABBATH

God established Sabbath - day of rest through the 10 commandments. God wanted people to have rest at least once a week. When the Israelites received the Promised Land God wanted even the land to have Sabbath rest every 7th year.

Even when God commands us to rest, we can feel like I need to work one more day to earn more to meet the needs of us and our family!!

When God commands us to rest, he also knows how to provide for us when we rest. Do you trust that God will provide when we obey him and rest?

Read Exodus 16 & Leviticus 25

In the wilderness where Israel spent 40 years, God sent Manna every morning for 6 days and on the 6th day he gave them double portion so that they can collect for Sabbath day also and keep it cooked and ready to be eaten on the day of Sabbath so that they don't have to do any work on the day of Sabbath. God kept this promise and provided them Manna for 40 years without fail.

Even after giving all these promises and commands, see what some Israelites have done: Ex 16:27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?"

Do you take rest? Do you know that God expects you to take rest? Scientists have found that sleep refreshes us and allows the brain to do clean up process - this helps us to rejuvenate. (Read article on the web http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2013-10/uorm-tsp100913.php)

In Lev 25 God commanded them to observe Sabbath year rest for the fields. Six years they were allowed to cultivate the land and on the seventh year they were commanded to give rest for the land that means no cultivation at all in 7th year.

It was humanly impossible to rebuild the walls of such size in such a short time - 52 days! Even his enemies realized that this work had been done with the help of God of Israel. See how this work - work that seems to be menial - brought honor and glory to God! People in surrounding places understood that God of heaven is helping the people of Israel all over again. So they lived in fear! This is what happened when Israel came from Egypt and occupied the Promised Land - the land of Canaan several centuries ago. All the people heard how the hand of God worked in opening the red sea, breaking down the walls of Jericho and they realized that no giants can stand against such a God who works hand in hand with this nation! Same fear of God is reestablished by the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

How do you respond when you hear of a situation where God's name is dishonored or despised? Do you have sadness and indignation? If not you don't love God or honour him!

Do you want to glorify God? What do you do about it?

Do you pray for God's mighty hand to help you accomplish it? How?

In 2011 New York church set an amazing plan to glorify God. They set a goal to baptize and restore 100 people in 100 days. God blessed their faith the church was able to baptize 87 people and restore 16 people and so altogether 103 people saved in 103 days!

Trichy Church in Tamil Nadu does not have full time workers for years. Andrew & Rachel moved in there and Andrew has a strenuous business to take care for his living. Yet they took the leadership of the Church seriously and by faith. Membership of the church was around 50. They prayed that God will make the Church grow beyond the membership of 100 for the glory of God. Now the membership is 120 and is still growing without any full time workers! They even have a campus ministry with disciples from prominent institution like NIT!

Do you want to see the mighty hand of God working in your life and ministry? Set specific goals to bring glory to God, write them down and pray for God's mighty hand to accomplish them.

risky step Nehemiah took by asking permission to go and rebuild the walls. Even though he had fear he kept praying for God to work and move the heart of the king.

Nehemiah did not stop there - he asked for letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide him safe-conduct until he arrive in Judah. Also he asked for a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give him timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence he will occupy.

Read vs.8b and because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests.

Story did not end here - the king was so concerned about the well-being of his humble cup bearer that he also sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah for his protection.

Can you imagine how far a king of an empire like Persia has gone this far to help one of his servants? If the hand of God is upon us there is nothing impossible! But think why the hand of God was upon Nehemiah? I believe that it was because he was concerned about what was concerned about - the glory and honor of God. Whenever we set our heart to glorify God he will do everything with his mighty hand to accomplish it. Bible is full of such amazing stories.

From chapter 3 we read about how Nehemiah planned well and executed the work even when he and his people faced serious threats and opposition. Work was really extensive, he did not have expert builders to do the job but he employed men of different professions and families for each location of the wall to be rebuilt.

Let us see the conclusion in Nehemiah 6: 15,16 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. 16 When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

Then the question will be - 'how will they survive in the 7th year?'. Well God always makes great plans that are surely successful. See what God says in:Lev 25:20-22 You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" 21 I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. 22 While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

Isn't God's plans wonderful?

Scientists have found that the land can't sustain growth of the same crop repeatedly without a period of rejuvenation. Nutrients and bacteria (specifically, nitrogen-fixing bacteria) that had been removed from the land as a result of the never-ending sowing-and-reaping cycles needed time to be replaced. When the land is given an year of rest after 6 years of farming, the land is rejuvenated by having the nutrients and helpful bacteria are replaced in the land. Scientists came to be aware of these facts only in the last few decades! But God had given these commands 1000s of years ago!

Who knows best about cultivation? The God who created the land and crops! If we listen to him our land, crops and life are all safe and well provided.

Do you trust and obey God's commands? Or are you waiting for reasons to be provided for you to obey? Let us trust and obey because God is superior in wisdom and is trustworthy! Results and reasons will be revealed later!

Do you find any Scriptures not reasonable and so have disobeyed? List them out and confess and surrender to God. (eg. Commands on tithe, Encourage one another daily, attending meetings, taking discipling, confession etc.)

Day 3

HAND OF GOD THAT BUILT THE TABERNACLE

Read Exodus 35:4 - 36:7

When the Israelites were in the desert on the way from Egypt to the Promised Land, God commanded Moses to build a Tabernacle and all the materials required to offer sacrifices in it. Moses gathered all the people together and told them to bring free will offerings for the construction of the Tabernacle. People responded quickly and brought more than what was needed.

Remember that these Israelites were slaves in Egypt - the slaves don't have much possessions especially valuable things gold and precious stones!

Yet God demanded them to build the Tabernacle with very expensive and best materials. How could this be possible? God is a master planner - he had planned about it much before they left Egypt. Let us see what happened there:

Exodus 12:35,36 The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. 36 The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

All the gold, silver, precious stones and all the materials needed were already provided by God through the Egyptians before the Israelites left Egypt. The reason why the Egyptians gave so generously to their slaves was that they saw 10 plagues sent by God and they feared the God of Israel and wanted the Israelites go in peace so that the Egyptians won't be cursed any further.

Now have a look at the materials needed for building the Tabernacle - this required not only silver, gold and precious stones but also enormous amount of materials for the tent including acacia wood!

See how the hand of God disciplines his people when they sin but also restores them out of his incredible love and grace. We also see how mighty and sovereign is our God - he rules all nations and so he uses them to accomplish his plans of discipline and restoration. Also we see how God is so faithful to his promises - no power can stop him from fulfilling his promises.

Do you like discipline? How is your response to God's discipline?
How have you faced God's discipline in the past?
How did God restore you in such times?

Day 29

HAND OF GOD THAT BUILT THE WALL IN 52 DAYS

Read Nehemiah chapter 1 & 2

Ezra had already been in Jerusalem with Zerubbabel and Joshua to rebuild the Temple. Years later in BC 445 Nehemiah was serving as a cup bearer for the Persian king Artaxerxes.

Those were the days the enemies of kings would poison the king through food or wine. Cup bearer is someone whom the king personally chooses as he is a truly trustworthy person.

In chapter 2 we read: One day as he brought wine to the king, he noticed Nehemiah is very sad so he asked "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart. "Nehemiah was very much afraid, but he said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" Then king wanted to know what Nehemiah desires to do for his home town. In this passage we notice that every time Nehemiah prayed and he expressed his desire to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Such a request can be considered even as treason by the kings and they can even execute the cup bearer accusing of treason! It was a very

restoration of Judah after 70 years of captivity. Jer 25:11 This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Remember Jeremiah prophesied for around 40 years (approximately BC 626-BC 586).

God also laid out plans of restoration and informed people well in advance. Isaiah prophesied such events by around BC 700 (Isaiah began his prophecy by BC 740s and he continued to prophecy for around 64 years) and they were fulfilled by BC 536.

Isaiah 44:28 who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'

Isaiah 45:13 I will raise up Cyrus in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty."

Prophet Jeremiah also prophesied the return of exiles in 70 years.

Jeremiah 29:10-14 This is what the LORD says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Read Ezra 1 to see how Cyrus the king sent back the exiles to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity. (70 years is calculated from the time first captives were taken in to Babylon - these captives included Daniel and his friends. This occurred in BC 605 and the captives returned with Ezra by BC 536)

In advance God made sure that the hearts of Egyptians to be moved to give more than all that was needed for building the Tabernacle. Also God moved the hearts of Israelites to give more than what was needed for this purpose. They gave so much that Moses had to order them to stop bringing any more offerings.

Also Read **Ex 35:30-34**

God gave amazing abilities and skills to Bezalel and Oholiab to do all the artistic works and train others to help them in the extensive work.

Hudson Taylor, great missionary to China said "God's work done in God's way never lacks God's supply".

Do you know and acknowledge that all that you have belong to God? Do you give generously to God - Finance - more than 10% of your gross income, time and your gifts and talents?

What ways can you give more?

How are you involved in building God's kingdom?

When was the last time you were involved in saving a soul?

Are you serving in any leadership position? What does it take you for taking it higher? (If you are not a leader, to become a leader & if you are a leader how to serve more?)

Day 4 **THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU**

Exodus 13:21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

When God took Israel out of slavery in Egypt and brought them on the journey to the Promised Land, He went ahead of them in a pillar of

cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night.

Imagine what an amazing experience it was?
The Almighty God is with you going ahead and preparing your way and protecting you day and night!

He was with them in a pillar of cloud in the day so that he could guide them as well as protect them from the scorching sun in the desert. By night he was with them in the pillar of cloud so that he could provide light and heat as the desert gets very cold at night.

We can't express in words how caring was God to his people. He met all their needs by being with them personally - not through some angels or agents - so that he proved to them he was their father!
What else was he doing when he was with them?

Deuteronomy 1:26-36

Even after being with them day and night and carrying them as a father, when God asked them to enter the promised land, they refused to go in as most of the spies brought bad news saying that the people of Canaan are giants and they will all perish if they fight against these giants. God was sad and angry because they did not appreciate all what he has done and they were ungrateful and were not able to trust that he will keep his promise of giving them the land irrespective of who lives there.

Only Caleb & Joshua had the faith and trust.

In response to their rebellion and faithlessness, God is speaking in this passage.

God is telling them clearly what was his plan: Vs. 29,30 Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. 30 The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, 31 and in the desert.

See how the hand of God works - God stretches out his mighty hand to save those who are found innocent in his sight even when the powerful forces are against them.

Have you ever doubted God and compromised?
How do you want to lead your life ahead?
Write down the situations similar (may not be of same magnitude) to what Daniel faced that you may face in the future.
Write down how you will trust God and take similar steps in such situations.
Teach and train others who may also face similar situations in life to be like Daniel & Jesus.

Day 28 **HAND OF GOD THAT DISCIPLINES** **AND RESTORES**

Read Jeremiah 25

People of Judah sinned against God even after many warnings. They forsook God who saved them from the slavery in Egypt and established them in the Promised Land where milk & honey was flowing. After forsaking the LORD they started worshipping pagan gods. God sent many prophets including Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to turn them away from the wickedness and bring them back to God. Even though they spent several years pleading with them to repent they did not heed the warnings.

As the people refused to return to the LORD God pronounced judgment on them. God predicted that they will be taken into exile by Babylonians. Prophecy of Isaiah and Jeremiah was fulfilled and in BC586 Babylonians destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem, killed many and took many as captives to Babylon.

God is patient, merciful but he is also God of justice. He had to bring just punishment upon them. But his punishment was for disciplining them and to get their hearts to turn to God. So he also predicted the

They wanted to get rid of Daniel. But remember anyone in such position can be ousted only if he is found to be corrupt. They watched every step of Daniel to find fault with him so that they can get the king to oust him.

Vs.4b They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.

Will the people around you be able to say that about you? This is the real test of our integrity as followers of God.

Remember Jesus asking people around him: John 8:46"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"No one could find fault with him even though they were always making every effort to trap him!

Realizing that they can find no fault with Daniel in his work they decided to change their tactics - they knew that he will never compromise his devotion to God. So they compelled the king that he should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to the king, shall be thrown into the lions'den(vs.7).

King agreed and issued the edict. Soon they found Daniel praying to God three times a day as was his practice. He did not worry about losing his life but was unwilling to compromise his devotion to God even when his life was threatened. Will God intervene and help such a person! Well God is always pleased with such people and comes down to help them with his mighty hand.

Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. King felt so sad about it that he could not eat or drink or sleep the whole night. Early in the morning the king rushed to the lion's den and found that Daniel was safe!

Hear what Daniel spoke to the king from the lion's den: Vs.22"My God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

God's plan was not to send these people into the land of giants and get them defeated and killed by the giants. Rather his plan was that he himself will go ahead of them and fight the battles for them.

Now God is reminding them that this is not something new rather this is what God has been doing from the time he sent Moses to lead them out of Egypt. He was always going ahead of them and fighting for them in Egypt and all through the journey in the desert.

Read few more passages on this matter:

Deuteronomy 20:1-4

Isaiah 45:2 I will go before you and will level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

Isaiah 52:12 but you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Isaiah 58:8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.

How powerful is the Hand of God? If he goes before you and fights for you, is there anything that you need to fear or feel insecure about?

God is with us like a great father & mother going ahead and preparing the way for us so that we won't suffer from any danger ahead.

He is a great leader who goes ahead and searches out the right way for us to go and leads us gently & safely.

He is a mighty general who can fight alone all our battles ahead of us.

Do you see him? Do you notice his presence?

Write down how he has been fighting for you all these years?

Write down your present fears and the battles ahead?

Start believing that these are not your own problems or battles? These are God's battles because you belong to him and you don't have to worry about them rather trust that He goes before you and fights for you with his outstretched arm and mighty hand!

If God fights for you like this, will you be able to overcome temptations?

Write down the temptation that seems difficult for you to overcome and entrust him with all your battles and stand firm and see the deliverance.

Day 5

GOD'S MIGHTY HAND OF JUDGMENT

God's judgment is simple - Either Blessing or Curse

Deut 2:7 The LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.

Deut 2:14-23

Jeremiah 17:5-7 lays it down clearly how God judges.

Vs.5 This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD

Vs.7"But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

God brings blessings or curses on us based on whom we trust.

This is what happened with people of Israel - Even after doing so many amazing miracles by the 'outstretched arm of God'and saving them from slavery of Egypt, they could not trust that the same God will stretch his hand and save them from the 'giants' they saw in the promised land.

As they did not trust God, they got cursed by God and all the adults had to perish in the desert and they had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Vs.14b, 15bythen that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them. 15 The LORD's hand

his kingdom that serious punishment will be meted out to anyone who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Are you willing to take risks to show your love and faithfulness to God?

Are you willing to trust God and let go of the job if that stops you from being a committed disciple?

Singles - are you willing to marry a disciple? What if you don't find some one suitable soon? Will you compromise and think of marrying someone who is not a disciple? Or will you stand up against the pressure from families or from your own sinful desires and say - my God is capable of giving me a disciple to marry me and even if he does not give I will still be a zealous Christian for rest of my life?

Let us love and serve our God with all our hearts willing to give up everything we have, knowing that he was willing to give up even the precious life of his only son to save us.

Day 27

HAND OF GOD THAT VINDICATES THE INNOCENT

Read Daniel 6

While Daniel & his friends were in Babylon, Medes and Persians defeated Babylonians and took over the entire empire. Even the new king Darius the Mede was also so impressed with Daniel & his friends and appointed them as rulers. But Daniel stood out among all the Satraps - see vs.3"Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

How do you feel when your colleague is going to be promoted to be over you? Unless you are godly, you can be filled with jealousy & envy!

Other satraps who served the king with Daniel were filled with envy.

What if he does not stretch his arms to save you from troubles, will you still trust and obey God?

Read again vs.19-30 and see the outcome of them standing up with deep convictions! Even though the furnace was heated 7 times, when these men were thrown into that blazing furnace they were unharmed - flames of that fire killed those strong soldiers who threw our brothers into the furnace. But these 3 men of God were well protected in the blazing fire. King was amazed to see now there are 4 men in the furnace and all of them were walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed. The fourth person looked like a son of the gods to the king. May be it was an angel or Jesus himself came into the fire to encourage and fellowship with these truly courageous men of God!

When they were pulled out from the furnace and examined they found out that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

This made the king to change his mind and accept his mistake and realise the God these men worshipped is truly powerful God and he praised the God of heaven. Read vs.28-30 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. 29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

See how his attitude changed from anger to amazement! Now he is appreciating them for willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God! The king was so impressed with them and he promoted them and issued another order through out

was against them until he had completely eliminated them from the camp.

After God eliminated all the adults who doubted him, he takes the next generation to the promised land tells them what he will do for them.



Deu 7:16-26

God says that he will send out hornets among the inhabitants of the Canaan to drive them out!

Hornets make up the Vespa genus of insects, and are the largest type of wasp.

Apart from this Scripture, **Exodus 23:28** says: I will send the hornet ahead of you to

drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way.

Also after Joshua conquering most the Promised Land God says in

Joshua 24:11,12" Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho. The citizens of Jericho fought against you, as did also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites and Jebusites, but I gave them into your hands. 12 I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove them out before you--also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.

When God says 'I sent the hornet ahead of you' it may mean sending literally sending hornets or as suggested in the following Scriptures, the angel whom God sent ahead of them. as vs 27 says "I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter." which caused enemies of God to run away or cause self-destruction!

Exodus 23:20"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared

Vs.23: My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out

Vs.27:"I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their

backs and run

Let us finish by reading the first Scripture: **Deut 2:20-23** (That too was considered a land of the Rephaites, who used to live there; but the Ammonites called them Zamzummites. 21 they were a people strong and numerous, and as tall as the Anakites. The LORD destroyed them from before the Ammonites, who drove them out and settled in their place. 22 The LORD had done the same for the descendants of Esau, who lived in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites from before them. They drove them out and have lived in their place to this day. 23 And as for the Avvites who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorites coming out from Caphtor destroyed them and settled in their place.)

See how God's hand of judgment worked on other nations!

Land of Zamzummites who were like Anakites - gigantic people. But God brought Ammonites and got them destroyed and given the land to Ammonites.

Horites were destroyed and their land taken over by Edomites (descendants of Esau) Avvites were destroyed by Caphtorites and took over their land.

No one can escape from God's judgment.

In 1 Cor 10 Paul says that all these stories written in Old Testament are written as a warning for us.

1 Cor 10:11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. 12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

Are we taking those warnings seriously in our lives? Are we really careful that we don't fall like them? God has showered so much of grace upon us and after showing so much grace through the very sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, God expects us to live carefully following his will. Carefully living to please God shows that we are truly grateful for His amazing grace.

does not, we want you to know, O king that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

These men knew the ten commandments and the first command was that we should not worship any idols and even in a foreign land were they had been brought in as slaves they would not disobey God. They have witnessed how powerful the King of Babylon is as he attacked and conquered their nation of Judah!

Now they are serving as high officials in Babylon and were personally known to the king and the king himself was impressed with their abilities and wisdom. Now they are losing all that they had including their lives if they made a choice to obey God rather than men!

What kind of choice you would have made if you were in their place?

What situations have you been tempted to compromise?

How have you been disobeying God because you fear men rather than God?

Have you disobeyed God because of the desire to get favors from men?

What are you afraid to lose? Is it your job, promotion, favor of your boss or family, property share from your parents, friendships?

Are you afraid to share about Jesus to your colleagues?

Not many of us are threatened to be thrown into fiery furnace! Yet you see how easy it is for us to compromise!

See the convictions they had -

1. They believed God is powerful enough to save them from the fire.
2. Even if God does not save them, they were not willing to disobey God.

What gave them this conviction?

1. They trusted the power of God.
2. They loved God more than their very lives.
3. They also wanted to share their faith in God with deep convictions to the pagans knowing that only the faith in true living God can bring salvation for these pagans.

How powerful is God according to you?

share your faith and pray with faith for the hand of God to work powerfully to give you opportunity, courage and wisdom to share the gospel to them and have their hearts to be opened to accept the gospel.

By faith make great attempts. May the God of Daniel give you also victory.

Great missionary William Carey who came and spread the Gospel in Bengal said this: "Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."

Let us do the same & experience the hand of God working powerfully in our life time.

Day 26

HAND OF GOD THAT SAVES YOU FROM FIRE

Book of Daniel is a great book in the Bible to study to deepen our convictions.

Hope you have been making great attempts to bring glory to God after studying the 2nd chapter.

Read Daniel 3

King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon made a gigantic image of gold. A decree was issued to all the people in Babylon that everyone must bow down to it as the music is played. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. Then they found out Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were Jews and companions of Daniel did not obey king's command!

Furious king summoned them and questioned them. He gave them another chance to save their lives by bowing down to the idol!

He also told them if they do not worship it, they will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. He asked them "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" Read Vs.16-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he

Meditate on **Hebrews 10:26-31** and identify if there are any sins that you are deliberately doing. Confess & repent of them remembering vs. 31 'It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'

Day 6

BE STILL AND SEE THE HAND OF GOD WORKING

Exodus 14

God purposely sandwiched Israel between marching mighty army of Egyptians and the Red Sea. He had a clear plan and he revealed that to Moses (read vs.1-4).

But when the Israelites saw the mighty army of Egyptians marching against them and seeing that they are trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army, their true colors was revealed. They started grumbling and complaining against Moses and God.

Vs11-14 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

As we learnt before, God's expectation on people is to trust Him completely. But our temptation is always to doubt him.

When we question God's plan and doubt him and his plans, we are only looking at the present situation and not seeing that we are carried by the mighty hand of God and he is directing the whole plot and he is the true winner in the end.

These doubting Israelites are looking back and saying that it was better to serve the Egyptians than to be rescued by God!
Have you ever felt like the life you had before becoming a Christian was better? Well you had a lot of freedom - freedom to sin (do whatever you liked or brought pleasure for yourself)! Yes there are challenges in our journey as a Christian! But don't lose sight of our destination God has promised! He is a trustworthy God and will surely stretch out his hands and rescue us and bring us to the destination he has promised because he is a faithful God.

Consider the difference in attitude of Moses & the people who were complaining. Because Moses fully trusted God's plans and ability to rescue them from any upcoming challenges, however big they may be, he was not shaken by fear but others were trembling in fear!

Notice what Moses told them: 13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

Whenever we face challenges in life our question is 'what can I do!' What answer can you get from here?
The answer Moses gave them has profound meaning "Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today."

See different translations on vs.14
The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."(NIV)
The LORD himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."(NLT)
The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."(ESV)
"The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent."(NASB)
What NIV states as 'be still' doesn't mean 'stand still like a statue' it means 'still your tongue' or 'be silent'.

What were they doing with their tongue?
Complain, grumble, expressing words that are revealing their doubts and dissatisfaction about Moses and God.

remember the very words Jesus spoke in Matthew 9: 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

So we started praying and came back and reported what we experienced to the Church in Bangalore.

All the disciples were excited about the plan to send the mission team to Bidar. That year end we organised a Christmas Carnival to raise funds to support the mission team and the Church raised up around Indian Rs. 3,50,000/-

By then we were praying for God to raise up people who can go on the mission team. 4 of them came forward from Bangalore and another 4 from Hyderabad.

Mission team was sent in April 2007. Philip & Pramila who were singles at that time led the team. David & Monica went with the team and trained them for couple of weeks. In 30 days the team with the amazing help of God baptized 8 people and so the group literally doubled in a month's time. One of them who got baptised in the first month was Samuel's brother Santhosh. Soon his mother also got saved.

In just few months a house church was started in Samuel's house in the village called Anadur.

In the first year (April 2007 to Dec 2007) they had 20 baptisms and the Church membership was 25 by the end of 2007.

In 2008 also God blessed the Church with 20 souls being added even though some of the mission team members went back to the mother Churches. In 2009, 13 souls got saved and the membership reached 50.

Now the Church has 123 members. In that 15 are campus students (by July 2014).

Write down names of people whom you feel difficult to approach and

seeking God.

One Sunday he was determined to find a Church to worship God. So he started walking from the place he was staying, praying that he will find a great Church to join worship. After walking more than 7Kms, he saw a banner 'Indian Church of Christ - All are welcome'. So he walked into the hall where our Church in Bangalore was worshipping. Soon after the service brothers started studying the Bible and he responded to the Scriptures and got baptised.

Ever since he got baptized, he wanted to reach out to his family members from his village that is 700Kms away.

God blessed him to get a job and soon he started his own business making advertisement boards etc. The business picked up well and he started bringing his relatives one by one from the village to Bangalore and helped them to find job and also introduced the Gospel to many and many of his relatives including 2 of his own brothers became disciples.

Then he kept requesting the leadership to send a mission team to Bidar. No one in Bangalore Church was planning to send a mission team to Bidar.

Initially no one took his requests seriously as the place is so far away from Bangalore and there were plans for planting other churches in the state. As Samuel kept persevering and praying some of us leaders decided to go with him and visit his village. So in 2006 we visited his village and he arranged meetings in the Methodist Church and we addressed their congregation and taught Discipleship etc. The response was great. Also they arranged an open air meeting where 100s of visitors came and again the response was amazing. We visited many villages and even though we just walked in to those places without any notice, when someone realised these people came to preach, they informed their families and neighbours and in half an hour 30-60 people would gather together in one place with Bibles in their hands with amazing eagerness to hear the gospel.

This amazing interest among the people made us compelled to

Jesus said "For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45). Words from their mouth revealed that they were not trusting God!

So what were Moses & God expecting from them? Keep quiet (by trusting God and believing that His hand is mighty enough to save them) and see the deliverance of God - wait for the deliverance that God will bring about.

What happened after this?

Amazing and dramatic things happened that is considered as some of the most amazing miracles done by God.

Ex 14:15,16 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground.

God expected Moses also to be at peace and lead Israel to 'move on'. Move forward even if you don't see the way ahead! That is walking by faith! When we walk by that kind of faith God opens the way that we don't see now! Wow that is amazing!

Vs. 20-22 then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. 21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

First he sent the angel that was in the front to behind them to protect Israel from being harmed by Egyptians. Also throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side. Then God sent an east wind that divided the sea and the wind was strong that

even the sea bed that is wet and slushy became dry ground so that Israel could walk across the sea.

What do you learn from this passage?

What are your responses when you face challenges?

Write down what are the biggest challenges you have ever faced and how did God deliver you?

Write down how you have seen God delivering others from terrible situations. What can you learn from them?

What do you do with your tongue when you face challenges?

What have you learnt to do from now on?

Day 7

HAND OF GOD PROVIDES THE BEST

Deut 11:10-21

Remember how faithless Israelites were complaining near the Red Sea that it was better if they had stayed back in Egypt?

Probably this was because the best land they had ever seen was Egypt. But God is telling that what I am offering and what I have prepared with my mighty hand is far better than even your imagination.

He compares both the lands - Vs.10-14 In Egypt “.....you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. 11 But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. 12 It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.”13 So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul-- 14 then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.

interpreting this dream was that God could bring understanding of God to the mighty emperor Nebuchadnezzar. In vs. 47 the emperor acknowledges that: Vs. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

What does God want the most? 1 **Tim 2:3,4** This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

John 4:23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

God wants all men - high and low - to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Also he is always seeking true worshipers who will worship the Father in spirit and truth.

But how does he achieve that? His mighty hand works through people like Daniel and today through you and me!

Today we saw how the hand of God worked powerfully through Daniel to bring a mighty emperor to confess the goodness of God and bring him down on his knees to worship the true God. (As you read ahead in Daniel we see that Nebuchadnezzar did not whole heartedly follow God and so he was not saved - but remember God and Daniel did not fail to do their part well.)

God wants to use you too in doing such things at this time. Are you like Daniel seeking God's mercy to empower you to reveal the greatness of God to your family, colleagues, authorities and neighbours? Do you believe it is possible?

{Samuel's Story}

Samuel came from Bidar to Bangalore several years ago to get a job. His family had much financial challenges. He is an artist. Initially Samuel could not get any jobs. He used to sleep in a park and used to take bath using the water for watering plants in the government park. But he was from a Methodist Christian background and was eagerly

has revealed this.

First he explains the dream in vs.31-35 and then gives the interpretation from vs 36.

Statue that was in the dream is interpreted as powerful empires that ruled most of the world: Head of gold = Babylon; Chest of silver = Media/Persia; Belly and Thighs of bronze = Greece; Legs or iron = Rome.

Most important part of the dream which was an amazing prophesy about the future of the world was this: during the times of the last empire, that is Rome, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. (Vs 44)

This is one of the most wonderful prophesy about the coming of Jesus and his kingdom that he will establish which will spread all around the world, which happened around 500 years after Daniel lived (Daniel must have been alive at least till 536BC).

King responded to the interpretation of his dream by Daniel with paying great respect for Daniel and more that that he revered God of heaven whom Daniel worshipped and who revealed these mysteries. Read Vs46-49 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. 49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Most wonderful effect of Daniel seeking the help of God and

Only expectation that God has from his people is that they love the Lord their God and faithfully obey his commands. Then he will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.

That is a promise! And God kept that promise as long as they loved God!

Do you pay attention to God's promises?

Do you believe that His mighty hand will provide all what he promised?

Or do you doubt?

When we trust we are confident and are joyful. When we don't trust in God's ability to fulfill his promises we are insecure and worried!

Even though Israel witnessed the fulfillment of this promise, experienced living in that amazingly best land, enjoyed the harvest, they rejected God very soon!

Then just as God promised he shut the heavens and the land became barren and those who failed to trust God faced severe famine. (1 Kings 18 explains one of such situations)

What God is promising us today is not a piece of land but Eternal home in heaven. Do you believe that God will keep his promise? Are your eyes set on heaven?

Even while we live on earth, he will meet our needs as long as we love him and trust him.

Expectation God had from his people was that they don't get enticed by foreign gods and worship them!

That is the challenge for us also.

Who do you worship? God of heaven or this world and the pleasures and splendor of this world?

If our priority is on making money than serving God we have already fallen into idol worship even though we are claiming 'we are still in the Church'.

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

God is calling those who were claiming to be Christians 'You adulterous people!' Why? Jesus is our bridegroom and we are his bride! He is so committed and faithful in his love for us. But if we flirt with someone else it is adultery! How are we flirting and being unfaithful and adulterous? Friendship with the world!

Jesus said the world is ruled by the Devil! In what ways are you attracted to the world?

(John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)

2 Cor 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Idolatry was always considered and addressed as adultery in the Old Testament that is consistent in the New Testament also. Admiring; desiring; building friendship with the world is hatred towards God.

In what ways are you tempted to be attracted to the world? How does God feel about it? How are you going to overcome such attractions?

Day 8

HAND OF GOD BRINGS FEAR ON UNBELIEVERS

Deut 11:25 No one will be able to stand against you. The LORD your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go.

Deut 28:6-10

Even though God says all the enemies of Israel will fear them, it is actually that they feared the mighty God who was with Israel. These promises in Deuteronomy were made by God when Israel was still in the wilderness before they even faced any enemies and God fulfilled all those promises.

Whom do you fear? God or people around you?

Do you compromise fearing of losing opportunities, job, position or friendship?

Do you believe God can work in the same way he worked in Daniel's life?

Why don't you attempt to be have convictions like Daniel.

Write down the areas you had compromised in the past and see the reasons you had at that time.

Also write about possible temptations you may face in the future and how you will respond differently because you trust God like Daniel and his friends.

Day 25

HAND OF GOD BRINGS DOWN THE MIGHTY TO THE KNEES

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he wanted his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed and its interpretation. But they all expressed their helplessness and said "What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."

Daniel : 2 Chapter

Read vs.12 This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon.

Daniel and his friends were also in the list of wise men who were to be executed. So Daniel requested the king for time for him to interpret the dream. Then Daniel returned home and requested his friends to plead with God for mercy to reveal the dream and interpretation. During the same night God revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. This made Daniel to burst out in praises to God.

Then he went up to the king and explained the dream. But he never took any credit for himself rather he glorified God and made the king understand there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries and he alone

looked healthier and better nourished than any other young men who ate the royal food? But that is what God achieved! Because of this the official took away all the royal food from them so that they could peacefully focus on other things.

Story did not end there: read Vs17-19 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.

God was so pleased with these men who stood up to honor God above any worldly benefits, that he gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. To Daniel God gave the ability to understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

After the training they were brought before the king and he 'interviewed' them.

Vs.20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

See how the hand of God worked so powerfully in the lives of these young men? Even though it was a tough time for them - they had to see their houses burned down, families killed and the temple of the God whom they loved and served burned down - yet they put their complete trust in God of heaven and earth and resolved to obey every command of him irrespective of all possible punishments that can fall on them.

Do you have such convictions?

Or do you compromise in situations like this?

Do you join other worldly people for ungodly speech, ungodly parties and the like? Why do you join the crowd and do ungodly things?

An instance is at the time the spies went to Jericho: Rahab tells them how the people of Jericho felt when they heard the news of what God was doing for Israel!

Joshua 2:8-11

Another instance is at the time when the LORD helped them to cross the river Jordan.

Joshua 4:23,24 For the LORD your God dried up the Jordan before you until you had crossed over. The LORD your God did to the Jordan just what he had done to the Red Sea when he dried it up before us until we had crossed over. 24 He did this so that all the peoples of the earth might know that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God."

The Scripture says the purpose of God drying up Jordan and helping the Israel to cross over was to let all other people of the earth know "that the hand of the LORD is powerful and so that you might always fear the LORD your God." Vs.24

Also remember when we fear God fear of men vanishes!

Another instance is at the time of Gideon. Israel was very weak and huge armies came to attack them. God chose one ordinary man Gideon to lead Israel against those enemies and rescue Israel. God also expected him not to take a huge army but only 300 people! Imagine the fear and insecurity Gideon had! Finally Gideon went down to the camp of the enemies and heard what those soldiers were speaking to each other and he gained his trust in God because he realized already the hand of God is at work in filling them with fear.

Judges 7:12-15

See the response of Gideon after he overheard the conversation of enemy soldiers! Seeing how the Lord has filled them with fear, he gained courage and worshipped God and led his people on attack very courageously.

Romans 8:31b-39

Paul is asking a very important question to get us think - If God is for us, who can be against us?

Today we are not fighting battles like Israel did! But we are on a spiritual battle - this is a daily battle for whole life. Devil is trying to make us fall into temptations so that he can win our souls! But remember Jesus has fought the battle for us and won! So we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us!

When you face temptations do you fear? Do you have confidence that we can overcome them or you easily give into them? Remember Christ fought the battle and laid down his precious life not for us to surrender to the Devil but to gain courage and fight every temptation and win and be like Christ!

If all those invading armies feared Israel knowing that the LORD is with them, how much more the Devil is afraid of us when the same LORD is with us?

What are the temptations you have been facing recently? How was your attitude? Fear and surrender or Courage and overcoming?

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

What are the temptations you have been facing recently? How was your attitude towards those temptations? Fear and surrender or courage and overcoming?

Experience the Hand of God by resisting the temptations and 'turning your weaknesses into your strength'.

Day 9

administration of his kingdom.

Read vs5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

The trainees also had to eat food from the king's table. It seems to be a good deal because these men are brought there as slaves - what can slaves expect? But for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah this was not a blessing but a burden because the Babylonians ate unclean food. These young men knew the Bible and they wanted to hold on to the commands of God even in captivity. Refusing to obey the instruction of the king could even bring death.

But they were willing to risk their life to hold on to the commands of God rather than obeying the commands of an earthly king.

Read again vs.8-16

Vs. 8,9 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel,

When anyone wants to honor God, He comes down to help you fulfill that attempt. Here God caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel.

This is very unlikely for a Babylonian official to show favor to a Hebrew slave! But with God nothing is impossible!

See what Daniel spoke to the official in Vs12-15 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

Is it possible to imagine that these men who ate just vegetarian food

But Elijah commanded them to offer their enemies a feast and send them back unharmed and well fed to their own land!

See how the story ends: Vs.23 So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Notice the ways the Hand of God worked powerfully.
Take note of what could have happened if God did not intervene?
How does God expect us to treat even our enemies?
Read Matthew 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:9-21

Day 24 **HAND OF GOD WORKS** **FOR THOSE WHO HONOUR GOD**

One of the saddest times of Israel was when they had forsaken the LORD, they were given into the hands of Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar's army destroyed the temple, looted it and took many Israelites as slaves to Babylon.

Read Daniel 1:1-21(Whole chapter)

Vs.3,4 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility-- 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

From the time of Solomon, other nations were aware that God has given superior intelligence to many Israelites (that is evident even today!).

Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make use of the intelligent men for

GRATITUDE TO THE BLESSINGS FROM THE **HAND OF GOD**

Deuteronomy 26:1-15

This is another command given to the Israelites just before they took over the Promised Land. God is commanding them about how to show their gratitude to the mighty God who gives them the land where milk and honey is flowing.

They were commanded to bring their first fruits to the Tabernacle and express their gratitude verbally also:

Let us focus on **Vs.3-11**

See the three parts in their expression of gratitude:

1. Remembering their past condition and suffering. (Slavery)
2. How the LORD brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. (Deliverance from Slavery)
3. How God brought them to this place and gave them this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Glorious present and future)

They were expected to show their gratitude by giving the first fruits to God as offering and verbally expressing their gratitude.

Isn't it the same thing God expects from us now?

Do you remember where you came from - your past? How you were slaves of sin! How hopeless was that life? You couldn't save yourself! God stretched out his mighty hand and saved you through the sacrifice of his only son!

He brought you into His Kingdom and made you part of his family as a child of God!

Now you have the glorious life in His Kingdom and after this life on earth you will be in the real Promised Land - heaven for eternity!

Are you grateful for all this? Do you show gratitude to God? Do you

give your first fruits and tithe and more to God? Or are you selfish and ungrateful keeping everything for yourself?
Do you verbally thank him remembering your past, present and the promised future?
Let us learn to be grateful for the blessings brought by the hand of God.

What will happen if we are ungrateful? Hand of God that saves us will be against us and crush us till we repent!

Read Duet 31:14-23 and see what God was predicting about the plight of ungrateful Israel! He even gave them a song to be taught to all Israel to remind them of their ungratefulness and to help them repent.
Meditate on that song in Duet 32

Write down your story - what was your past and how God delivered you and the blessings that God has given you so far and what you are surely going to receive from him in the future!

Once in a while (you set the frequency) read it and thank God.

As an expression of gratitude continue to give more and more to God in offering and to the poor and widows.

Decide to do something today to express your gratitude to God

Dothan. They surrounded the city and in the morning when the servant of Elisha got frightened when he went out and saw the huge army surrounding the city.

But Elisha said: vs.16 "Don't be afraid, those who are with us are more than those who are with them." 17 And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Do you know there are spiritual forces guarding us? They can't be seen by our physical eyes! Even if an army surrounds us those hordes of angels who are around us to protect are more than those who come against us!

The moment the servant's eyes were opened and as soon as he saw the chariots of fire around him, his fear left and he got so confident!

We may never have that experience but we must have faith that God and his powerful angels are around us fighting the good fight to protect us! When we have that faith we don't panic or fear or worry in any situation. Rather we can be at peace even amidst all turmoil around us. When we trust God like that God helps us with his outstretched arms.

The latter part is interesting - Read again vs 18-23

Elisha prayed to God to strike the army that came to capture him to be struck with blindness and God acted on it at once!

Then he led them to Samaria -the capital city of Israel.

So he trapped them in the walled city of Samaria and surrounded them with forces of Israel. Then he opened their eyes! Now who is frightened?

What the king of Israel or the army of Israel could not achieve was achieved by an unarmed ordinary man with the power of God!

Then the king of Israel wanted to kill these enemies who were brought into his lap!

Then and there he pulled out his brief case and took the tablet and gave me and I asked how much I should pay him! He said - 'nothing'!

I am not saying that we should give to God in expectation of something from God. But the point is to trust God that he is our father who knows our needs before even we see it and he is concerned about us and so he will meet our needs even if we feel like we have only little. And never hold back in giving to God even when we feel like we have only little!

Write down the situations you were in dire trouble and how God helped you.

Praise God about that and remind yourself every time you face similar situations in the future that God is in control.

Seek advice in every such situation and follow the advice than following your own ways.

Day 23

OPEN YOUR EYES AND SEE THE HAND OF GOD

2 Kings 6:8-23

Even though Israel was steeped in idol worship that God hates as adultery, when Israel was in trouble God helped them through his prophet Elisha.

Powerful kingdom of Aram waged war against Israel. But the Hand of God was upon Israel - God who knows the thoughts and attitudes of men revealed the schemes and plans to the king of Israel through Elisha the prophet.

So Israel could have strategic advantage over Arameans.

King of Aram was assuming that there are some spies in his camp reporting to the King of Israel. But one of his own officers told the king, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

So the King of Aram sent a powerful armed troop to capture Elisha in

Day 10

NO WALLS ARE TOO STRONG FOR THE HAND OF GOD

Joshua 6 - Fall of Jericho

Do you remember how Israelites grumbled against God and Moses?

Duet 1:27,28"The LORD hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. 28Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say, 'The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there.'"

Even at that time God had reminded them gently and patiently -

Duet 1:29-31Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. 30The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, 31and in the wilderness. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

How many powerful deeds of the Hand of God they had already witnessed? 10 plagues against Egypt, parting the Red Sea, destruction of mighty army of Egypt, receiving manna from heaven every morning, getting water from the rock.... the list goes on! Yet they got terrified knowing that the Promised Land has cities with very high walls.

Now God is bringing them to the first such city that they were afraid of!

Here God wanted to show them it is he who fights for them and they have to do only very little to capture such places.

Just by marching around the walls for 7 days and raising their voices on the 7th day, God brought down the mighty walls they described as that are up to the sky! What brought down the walls?

Is it their marching? Is it their shouting? Or is it the invisible mighty hand of God?

Is there any walls that are too strong for God to bring down?
Centuries after this incident, the walls of Nineveh, capital of 150 feet high walls that had the width on top of it good enough for 3 chariots to run abreast with 1200 towers was brought down when God brought the flooded river against it!

What are the walls that you are afraid of? Which areas of your city do you feel like Gospel cannot enter?
Which are the groups of people in your city that you feel like impenetrable?
Do you reject some people thinking that their hearts are too hard and will not let the Gospel enter?
By this you are not just misjudging people but also God! You are saying that God is so weak that he can't break those walls!

Are you not despising God with such thoughts? This is the worst thing we can do against God! On the other hand, when we completely trust Him and believe there are no walls too strong for God to breach, God is glorified and honored and he will accomplish what you believe.

Write down such things that you want to witness and pray to God.
When God breaks those walls, write down and let the generations hear about it and gain the same faith!

Some of us have experienced the hand of God working powerfully by turning the whole family to Christ by breaking down the walls of traditions, false beliefs, bitterness etc.
Here is such a great story of Saji Alex's family: Saji grew up in a traditional Christian family in Kerala. He and his family faced very intense challenges when he was growing up. When he finished schooling he was not sure what direction he has to take for his future. He went along with a friend who wanted to join Catholic Seminary and he too joined the seminary. After few years of seminary life he realized that is not what he should continue and so he quit. After much

never know how much that can become!

Elisha asks her to collect as many jars from all her neighbors and then close the door and pour that little oil into those jars filling them one by one!
She and her sons obeyed it word by word and when they finished pouring the oil into the last jar, the oil stopped flowing.

Amazingly that much oil was enough her to sell and pay back the debts and for the family to live on!
What a faithful and powerful God we have!

Are we willing to seek advice when we are in trouble?
Are we willing to follow the advice when someone gives advice that does not match our reasoning?
Are we willing to entrust God with the little we have?
In Nov 2013 my son had his birthday. I asked him what does he want for his birthday. He didn't say anything. Later on with hesitation he came to me and said he would like to get a graphic tablet for drawing. Then I asked how much it will cost. He said it will cost Rs.7, 000/-! That was too much for me! I said sorry I don't have so much money now but let us pray and when I have enough money I will get it. Then I started wondering - my son does not ask anything much and what kind of father I am if I can't give him something when he asks?

The only option for me was to reduce my contribution and buy him the gift. Then I thought it is not right for me to give less to God to give more for my son!

I resolved to give first to God and wait. In that same week the person who stays in the 1st floor of our house requested me to help him fix a window mesh. When I went to help him I asked him about what type of graphic tablet is good because he being a graphic artist I had seen him using one before.
Immediately he said I have one that I am not using you can take it right now!

Pray with newly found faith for them to be accomplished by the Hand of God for His Glory! Witness such things being accomplished by God - praise God and share the work of the Hand of God to others.

Day 22
WHEN THE HAND OF GOD WORKS
ON THE LITTLE WE HAVE

2 Kings 4:1-7 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." 2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house? "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil." 3 Elisha said "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." 5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."

This poor widow of a prophet of God was in deep trouble. Her husband had incurred debts before his death. Now the creditor is coming to take her two boys as slaves!
Such terrible things were common in the land of Israel where people have become godless!

She approaches Prophet Elisha for help.
Elisha asks her Tell me, what do you have in your house? "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil."

By human reasoning what can she do with that little oil that is left in her house? Nothing at all!
But when you give that little oil you have to the hand of God - we

struggle he got a job in Bangalore and while working there he was invited to the Church. The Bible studies helped him to clearly understand God's plan for his life and he became a disciple. But he faced a lot of opposition from his family. As he was the eldest in the family, he was expected to earn and take care of the family. His mother was afraid that he will not take care of the family anymore. From the time he became a disciple he was desiring and praying that everyone in his family will also be saved. His brother Sojan came and stayed with him and took up a job and he too became a disciple. Saji joined the mission team to Cochin in 1992. Soon his sister Sheji became a disciple in Cochin. Saji got married to Sheeba in Cochin. Then his brother Binu became a disciple. Saji kept praying for the rest of the family and his brother Biju and his wife Cinija came to Cochin to help Saji&Sojan to construct their house and they stayed back and became disciples. By this time their mother Leelamma became very interested in following Jesus but there was no Church in Kannur where she was residing with her husband. So the whole family prayed and soon in 2012 the Church was started in Kannur. Saji's mother was so eager to follow Christ that she started attending the Church services in Kannur travelling a long distance from her village by spending 6 hours by bus (up and down). The biggest challenge was about his dad. He was an alcoholic. He had no interest in following Jesus all these years. But in 2013 he became very sick and was in the ICU for several days. During this time disciples from Kannur Church sincerely reached out to him by visiting, praying and serving him. With much prayer and perseverance Saji's dad Alexander repented and got baptised. By this all his family members are saved. New chapter of the second generation coming to Christ began with Sojan's daughter getting baptized in 2014.

Day 11

HAND OF GOD THAT TURNS HEAVENLY BODIES

Joshua 10:1-14

Five kings of Amorites gathered their armies together to fight against Israel. Fear of the LORD and how He helps Israel to take over cities spread among all nations living in the 'Promised Land'. They might have thought if they gather together and fight they may win.

Gibeonites who lived in that region were wise enough to surrender to Israel even though their city was important and larger than many other cities and that all their men were good fighters.

(Joshua 10:2 He and his people were very much alarmed at this, because Gibeon was an important city, like one of the royal cities; it was larger than Ai, and all its men were good fighters.)

Five kings of Amorites set out to attack Gibeon and they in turn requested help of Joshua.

Joshua responded and got his army march against the enemies.

Immediately the LORD spoke to Joshua "Do not be afraid of them; I have given them into your hand. Not one of them will be able to withstand you."

Whenever we set out to do God's will, however hard the task is, God is on our side and he will help us with his mighty hand to provide us success.

How can Israel - a small nation with few soldiers - win against armies of five nations? Well nothing is impossible when God is fighting for us!

It is not the strength of Joshua or his army that fought the battle and won but the hand of God did it.

first God threw them into confusion and many enemy soldiers ran for

hands. 19You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones."

20The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was—water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.

{It is interesting to note that instead of the regular phrase 'Spirit of the LORD came up on the prophet' or 'Word of God came to the prophet' here in Vs15b says 'hand of the LORD came on Elisha' ("While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha".)}

Then Elisha prophesied that God will fill the valley with pools of water without wind or rain! So that all the soldiers and their animals can quench their thirst. Also vs. 18 says -This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD.

It is impossible for us to even imagine such a thing will happen - without rain without any one digging wells, the whole valley being filled with water all of a sudden! But such an unbelievable matter is 'an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD'!

God also predicted that he will deliver Moab into their hands. All what God promised through Elisha happened and the proud army of Moab was defeated!

There is nothing impossible for the Hand of God to accomplish!

What are some of your godly desires that are not fulfilled?

Do you think it is hard for God to accomplish them?

What is the hardest/impossible thing in your sight today?

Is that too hard for God or do you want to believe 'it is an easy thing for God'?

Make a list of things that are too hard and unimaginable for you and pray that you will have faith to believe that they are too easy for God!

turn you away from God.

Day 21
OUR HARDEST THINGS ARE
EASIEST THINGS FOR GOD

2 Kings 3

Israel went to fight against Moab.

Joram king of Israel took the help of Jehoshaphat king of Judah and the king of Edom.

After marching for seven days the army ran out of water and they realised they may perish not by the swords of Moabites but by thirst!

Jehoshaphat being a man trusting the LORD, wanted to seek the guidance and help of God.

Read what happened:

11But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no prophet of the LORD here, through whom we may inquire of the LORD?”

An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.”

12Jehoshaphat said, “The word of the LORD is with him.” So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

As we know Israel had rejected God and were worshipping only idols for generations! Even though God sent prophets like Elijah & Elisha they did not fully give up their idol worship! Just because Elisha had respect for Jehoshaphat because he feared the LORD, Elisha offered to inquire of the LORD on their behalf.

So he asked for a harpist to be brought and play the harp.

Vs.16-20 While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came on Elisha 16and he said, “This is what the LORD says: I will fill this valley with pools of water. 17For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink. 18This is an easy thing in the eyes of the LORD; he will also deliver Moab into your

their lives. Vs. 11 "As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them from the sky, and more of them died from the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.”

Who fought against the enemies of Israel? This is not the only time God fought against his enemies using natural forces. Study about how God used natural forces that are under his control to fight against the wicked nations and how he destroyed them. Praise God for His amazing ways. Gain faith and trust in God's saving hand.

The story is not over. Read vs.12-15

12 On the day the LORD gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." 13 So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down about a full day. 14 There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the LORD listened to a man. Surely the LORD was fighting for Israel! 15 Then Joshua returned with all Israel to the camp at Gilgal.

This is one of the most amazing ways God worked - As the battle against Amorites goes on Joshua realized that he needs more time to finish the attack on his enemies. He asks more time for sun to go down (sunset)! This is something no one will ever dare to imagine. But Joshua knew so well that it is God who controls the whole universe. Let us look at his prayer and learn from it - Joshua said to the LORD in the presence of Israel: "O sun, stand still over Gibeon, O moon, over the Valley of Aijalon." He is not asking, God if possible please stop the sun! See the confidence he had on the power of God. God was so pleased with Joshua's faith and zeal that he extended the day by probably another 12 hours!

How did God do it? We don't know how to explain that but one thing is

sure - this miracle did happen! More important matter is to believe that we are worshipping a God who controls the entire universe! Trust him and dare to ask (like Joshua) confidently for God to work beyond our logics and reasons.

Write down your miracle prayers:
Believe that you have already received them (Mark 11:24)
Write down answered prayers and share with others giving glory to God.

Day 12

GOD WHO FULFILS HIS PROMISES

In the last few devotionals we read many of God's promises. Those promises seemed to be too big for us. Such great promises can even make us doubt - "will God do that much?"

Those who trust God will see the promises of God being fulfilled in their own life.

Joshua was one of those rare faithful ones. When all others around him failed to trust God, he stood up and went against the crowd and trusted God and challenged the faithless. God rewarded him to see the fulfillment of those promises he trusted.

God brought them out of Egypt promising them to be settled in the Promised Land of Canaan. When they were in the wilderness very close to the land of Canaan God had asked Moses to send out 12 spies to survey the land. They saw the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey but 10 of them had no faith that God will help them to capture the land. Only Joshua and Caleb had the faith in God's ability to fulfill his promises. Those 10 of them caused the minds of the rest of Israel to be troubled to the point they all believed that they will perish in the hands of the 'giant Anakites' who lived in Canaan. So they rebelled against God and Moses.

the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. 39 When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"

People of false gods prayed to their gods for hours but they were not gods that they could not answer their prayer! But here Elijah prays just once in reverence to God and the most amazing thing takes place - fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil and also licked up the water in the trench!

Close your eyes and visualise this event - it is one of the most dramatic events in the Bible - and see the result - vs.39 says When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"

It was not required for Elijah to give a sermon to challenge them to accept the LORD but by the very sight of this event they all fell prostrate in worship and cried out - "The LORD--he is God! The LORD--he is God!"

Not only that these people who revered the prophets of Baal, listened to the instruction of Elijah and seized them all and brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there!

See how the hand of God worked so powerfully to turn the hearts of people of the whole nation to God!

What a wonderful God that we are worshipping!
Are you like Elijah with uncompromising faith and trust in the living God or like the people of Israel who are wavering between false gods and true God?

Where do you take refuge in times of difficulties? In the world, wealth, humans, self or on the living God?

Do you love God with all your heart and mind and soul?

If there is in any way your heart is not fully committed to God make the whole hearted commitment to HIM today! Don't let anything to

challenges the nation in vs.21 Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him."

Elijah's proposal for this was to have both the prophets of pagan gods & Elijah to bring an offering to their god and call out their god to accept the offering by fire. Whichever god accepts it by fire then it is proved to be true god. Elijah was sure that their god has no power to bring fire from heaven and he was also sure that the Lord of heaven whom he worships is the true God and he will answer his prayer by fire.

The prophets of false gods spent hours chanting, dancing and cutting themselves but their gods did not answer by fire!

Elijah was bold enough to taunt them: Vs.27,28 At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened."28 So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed.

Finally Elijah repaired the altar of the LORD and placed the offering and he did another amazing thing - he dug a trench that could contain more than 14 litres of water and he got people to pour water on the offering, on the altar and the water even filled the trench. (read:vs.32-39)

This is unusual because we know if something has to be lit by fire it should not have water! But Elijah was sure of the power of fire that God is going to send that he wanted all the people around to be amazed and turn their hearts to God.

Let us read the most wonderful part of this event: Vs.37-39 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, so these people will know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood,

Numbers 14:6-9 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes 7and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. 8If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. 9Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them."

Joshua and Caleb had so much of trust in God that they stood up before a million grumbling faithless Israelites and proclaimed their faith in God's power to fulfill God's promises.

God was pleased with Joshua and Caleb but was angry with the faithless. So he cursed the faithless and made sure they wander in the desert for 40 days and perish. Only Joshua and Caleb who trusted God got a chance to step into the 'Promised Land'.

Then God made this promise to Joshua:

Joshua 1:3-6 I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. 4Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates—all the Hittite country—to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. 5No one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you. 6Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them

See the fulfillment of this promise:

Joshua 11:16-23

What happened to the Anakite giants that people feared {Numbers 13:32b,33 All the people we saw there are of great size. 33We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.}}

Not only Joshua but Caleb was also blessed to see the fulfillment of the promises he trusted: **Joshua 14:12-15** Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”

13Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. 14So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly. 15(Hebron used to be called KiriathArba after Arba, who was the greatest man among the Anakites.) Then the land had rest from war.

Did God fulfill his promises? Let us hear Joshua's own testimony on this:

Joshua 21:43-45 so the LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their ancestors, and they took possession of it and settled there. 44The LORD gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors. Not one of their enemies with- stood them; the LORD gave all their enemies into their hands. 45Not one of all the LORD's good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyonewas fulfilled.

Do you trust in God's faithfulness and power to fulfill His promises?

Do you even remember His promises?

One of the goals of all the people in this world is to be happy! Best way to be joyful (that is the word found more in the Bible than happiness) in this life is to remember the promises of God and trust those promises and wait in expectation to see their fulfillment.

Study the promises of God in the Bible.

Make a list of them. Choose those are relevant to you and pray to God to fulfill them. Trust and wait to see those fulfillments. Enjoy and praise God and share those amazing stories to others around you. This will not only make you joyful but will Glorify God - that is the ultimate purpose.

Day 13

Elijah felt the same grief for the loss of this boy and he took the boy into his upper room and cried out to God three times and God brought the boy back to life. Through this she was convinced that Elijah was truly the prophet of God and that he speaks the word of God!

Study Jeremiah 17:5-9 See the blessings and curses from God depends on where we put our trust!

Are you giving first priority to God?

What excuses do you make when you compromise and not give first priority to him?

Do you give the best and first from your income to God?

Will you do that even if you come across challenging times in your life?

Remember none of us may face the crisis this widow faced and yet she chose to give first to God (by giving to the prophet of God)!

Have you experienced God's faithfulness by way of God taking care of your needs? Write down those experiences and praise God.

Make a commitment that you will never compromise in giving first to God.

Day 20

HAND OF GOD THAT TURNED THE NATION TO TRUE GOD

1 Kings 18:16-46

Israel was at its lowest position spiritually when Ahab & Jezebel were ruling it.

God sent Elijah the prophet to turn the nation to God.

Jezebel had succeeded in turning the whole nation to worship pagan Gods of Cananites Baal & Asherah. Jezebel had four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah eating at her table!

Elijah was fed up seeing that they have abandoned the LORD. He

LORD spoken by Elijah.

This poor widow had so much trust in God that she obeyed the instructions of Elijah and so God blessed her and her son to be well taken care till the famine ended.

How are your faith and trust in God tested?
What is your response when you are tested?
Do you doubt or trust?

How about giving contribution/offering to God? Is that your 1st priority after you receive your income? Or do you consider what are your expenses first and consider giving to God later or from the 'left over'?

Satan always want to keep us insecure and worried about our future making us feel like 'you need to take of yourself'no one else will care for you"God and the Church are selfish - they are demanding more from you'etc.

This widow could have thought about the prophet like this 'what a selfish man he is - see what he says "But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son."He wants the first portion - he is not telling - bake and eat first portion and then give me the rest!

Is God wrong in expecting you to give the first and best to HIM?
He is not selfish and he can exist without you giving him anything. He was there fully taken care even before you ever existed. But he is expecting you to give first to him for your well being. Because he knows that your whole life till eternity depends on you loving him with all your heart and giving him the first priority.

Also notice another miracle happened in the same period of Elijah's stay with this widow's family. Her only son became ill and died bringing terrible grief.

CHOOSING THE WEAK TO REVEAL THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD

It is noticeable in the Bible that God always chooses the weak and ordinary men and make them do mighty deeds by the power of God so that He will gain glory.

Young boy David was used by God to kill giant Goliath and win the battle against Philistines.

Young boy Samuel was used by God to prophesy about Eli & family and lead Israel.

Most of the prophets were very ordinary people but brought extraordinary prophesies and some did extraordinary miracles.

Moses had a stammering tongue but God used his tongue to bring the mighty kingdom of Egypt to its knees.

List goes on...(Read Hebr 11 to know more)

Judges 6:1-6

Because of the sins of Israelites, God handed them over to the Midianites. Vs2.because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds.

See how the Israelites had to suffer under the oppression of Midianites?

When they were crushed so hard they cried out to God and God sent a deliverer - Gideon.

Read Judges 7

See how God works - when thousands of Israelites gathered to fight the Midianites God wanted most of them to go back and have only 300 of them to accompany Gideon to fight innumerable Midianite soldiers. Why did God send most of them back? If a huge army fights Midianites and win the war people may give the credit of victory to the army and not to God who really fights for them and gives them victory! God wants to gain glory and so he did this.

Who will ever imagine a small group of 300 can win the victory over such a huge army of Midianites? By worldly point of view it is impossible to even imagine that it is possible for a victory by just 300 ordinary famished men!

But remember the promise God had made with them -

Deut 1: 29 Then I said to you, "Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. 30 The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes,....

Also here we see how God understands our weaknesses and how he strengthens us.

Read again **Judges 7:9-16** God knew that Gideon was fearful! See vs.10 ¹⁰If you are afraid to attack, go down to the camp with your servant Purah¹¹ and listen to what they are saying. Afterward, you will be encouraged to attack the camp."So he and Purah his servant went down to the outposts of the camp.

So Gideon went down to the camp of Midianites and as God himself promised he got strengthened!

Vs.13-15 Gideon arrived just as a man was telling a friend his dream. "I had a dream,"he was saying. "A round loaf of barley bread came tumbling into the Midianite camp. It struck the tent with such force that the tent overturned and collapsed."

14His friend responded, "This can be nothing other than the sword of Gideon son of Joash, the Israelite. God has given the Midianites and the whole camp into his hands."

15When Gideon heard the dream and its interpretation, he bowed down and worshiped. He returned to the camp of Israel and called out, "Get up! The LORD has given the Midianite camp into your hands."

See how God works - God put dreams in the minds of his enemies and made them to live in fear! When Gideon overheard the dream of one of those Midianite soldiers and its interpretation, he was so convinced that God is working so powerfully to give Israel a great victory and so he worshipped God then and there! Also he took courage and led the

once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

As usual Elijah obeyed God and went to Zarephath looking for the widow God has planned to provide him with food.

Her life situation shows what people were going through all over in Israel. Because of them rejecting God and worshipping idols, God had brought famine upon the land that was once flowing with milk and honey.

People must have started dying. Even this widow and her only son were planning to bake the last bread and she had no hope that they will survive. From her words in vs.12 we see that she and her son were expecting nothing but death soon after she has this last meal with her son.

That is when Elijah appears the scene and requests her to give him a jar of water to drink. When she goes ahead to get the drink, he also makes another request - "And bring me, please, a piece of bread."(Vs.11b). That is when she reveals her plight we discussed before.

Then Elijah prophesies : 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.' "

What will be your response if someone says like this when you are in her situation? I may think: "This must be some one who has come to trick me"or "what if this doesn't happen as he predicts? What if the flour and oil gets over when I bake bread for him? Then what will be our plight?"or "Let me bake a bread for my son first and then if the flour and oil remains I will bake one for this man."

These are all thoughts out of insecurity fear and lack of trust in God!

But let us see how this widow responded: Vs.15,16 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the

Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook.

As God was angered by the idol worship of his people, he told Elijah there will be no rain for 3 years!

Will God punish the righteous and unrighteous together?

Well God had a plan to take care of Elijah - it was an unprecedented plan. He led him to a brook so that he can drink water from the brook and God sent ravens with bread and meat in the morning and evening! Who cooked them and from where the ravens brought them? We don't know - but the hand of God that brought punishment on the wicked brought blessings to those who followed God! Our God is just - he will take care of those who serve him faithfully.

It was not only Elijah that God took care during this time but also all other prophets and the righteous in Israel.

1 Kings 18:4 While Jezebel was killing off the LORD's prophets, Obadiah had taken a hundred prophets and hidden them in two caves, fifty in each, and had supplied them with food and water.)

Is there any reason that you should hold back from serving God?
Are you willing to trust God the Almighty that he will take care of you as you serve Him?

Day 19

HAND OF GOD WORKS POWERFULLY FOR THOSE WHO GIVE FIRST TO GOD

1 Kings 17:7-24

As we studied before this, in the time of drought, God provided provided Elijah with water from the brook and bread and meat brought by ravens.

After some time the brook dried up and God told him in vs 9 "Go at

300 soldiers with him and led them to great victory over such a huge army!

Vs.22 When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords. The army fled to Beth Shittah toward Zererah as far as the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath.

See how the hand of God worked? When the 300 men with Gideon sounded the trumpet in faith, God caused confusion and fear among the enemies and they killed each other with their swords and the rest of them fled in fear.

What ways are you being like Gideon and his people? Do you consider yourself weak? Well then understand from these Scriptures that God has great plans for those who are weak but are willing to trust the 'strong and powerful' God.

Think and write down few things you considered impossible for you as you felt you were weak.

{It could be like the following:

I am afraid & I don't know how to share my faith with my friends, colleagues or boss.

I wish I could start a Bible Talk in my college, work place or neighbourhood but I don't have the knowledge and courage.

I am so weak in fellowship that I don't have many friends in the Church.

I am so weak in my knowledge of Scriptures that I can't teach the Bible to any non Christians.}

While I am writing these lines I am reminded of how God helped me - I had no Bible knowledge before becoming a disciple. I was amazed and touched by the way the brothers who taught me were so well versed in the Scriptures. They were able to give me answers for any questions from the Scriptures! After getting baptised as I got joined them for studying the Bible with new comers, I was even more amazed to see how fast people are overcoming addictions and sins they were enslaved for years just by the Bible studies. I was

wondering that if I can also equipped to study the Bible with people like this, so many more people could be saved. But I did not have the confidence that I can ever do it. One reason was that as I suffered some sickness few years before that I had lost my ability to memorise. This had seriously affected my education and work.

Then it dawned on me that if God has changed me so much and as I witnessed, God is chaining so many others around me, then why can't I pray for God to help me regain my ability to memorise? Also I remembered that after baptism I am not alone but I have received the gift of Holy Spirit. I started praying and started making efforts to memorise Scriptures and Guard the Gospel studies. Amazingly soon God helped my brain to start functioning much better than ever before. With the help of Holy Spirit and other brothers I learnt to do Guard the Gospel studies and memorised 100 Scriptures in two months! So many of them with whom I started studying the Bible even got baptised. I know it so well that I am still very weak but it is not my ability or power but it is truly the power God that works through weak people like me!

Gain faith from the example of Gideon and pray that God will strengthen you and use you powerfully in the areas you are afraid you are weak and helpless.

Day 14

HAND OF GOD WORKS FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GLORIFY GOD

Hezekiah was the king of Judah. {Remember Israel was divided into two nations : Judah(Southern nation with Jerusalem as capital) and Israel (Northern nation with Samaria as capital).}

In the early years of Hezekiah's reign nation of Assyria attacked and destroyed Israel and took many people into Assyria as captives (Exile of Israel) This is mentioned in the first part of 2 Kings 18.

Day 18

HAND OF GOD PROVIDES FOR THOSE WHO SERVE HIM

Many times people hold back from serving God thinking that it takes a lot of sacrifice and while serving God their needs will not be met.

Elijah was a great servant of God. He had to live and do his ministry in one of the most hostile nation - Israel! This is the time of kings. Israel was divided into two nations - Northern kingdom Israel and the southern kingdom Judah.

From the beginning of forming the kingdom, Israel turned away from God and started worshipping idols (starting with calf idols in Bethel & Dan set up by the first king Jeroboam).

Ahab was one of the worst kings who rule Israel guided by his wife Jezebel who was probably the wicked woman mentioned in the Bible!

Jezebel was leading Israel to worship Baal and she was bent on killing God's prophets!

Elijah was sent by God to such a godless nation at such a terrible time to bring them back to God.

Deuteronomy 32 talks about what God would do to the nation if it forsakes God and worships idols. One of the punishment predicted is that he will afflict the land with famine!

1 Kings 17:1-6 Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, and there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word."
2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: 3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there."
5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith

throwing them into confusion and they killed each other!

What do you do when you face crises? Worrying or praising? Even if you go to God what kind of prayer do you offer? Praying with doubt - "God if you can..." Or do you fully trust God? Do you remember God's promises in such situations?

Do you trust God's promises? What are some promises you have witnessed being fulfilled?

Next time when you face a crisis, face it with confidence in God's promises and offer songs of praises to God and see how God works powerfully.

Day 17

YOUR STORY - HAND OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE

Psalm 118

Many psalms are written from the experiences of the psalmists.

Write your story - how the Hand of God worked in your life -

How were you saved?

What are the other miracles God did in your life?

Write down and see how the unseen hand of God worked in your life; praise God.

Write down your present burdens and see how the same God delivered you in the past will give you victory over these things as well.

Praise him for the future victories and live in peace.

Mark 11:24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Assyrians were very powerful and very wicked - they were known for their cruelty. Bent on conquest, they now attacked Judah assuming that it must be much more easy to capture this smaller nation. But they did not understand that this small nation is worshipping the great God!

Read 2 Kings 18:17-19:37

See what Hezekiah did when he read the letter from the Assyrians! He was scared but took refuge in God the almighty. Read his prayer:

2 Kings 19:14-19

Assyrians were boasting that none of the gods of other nations could save those nations from the mighty hand of their king! So they were threatening the people of Judah not to trust Hezekiah when he says 'the LORD will deliver' them.

But King Hezekiah had clear understanding that those so called gods were only wood and stone! Read vs.18 They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands.

Notice Hezekiah's request to the almighty God whom he worshipped: Vs.19 Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

Hezekiah's prayer was not that God will save his nation for his benefit or for his people's benefit but the glory of God!

Notice what he prayed: "deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

He wanted God to act on the threat of the Assyrians and deliver Judah so that all the kingdoms on earth may know that the LORD (YHWH) alone is God!

Isn't it the same desire David had when he attacked the giant Goliath whom the whole nation of Israel feared?

Whenever anyone desires God's name to be glorified, God is pleased with that desire and if anyone prays to Him with that desire he will surely answer that prayer so that His name will be glorified.

How do you pray? Praying for your benefit, comfort and glory? Or are your prayers purely for the glory of God?

Remember: the very reason God created all men is for His glory - (Isa 43:7).

When we seek God's glory we are fulfilling the very purpose of our creation.

As soon as Hezekiah prayed this prayer of faith - God sent message to Isaiah the prophet and this is one most important part of that message: **2 Kings 19:22,23**"Who is it you have insulted and blasphemed? Against who have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel! 23 By your messengers you have heaped insults on the Lord."

God says that Assyrians that it is not Hezekiah or the nation of Judah that they have insulted with their threats but they have insulted God of heaven and he calls it 'blasphemy'! God cannot bear with anyone blaspheming him.

Blasphemy is opposite to glorifying God. God destroys those who blaspheme his name and protects and lifts up those who are trying to glorify him.

Now he raised his hand against the blasphemer - Assyria. See what the mighty hand of God has done:

Read again **2 Kings 19:32-37**"Therefore this is what the LORD says concerning the king of Assyria: "He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. 33 By the way that he came he will return; he will not enter this city, declares the LORD. 34 I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant."35 That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning--there were all the dead bodies! 36 So Sennacherib king

See how Jehoshaphat prayed:

12 O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

God answered his prayer of faith through a prophet:

Vs 15-17 'Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.16 Tomorrow march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. 17 You will not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will give you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the LORD will be with you.'"

Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah trusted God's promise even though God did not specify how he will defeat the enemies.

Because they trusted the promise of God - even though a vast army was near them - the first thing they did was to worship God and sing praises to him.

See what military guidance that Jehoshaphat gave his army that went out against the invading vast army:

Vs.21-23 After consulting the people, Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing to the LORD and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness as they went out at the head of the army, saying: "Give thanks to the LORD, for his love endures forever." 22 As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. 23 The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another.

See how they won the war! Only thing they did was to sing praises go God. As they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated. God destroyed them by

It can also be a great revival of Evangelism to save souls. Are you willing to spearhead the revival? Do you want to experience the 'Hand of God' working powerfully in your efforts for that amazing revival? You don't have to be a king or a great leader starts a great revival. We have the greatest example in Jesus - he had no position given by the people in the world for him to start the revival. His heart was moved by seeing the spiritual condition of the people around him.

Matt 9:35-38 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Jesus 'SAW' the needs of people and that aroused his compassion for the lost. Pray to God to open your eyes and ears to see and hear the needs of people (both lost and saved - including you and your family) around you. Write them down and with prayer and dependence on God & with advice from other matured disciples around you and start a revival to meet those needs for the glory of God.

Day 16
WINNING A WAR JUST BY SINGING
PRAISES TO GOD

Read: 2 Chronicles 20:1-30

Three nations got together to attack Judah - Moabites, Ammonites and some of the Meunites. It was a vast army against a small nation with little strength. Jehoshaphat was the King of Judah at that time. He was a good king who trusted God. He had options to either surrender or fight and get defeated or to seek the military alliance of some other nations. But he did not do any of them but turned to God for the help of his mighty hand!

of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there. 37 One day, while he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer cut him down with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son succeeded him as king.

God promised deliverance of Judah from the hand of Assyrians and he did it on the same night! One angel of the LORD destroyed 1, 85,000 mighty soldiers who had conquered many mighty nations! Hezekiah or his army had to do nothing to protect them - they did not have to raise their swords against this mighty nation!

It was done by the MIGHTY HAND OF GOD! Story did not end there - even the king Sennacherib himself was put to death by his own sons - see how God chose the venue for it: he was cut down with sword when he was worshipping his god in the temple of Nisroch!

His so called god could not give him victory over probably the smallest nation he ever attacked and himself from his sons though he faithfully worshipped his god!

Do you have complete trust in the LORD our God?
Do you fear anything else other than God?
Are you living with the primary purpose of glorifying God?
Are your prayers focused on Glorifying God?
Start praying like Hezekiah and see how God works!

Day 15
HAND OF GOD BRINGS GREAT REVIVAL

2 Chronicles 30

Remember the Nation of Israel was divided into two nations - Israel & Judah. Israel was steeped in idol worship from their first king Jeroboam. Judah was ruled by the kings who were descendants of David. Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings of Judah. He led the whole nation into idol worship and detestable practices associated with it. But his son Hezekiah was completely different. He loved God wholeheartedly and spearheaded a great revival in Judah. He was so excited about the way God blessed his efforts and how the hearts of people were being drawn to God.

In the 6th year of Hezekiah's reign, Israel was destroyed by Assyrians and many Israelites were killed, some were taken into exile and some were left behind. (2 Kings 18:10 says "So Samaria was captured in Hezekiah's sixth year,"). This happened because Israel rejected God and worshipped idols(2 Kings 17).

For generations the Passover feast was not being observed even in Judah. Hezekiah decided to celebrate the Passover. He sent messengers all over Judah and even to the left over people in the neighbouring nation of Israel. His desire was to help not only the people of Judah but also the people of Israel to return to God.

See how people responded: **2 Chronicles 30:10-14**The couriers went from town to town in Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun, but people scorned and ridiculed them. 11Nevertheless, some from Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. 12Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD.

13A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem to celebrate

the Festival of Unleavened Bread in the second month. 14They removed the altars in Jerusalem and cleared away the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

Some people in Israel ridiculed the messengers of Hezekiah. But some Israelites humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Vs. 12 says "Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD."

Hezekiah set his heart on spiritually reviving both the nations of Judah & Israel. God was so pleased with that effort so 'the hand of God' was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out the plans of Hezekiah.

All those whose hearts were moved by the hand of God came to Jerusalem and took part in the celebration as well as destroyed the idol worship in Judah(Vs. 14). They enjoyed the freedom from idolatry and enjoyed the pure wholehearted worship of the living God. (21The Israelites who were present in Jerusalem celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great rejoicing, while the Levites and priests praised the LORD every day with resounding instruments dedicated to the LORD).

They even extended the period of celebration. (vs.23 The whole assembly then agreed to celebrate the festival seven more days; so for another seven days they celebrated joyfully.)

How much time do you spend in worshipping God? Do you enjoy your Bible studies and prayer times? Do you enjoy the meetings of the Church? Or do you feel it is burdening and complain it is too long? For these people, whose hearts were turned to God, walking several miles and coming to Jerusalem and meeting for one week seemed to be too less and they wanted to spend another week in worship and fellowship!

What kind of spiritual revival is required in your life, in your family, in your Family group and the Church? It could be destroying the idol worship of greed, worldly pleasures, impurity, selfishness, pride etc.

INDEX

Day 1	HAND OF GOD PROVIDES ALL WHAT WE NEED	4
Day 2	HAND OF GOD THAT PROVIDES FOR SABBATH	8
Day 3	HAND OF GOD THAT BUILT THE TABERNACLE	10
Day 4	THE LORD WILL FIGHT FOR YOU	11
Day 5	GOD'S MIGHTY HAND OF JUDGMENT	14
Day 6	BE STILL AND SEE THE HAND OF GOD WORKING	17
Day 7	HAND OF GOD PROVIDES THE BEST	20
Day 8	HAND OF GOD BRINGS FEAR ON UNBELIEVERS	22
Day 9	GRATITUDE TO THE BLESSINGS FROM THE HAND OF GOD	25
Day 10	NO WALLS ARE TOO STRONG FOR THE HAND OF GOD	27
Day 11	HAND OF GOD THAT TURNS HEAVENLY BODIES	30
Day 12	GOD WHO FULFILS HIS PROMISES	32
Day 13	CHOOSING THE WEAK TO REVEAL THE MIGHTY HAND OF GOD	35
Day 14	HAND OF GOD WORKS FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GLORIFY GOD	38
Day 15	HAND OF GOD BRINGS GREAT REVIVAL	42
Day 16	WINNING A WAR JUST BY SINGING PRAISES TO GOD	44
Day 17	YOUR STORY - HAND OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE	46
Day 18	HAND OF GOD PROVIDES FOR THOSE WHO SERVE HIM	47
Day 19	HAND OF GOD WORKS POWERFULLY FOR THOSE WHO GIVE FIRST TO GOD	48
Day 20	HAND OF GOD THAT TURNED THE NATION TO TRUE GOD	51
Day 21	OUR HARDEST THINGS ARE EASIEST THINGS FOR GOD	54
Day 22	WHEN THE HAND OF GOD WORKS ON THE LITTLE WE HAVE	56
Day 23	OPEN YOUR EYES AND SEE THE HAND OF GOD	58
Day 24	HAND OF GOD WORKS FOR THOSE WHO HONOUR GOD	60
Day 25	HAND OF GOD BRINGS DOWN THE MIGHTY TO THE KNEES	63
Day 26	HAND OF GOD THAT SAVES YOU FROM FIRE	68
Day 27	HAND OF GOD THAT VINDICATES THE INNOCENT	71
Day 28	HAND OF GOD THAT DISCIPLINES AND RESTORES	73
Day 29	HAND OF GOD THAT BUILT THE WALL IN 52 DAYS	75
Day 30	ARM OF GOD - JESUS OUR SAVIOUR	78
Day 31	HAND OF GOD THAT PLACES THE CROWN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS	80

Hand of God

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Wish you all a happy new year! As each one of us are thinking of this new year we all want to do start the year well. Shaijus has worked putting this quiet time devotionals together called 'Hand of God". As we do this devotionals daily and participate in the campaign I pray that we will draw closer to God and also share our faith as we go. I pray that we all will participate wholeheartedly and encourage each other to do it as well.

Let us pray all of us personally will have the best year spiritually.

- Dinesh George

Indian Church of Christ



Staff

1st Week. 1st to 7th of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls.

2nd Week. 8th to 14th of January. Nehemiah--Building the Wall of Unity.

**3rd Week. 15th to 21st of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of
commitments.**

**4th Week. 22nd to 28th of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of
Conviction.**

Nehemiah Quiet Time Series

1st Week. 1st to 7th of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls

Day 1. Wednesday 01-01-03

1. Background

A. Storyline

For hundreds of years the city of Jerusalem had existed as the capital of Israel, the home of the altar and the temple, and a symbol of strength to every Jew. In 1000 BC, David reigned as king over Israel, the most powerful nation in all the land. It was a glorious time to live in Jerusalem. But as time passed, the Jews drifted from their God. Civil war broke out, and sin overtook both the leaders and the people. After many warnings through the prophets, God finally brought judgment against his people and his city. In 586 BC, God caused Judah (the Southern Kingdom) to be captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile. It was then that the dream was born to return to Jerusalem some day to rebuild their beloved city. But this dream would not come true easily. It would take three different leaders making three different trips home over a period of almost 100 years to finally bring about the restoration of the altar, the temple, the city wall, and the true worship of God that is triumphantly recorded in the book of Nehemiah. The first return of the Jews to their homeland of Palestine was led by Zerubbabel in 538 BC. God used Zerubbabel to lead the people to rebuild the altar and the temple. God also used the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to preach to the people during this time. The second return of the Jews to Jerusalem was led by Ezra in 458 BC. God used Ezra to bring about a spiritual reformation of the people. But they would need spiritual reformation again and again. God also used the prophet Malachi to preach to the people during this time. The third return was led by Nehemiah in 444 BC. God used Nehemiah to lead the people to rebuild the city wall. He and Ezra worked together to restore the true worship of God in Jerusalem.

B. Setting the Scene

The book of Nehemiah begins with Nehemiah living in Persia among the exiled Jews who had not yet returned to Jerusalem. He hears a report from some brothers who had recently come from Jerusalem that although the altar and the temple had been rebuilt, the city wall is still in ruins and the Jews living there are in great trouble and disgrace. Nehemiah is greatly moved by the fact that God's people are living in such disgrace and so, after much mourning, prayer and fasting, he feels compelled by God to ask the King of Persia's permission to go back to Jerusalem himself as a temporary governor and lead the people back to spiritual victory. What follows is one of the most inspiring "come back stories" ever in the history of God's people. It is a story of prayer rediscovered. It is a story of faith rekindled. It is a story of what God's people can do when they are truly unified in their mission, in spite of severe opposition.

C. Summary of Key Dates and Storyline

- 586 BC = God causes Judah (the Southern Kingdom) to be captured by the Babylonians and taken into exile because of their sins.
- 539 BC = Babylon falls to Persia, who is led by Cyrus, a man whom God will cause to allow his people to go back to their homeland of Jerusalem, in the land of Palestine, in order to rebuild their city, their temple, and their worship of God.
- 538 BC = Many of the Jews excitedly return from Babylon to Jerusalem in order to start this restoration project. But after a noble start, they soon get distracted and sidetracked. (Ezra 1-4 describes this.)
- 520 BC = Haggai and Zechariah prophecy in Jerusalem in order to get the people focused back on the work of God. The people repent of their laziness and self-focus and the temple reconstruction resumes. (See Ezra 5-6; and the books of Haggai and Zechariah.)
- 516 BC = The rebuilding of the altar and the temple is completed. (Ezra 6)
- 465 BC = The worship of God is again half-hearted, and so God raises up a prophet, Malachi, to prophecy in Jerusalem in order to call the people to repentance and get them refocused on giving their best to God again. (See the book of Malachi.)
- 458 BC = Ezra goes to Jerusalem from Babylon to continue the redevelopment project. Though the temple is rebuilt, the law of God is not fully restored, and the city wall is still in shambles. (Chapters 7-10 of Ezra describe this.)
- 444 BC = Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem; Ezra and Malachi are there. Nehemiah will lead the people to rebuild the city wall and recommit themselves once again to God.

II. Read Nehemiah 1:1-4;

A. Understanding

1. How are the people of God doing at the time of this report? (Verse 3)
2. Try to imagine what it must have been like to be a Jew living in Jerusalem at this time. It's been almost a century since the first group of Israelites excitedly returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city, the temple and the spirituality of the people (see timeline and storyline above). But only the temple and the altar have been restored. The city walls are still in shambles and "the people are in great trouble and disgrace (vs 3)." They are no doubt discouraged, defeated and feeling hopeless. Their faith is low and their strength is weak.
3. What was Nehemiah's response to this report? (Verse 4)

4. Nehemiah wept for his city and his people. He hurt deeply over the state of Jerusalem. And it moved him to mourn, fast and pray to God.

B. Application

1. We should be moved to tears for our people and our city as well. We should have deep feelings for how the Kingdom of God is doing both globally and locally, and for the lost people of our city.
2. Jesus wept over the same city 500 years after Nehemiah, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it...(Luke 19:41)."
3. When was the last time you wept over the spiritual condition of other people? Do you have that kind of heart -- a heart that hurts, a heart that cares, a heart that mourns, a heart that takes it personally, a heart that is moved to fast and pray for the sake of others?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Pray for the lost of your city, neighborhood, school, college, work.....
2. Honestly evaluate the spiritual state of your own sector, and then sincerely pray as Nehemiah and Jesus would for them.

Day 2 (Thursday 02-01-03)

I. Read Nehemiah 1:5-11

A. Understanding

1. Re-read verses 6-7.
 2. Notice that Nehemiah is not self-righteous and condemning of others. But he includes himself in the blame for where God's people are at.
 3. Notice too that that he did not minimize the severity of their sin or the fact that it was direct disobedience to God himself.
 4. Now re-read verses 8-9.
 5. Notice that he recalls the promises of God: to surely curse unfaithfulness and just as surely reward repentance, no matter how far we have drifted from him.
 6. Now re-read verses 10-11
 7. Notice at least two things:
- Nehemiah's personal initiative. Nehemiah is cooking up a plan. He is saying: I am going to do something about this. It reminds us of Jesus when he is quoted by the Hebrew writer as saying: "Here I am... I have come to do your will, O God (Hebrews 10:7)."
 - Nehemiah's faith in the power of God to change the situation! He starts his prayer with, "O Lord , God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands...(vs 5)". And then he ends his prayer with, "Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man (vs 11)." God's people may be discouraged and faithless, but Nehemiah is neither of these things. Nehemiah is faithful and courageous as he looks to the great and awesome God of heaven to do what he promises he will always do: come through for his people whenever they turn to him in humility, repentance and faith.

B. Application

1. What is your part in the current state of affairs of God's people?
2. Are you faithless or faithful about God's ability and willingness to work powerfully in your group this year?
3. What is God calling you to do about it today and this month? Will you take the initiative as Nehemiah and Jesus did?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Praise God for his mighty deeds in your life already, and for his trustworthy promises about working powerfully again.
2. Confess your sins to God and talk to your discipler.
3. Ask God to show you what you can do to rebuild your part of the wall.

Note: Pray with the same confident faith of Nehemiah and Jesus.

Day 3 (Friday 03-01-03)

1. Read Nehemiah 2:1-10

A. Understanding

1. Nehemiah was "very much afraid (vs 2)" to ask the king such a huge request as the one that God had placed on his heart. But he asked anyway. Someone once said that "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conquest of it." And someone else said, "Feel the fear and do it anyway."
2. But what was the secret to Nehemiah's courage? Look at verse 4. Nehemiah's courage came from his relationship with God, and specifically from his prayer life, which was not just in the morning, but throughout the day. Clearly Nehemiah had more than a ritual with God; He had a relationship with God.
3. Look at the latter part of verse 8 again. Why did the king grant Nehemiah all of his requests?

B. Application

1. Do you "feel the fear and do it anyway"? Or do you allow your fears to stop you from doing the will of God?
2. Does your relationship with God sustain you "when it counts"? Or in the times when you need it most, does it become apparent that your relationship with God is not as strong as it needs to be?
3. Do you seek God's guidance and favor throughout the day, or just in the morning?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Ask God to reveal what fears have been holding you back lately, and for the strength to overcome them today.
2. Resolve to seek God throughout the day today, and especially "when it counts".

Day 4 (Saturday 04-01-03)

1. Read Nehemiah 2:11-20

A. Understanding

1. Nehemiah surveyed the situation. He spent time thinking through the task before him. He understood that "work without a plan" would be as foolish as "prayer without work".
2. Verses 17-18 are inspiring. Nehemiah calls the people to join him in the project that God had put on his heart, and the people respond with one heart and mind: "Let us start rebuilding."
3. But it quickly becomes apparent that this project will not be easy. As soon as Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem hear about it, they immediately oppose Nehemiah and accuse him of rebelling against the king (vs 19). Take note: opposition starts the day you decide to do God's work (see also Nehemiah 2:10).
4. How does Nehemiah respond to this false accusation and their immediate opposition to the rebuilding project? (See verse 20.) What insights do you gain from reflecting on verse 20?

B. Application

1. We too must be organized to be effective. This is especially true of our evangelistic efforts. How many times have we "met an open person" and then failed to follow up? What do you need to organize this week in order to set yourself up for success?
2. What is the evangelistic plan of your group? Are you as wholeheartedly supportive of this plan as the people of Nehemiah's day were about their plan?
3. Have you allowed the "Sanballats" (opposition) to stop you from doing God's will? Or have you responded like Nehemiah did to them in verse 20?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Pray through your evangelistic opportunities and contacts, and ask God to put a plan on your heart to maximize those opportunities today and this month.
2. Ask God to give you a willing and wholehearted spirit about the evangelistic plan of your group today, and these next couple of months, so that many more souls can be saved this year!
3. Ask God to help you identify the "Sanballats" that are in your life at this time, so that by his power, you can overcome them.

Day 5 (Sunday 05-01-03)

1. Here are some thoughts to consider before reading the next section of scripture:

A. Understanding

1. Chapter 3 of Nehemiah is a careful record of the individual names of each of the workers who repaired different sections of the wall. At first glance, it may appear to be a section of scripture without much to teach us today. (It may even seem boring to us at first - heaven forbid!)
2. But there is actually much in this chapter that can feed our spirits and inspire our hearts today.
3. Look at this chapter as a beautiful display of teamwork! This tapestry of unity is certainly a marvel in any generation and a great delight for God himself to behold.
4. When you consider the difficulty of the task and the challenge it must have been to accomplish it in only 52 days (Neh 6:15), you begin to appreciate the vital contribution of each and every worker to the project. I'm sure Nehemiah appreciated each of them, or else he would not have taken the time to record each and every one of their names and their individual contributions to the work.
5. How difficult was the task? Here's what one writer says about it: "The task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was a huge one. The wall was more than a mile long and the parts that had to be rebuilt needed to be three or four feet thick, and fifteen to twenty feet high. Rebuilding would be a massive operation, only possible if everyone did their part (adapted from "A Passion for Faithfulness", by J.I. Packer, page 81)."
6. Some things to note about this heroic list of ordinary folks who pooled their resources together to accomplish in a month and a half what had not been done in almost a century before by others who had tried and failed. (Adapted from "A Passion for Faithfulness", by J.I. Packer, pages 86-87).

- **Note the unity:** 41 separate groups worked together on the project.

- Note the diversity: All kinds of different people chipped in and did their part: priests, Levites, temple servants, goldsmiths, merchants, officials, private individuals, women, and men from Jericho, Tekoa, Gibeon, Mizpah, and other towns close by.
- Note the plan: Think globally. Act locally. Most worked on portions of the wall that were right in front of their own house (i.e. they built the wall in their own neighborhood). Priests rebuilt the area near the temple (vs 1, 28); the temple servants built the area near their dwelling on the temple mount (vs. 26); Jediah built the portion of the wall "opposite his house (vs 10)"; Benjamin and Hassub built the portion of the wall "in front of their house (vs 23)", and so on.
- Note the exception: verse 5 = "The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work." How do you think the "men of Tekoa", who were working so hard, must have felt about the "nobles of Tekoa", who were apparently unwilling to do their part? And yet, it did not hinder the men of Tekoa from doing their part; In fact, they did even more (see verse 5 and 27).

II. Now go ahead and read Nehemiah 3:1-32 and see what strikes you the most from this passage of scripture.

B. Application

1. What did you personally get most from this passage of scripture?
2. What if a book were written about the spiritual wall that we are building today? Would your name be in it? What portion of the completed wall would be attributed to you and your closest friends and family?
3. What are some good reasons for us to build our part of the wall in our own neighborhoods and work places, rather than in another area of the city? How about if we are teens or college students - what's our part of the wall?
4. Are you more like "the men from Tekoa" who finished their part of the wall (vs 5, 27)? Or like "the nobles from Tekoa", who "would not put their shoulders to the work...(vs 5)?" When others don't do their part, does it cause you to stop doing your part? What should you do in situations like that? What would Jesus do?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Praise God today for specific workers on the wall in our church that you feel grateful for.
2. Pray that God would make clear to you what your part of the wall is, and to put it on your heart to take responsibility for it.
3. Pray specifically for your section of the wall (geographical area).

Day 6 (Monday 06-01-03)

1. Read Nehemiah 4:1-3

A. Understanding

1. Sanballat and Tobiah opposed the rebuilding process in much the same way that Satan opposes our spiritual rebuilding today. But one of the greatest defenses against Satan's attacks is to make ourselves aware of his "schemes (2 Cor 2:11b)", "in order that Satan might not outwit us (2 Cor 2:11a)." See if you can pick out the devil's schemes in the following phrases from verses 1-3...
 - a. "He ridiculed the Jews"
 - b. "What are these feeble Jews doing?"
 - c. "Will they restore their wall?"
 - d. "Will they offer sacrifices?"
 - e. "Will they finish in a day?"
 - f. "Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble - burned as they are?"
 - g. "What they are building-if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones."
2. What is Satan trying to do here? What are his tools? What are his tactics? How would these same attacks be rephrased today if they were verbalized by Satan against you?
 - a. How does Satan "ridicule" you, your Bible Talk, sector, zone, Region & our church?
 - b. How does he get us to feel "feeble"?
 - c. How does he introduce doubts into our minds about our evangelistic efforts?
 - d. How does he question our motives and accuse us?
 - e. How does he get us to question whether this is even worth it?
 - f. How does he get us to question and doubt whether we or other people, as far gone as he makes us think we are, can ever be "brought back to life from those heaps of rubble"?
 - g. How does he get us to question whether what we are building will really last?
3. And what is Satan's real goal in all of this, anyway? Re-read verse 11 again for a pretty good clue.
4. Certainly the goal of Nehemiah's enemies was to "put an end to the work (vs 11)." And that is Satan's main goal regarding our efforts to build up the Kingdom of God today.

2. Now read Nehemiah 4:4-6

A. Understanding

1. What was Nehemiah's response to Sanballat and Tobiah's attacks?
2. Did they stop their work in order to "sort out all the problems in the group"? Or did they continue to work on the wall?
3. Were the people discouraged and disheartened by the Satanic opposition? Or did they trust in God through prayer and continue to give their whole hearts to the work of God?

B. Application

1. How is Satan attacking your faith right now? Is he using some of the same tactics he tried to use on Nehemiah and the Jews?
2. Have you allowed the traps of discouragement, bitterness, fear or faithlessness to ensnare your heart and cause you to stop working on your part of the wall with all of your heart?
3. How can you learn from the example of Nehemiah today?

C. Prayer Focus

1. Ask God to reveal what schemes of Satan he has been trying to use on you lately.
2. Pray boldly and faithfully to our awesome and powerful God to rescue you from those traps so you can get joyfully and wholeheartedly back to work on the wall of God today.

Day 7. (Tuesday 07-01-03)

I. Read Nehemiah 4:7-12

A. Understanding

1. What was Nehemiah's defense against the increasingly intense opposition he and his people were receiving? (See verse 9.)
2. He prayed to God and posted a guard. We too need to pray to God and post guards in our lives to help us guard our hearts. How is "discipleship" like "posting a guard" in our lives?
3. Prayer and people - they are two of the most effective ways to protect ourselves from the ongoing attacks of Satan in our lives.

II. Now read Nehemiah 4:13-23

A. Understanding

1. What principles of the "one another relationships" talked about in the New Testament do you see exemplified in these verses? Here's a few ideas just to get you started (I'm sure there are many more than these):
 - a. Verse 13 = we especially need help "at the exposed places" in the walls of our lives.
 - b. Verse 13 = "posting them by families" - the importance of doing the work of God together with our physical families.
 - c. Verse 13 = "with their swords, spears and bows" (Remember the "full armor of God" in Ephesians 6:10-20?)
 - d. Verse 14 = "Don't be afraid of them..." We all need daily encouragement from each other! (Heb 3:13)
 - e. Verse 14 = "Remember the Lord who is great and awesome..." We all need to be reminded to look to our awesome God!
 - f. Verse 14 = "...and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes." We all need to be reminded of what and who we are fighting for.
 - g. etc. (There's much more.)

B. Application

1. Satan is intensely opposing you. Have you developed a deep conviction yet about praying to God and posting a guard on your life, in order to be victorious in this war and win many souls to Christ?
2. How's your prayer life? Has it increased during this time of studying the book of Nehemiah and praying? Or are you still allowing excuses and circumstances to get in the way of your times with God?
3. Who is posted at the door of your life as a friend to help you win this spiritual war? Are you working well together? Or do you need to work on that relationship today?
4. Whose door are you posted at to help them guard their lives? Which family members? Which disciples? Which non-Christians that you are reaching out to or studying with? All of us should be posted at the three doors listed above (family, disciples, and a Non-Christian friend or friends we are leading to Christ).

C. Prayer Focus

1. Pray and post a guard:
 - i. Pray about those who are posted in your life.
 - ii. Pray about those whose lives you are posted at.
2. Family
3. Disciples
4. Non-Christians

2nd Week. 8th to 14th of January. Nehemiah--Building the Wall of Unity.

Day 8. (Wednesday 08-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 5:1-13

A great outcry was raised among the people because of the injustice of their treatment of each other. Some complained that they needed to work more to get grain so that their own families could be fed. The underlying complaint is that they were working so hard on building the walls of the Kingdom that the needs of their own families were being neglected.

Money problems are rarely just money problems; instead, relationship, discipline, and stewardship problems often lie at the root. When the Jews turned to their brothers for help, they were taken advantage of. It is one thing to help out brothers and sisters in their poverty, but it is quite another when we use our position in life to take advantage of others and try to profit from them in their times of need. The wealthiest and most shrewd businessmen always look for the needs of society in their perfect timing so that they can make their personal fortunes.

God understood that times like these would come, but He expects that we will not charge interest (exacting usury) or enslave our brothers and sisters by their indebtedness to us when they are in need of the basic necessities of life. In Nehemiah's day, God had already given the people instructions about these matters in His Law (see Leviticus 25:39-43). Nehemiah knew that all of these people had left their captivity in Babylon to rebuild Israel and be free again--not simply to be enslaved again to new owners!

Nehemiah was indignant over the abuse of relationships that were taking place within the family of God. In Nehemiah 5:9, he questioned, "Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?" The Hebrew word for "reproach" is "Herpah", and in this context, it conveys the idea that the unbelievers will mock as they see the way that the "people of God" treat one another. To our shame, the lost are often better at taking care of one another, having mercy, and being hospitable than the children of God. This should not be.

Jesus knew that our treatment of each other--our unity and love--are some of the brightest lights we have for evangelizing this dark world. He said it well in John 13:35, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." It is our own selfishness and greed that enslaves our brothers and sisters with "profitable opportunities". Satan has used this method to divide and embitter God's people and destroy their unity from the days of Cain and Abel until now. (For another example of this, read the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:29-34). Let's not fall prey to the devil's trap; and instead, let's be humble, helpful, and honest with one another.

In Nehemiah 5:12-13, it is very impressive to see how quickly and humbly the people responded to Nehemiah's correction and carried out their promise to repent in these matters. Are you so quick to repent? Or do you put up a fighting defense when you are corrected--hoping to explain and justify your actions?

Day 9. (Thursday 09-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 5:14-19

One of the outstanding qualities about Nehemiah that we see over and over in this book is his heart to lead in a Godly, rather than a worldly, way. A Godly leader sacrifices his own privileges so that the needs of his people can be met. Nehemiah had full rights, as the man in charge of the work in Jerusalem, to take advantage of the "benefits" of his position. It might even be fair to say he deserved those rewards; however, he did not look to his own needs first, but to those of his people. Nehemiah devoted his personal time to working *among* them, not simply *over* them. He was not blind to the sacrifices of time, labor, and money that the people were investing in order to rebuild the walls of the Kingdom--and what was their reward? It was merely to live within the safety of its walls and set up a future for posterity.

In humility and unselfish love, Nehemiah did not want to be a burden to his brothers and sisters, nor did he want to "lord over them" (Neh. 5:15). He was not only sharing in the work with them, but also neglecting his own wages and feeding many of the people at his own table. The apostle Paul was unified in the same Spirit with Nehemiah when he was careful to not be a financial burden to the needy congregations of his day (see 1 Corinthians 9:1-15, 2 Corinthians 11:7-12, and Philippians 4:14-19). Similarly, Jesus shared the same Spirit when He said in Matthew 20:25-28, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Anyone who truly walks by the Spirit of God--and particularly, anyone who leads by the Spirit--will subjugate his or her own selfish desires for the sake of pleasing God and caring for His people (see Romans 8:5).

In exchange for his sacrificial behavior, Nehemiah only asked God for one thing: "**Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.**" He was not looking for recognition from men, but from God.

How about you? Are you a burden to others? When you meet with other disciples, are you more focused on having your needs met and dealing with your problems than you are on building others up? Do you lord over others around you? All of us lead in some capacity--whether in the Kingdom, in our families, at school, at work, or in our neighborhoods--so all of us need to evaluate how selfish or how sacrificial our leadership is. Lastly, are you bartering with God--doing your "good deeds" in hopes of receiving something more than you deserve? (For further thoughts, see Luke 17:7-10 & 1 Peter 5:2-4.)

Day 10. (Friday 10-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 6:1-14

First of all, let's set the stage of who is who:

Sanballat is called a Horonite in Nehemiah 2:10, designating him as either from Beth-Horon in Ephraim, some 13 miles northwest of Jerusalem, or, more likely, from Horonaim, a city of Moab mentioned in Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:3-5. In papyri found at the Jewish settlement in Elephantine, Egypt, Sanballat is called the governor of Samaria. His daughter was married to the Jewish high priest Eliashib (Neh. 13:28). Keeping this in mind, his opposition to Nehemiah was most likely politically motivated. If Jerusalem were rebuilt, Samaria would lose its political prowess as the center of Judea.

Tobiah was an Ammonite. He is designated as an "official" in 2:10, though some translators would use the word "servant" instead. The Hebrew word, "ebed," is usually a designation for a servant and probably indicates that he was Sanballat's lieutenant or subordinate and not a full member of the coalition.

Geshem was undoubtedly a chieftain from the more distant Arabia and a full partner in the league.

Why were these three men and their cohorts so opposed to Nehemiah's work? Their motive was probably jealousy. Being newcomers to the area, the Israelites were potential rivals for grazing land and for the commercial revenue that came from caravans traveling between Egypt and points east.

Previously, the neighboring tribes led by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem had planned to enter Jerusalem through the breaches in the walls and attack from within. Nehemiah had received word of this and had set careful watches to prevent this infiltration (chapter 4). Now the breaches were all filled and only the doors needed to be installed in the gateways. New tactics were called for, and chapter 6 details these final attempts of Israel's foes to stop the building of the city.

It is interesting, me and Rita were in Jerusalem, September 1999, we were praying, touching, leaning against, and looking at the very walls that Nehemiah and his people rebuilt. Much of the wall still stands today! Nehemiah was so thorough about the work that God had graciously assigned him that he says upon its completion: "Not a gap was left in it" (6:1). Nehemiah did not treat his role and duties in God's Kingdom haphazardly or flippantly, but rather with an excellent and diligent spirit that wanted to please his Lord. The foundations of his hard work still have impact on the people in Jerusalem today--2500 years later! He did not work as one working simply for himself, but as one who worked for the Lord (see Ephesians 6:7).

In addition, he would not be intimidated, tricked, distracted, or lured to the Plain of Ono and, by doing so, neglect the work that God had given him. Oh, no--he was going to stay righteous, setting the needs of the Kingdom first. He had his priorities straight! He knew that he was carrying on a great project and not just some menial task of building some wall in the middle of an abandoned city.

The enemies of God, Sanballat and Geshem sent their message to Nehemiah hoping he would meet with them--by appearances, a peaceful meeting, perhaps even a reconciliation or a vacation--"You've been working awfully hard, Nehemiah. Come. Take a break for a few days with us out on the plain of Ono." "Let us meet together" sounds so friendly--after all, we want unity, right?

The plain of Ono was about 30 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It would have taken a day to get there, maybe a day to meet, and a day to get back. The work would stop for half a week if he were to attend this meeting. The plain is near Tel Aviv, where Ben Gurion airport is located today. It was not neutral ground; it was on the border of enemy territory, near Ashdod. The meeting seems to be a summit of sorts, but with a hidden agenda. Can't we just live together in peace? Can't we all just get along?

Opposition often comes when one commits oneself to be unified whole-heartedly with the purposes and plans of God. Sometimes unity with God appears to be disunity with others. It takes discernment and determination to stay the course of God's will in the face of so many distractions--and sometimes these distractions are not even evil in and of themselves. Jesus explained to His disciples that such fervor to do God's will is not understood by the people of the world (John 15:18,19) but only by those who know their master's business (John 15:15). This is why the slander and false accusations inevitably come--carnal minds of this world do not understand the spiritual business of God.

It must have been hard for Nehemiah to hear that such slanderous rumors had been reported among the nations. It isn't easy to have lies spread about you, but this great man of faith did not reply with retaliation; instead, he calmly stated the truth. He saw through their wicked schemes and attempts to make him fearful. Nehemiah knew where to get his strength. He prayed to God, "Now strengthen my hands." (6:9)

In reality, even with the walls complete, Israel did not stand a chance against her many foes. Nehemiah knew that their greatest protector and shield was not a stone fortress, but God Himself. In all our efforts to build in the work of God, even with excellent skills and talents, we must not forget that God is the master architect and builder (Hebrews 11:10) and it is only through Him that we can be strengthened for everything (Philippians 4:13).

If the devil cannot distract you with the world, he often tries to do it with someone from among you--such was the case with Shemaiah. This man was acting as a prophet but was not one. He was offering Nehemiah safety in the temple. At first, it sounds reasonable, but Nehemiah knew that Shemaiah was trying to get him to disobey God. Only priests were allowed in the temple, and Nehemiah was not a priest. If he had done what was suggested, he would have committed a grave sin and would have been faced with major consequences. For example, in 2 Chronicles 26, King Uzziah, who was not a priest, went into the temple; and God instantly struck him with leprosy.

Shemaiah sought to persuade Nehemiah to embrace an easy-going, compromising religion that would shirk persecution, that would carry no cross, and that would be governed by fear of the opinions of other people. He knew how to use religious talk, but it was still a trap; if Nehemiah had heeded his instruction, he would have sinned and given others something with which to find fault and discredit him.

Nehemiah stood brave against this religious deception; and in his commitment to obedience, God revealed to him the heart of Shemaiah--who was no true prophet; but was on Sanballat's payroll! Instead of lashing out against Shemaiah and his fellow false-religionists, Nehemiah simply committed these wicked men and the situation to God.

Nehemiah's response to the three-fold attack of pretended friendship, slander, and false religion makes us admire him as a leader. "Come down to the plain of Ono," they said to Nehemiah. "Come down from the cross," they said to Jesus. But Nehemiah--and Jesus--were carrying on great works and would not be stopped. They slandered Nehemiah, but he did not defend himself. He spoke the truth and trusted in God. Jesus was also insulted, but did not retaliate (1 Peter 2:23). A false prophet offered Nehemiah an easy way out. Jesus was also offered a way out by Satan; just worship Satan, and all the kingdoms of the world would be delivered to him. But Jesus would have none of it. What about you?

Day 11. (Saturday 11-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 6:15-7:3

According to Jewish tradition and Rabbi Eliezer in the Talmud, "The world was created on the 25th day of Elul. Six days later, the first day of the month of Tishrei, marked the creation of the first human being." To this day, the Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in accordance with this tradition. The month of Elul is the final month in the Jewish year. This month is a particularly propitious time for prayer, self-introspection, and repentance. It is a time of intense spiritual preparation for the coming year and the upcoming holiday. Last year (2002/5762), the month of Elul began on August 8, 2002 and lasted through September 6, 2002. Whether we agree with Eliezer's date of creation or not, there is one thing we know from the Scriptures, this was the day that the people and Nehemiah finished their work on the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

They finished the wall in 52 days! Wow! What a tremendous task completed so quickly, especially when you consider that the walls had sat there destroyed for over a century; now in a matter of days, they were rebuilt! At the beginning, when Nehemiah saw the need, he prayed for four months (the difference in time between Nehemiah 1:1 and 2:1); but the work itself took less than two months. Nehemiah worked longer in prayer than on the wall! How often we neglect the spiritual walls that must first be built; instead we leap toward the tangible walls that bring us visual recognition. But in Nehemiah's case, the wall was finished, and completed so fast that it was surely to be credited to God's glory and not to man's. There is nothing like the will of God being accomplished with excellency and expediency to make His enemies lose their self-confidence. Men will compete if they think the work is man-made; they will surrender if they perceive that it has been done with the help of God Himself. Self-confidence is never a match for confidence in God.

No great accomplishment comes without intimidation from our opponents. Regardless, Nehemiah kept his trust in God, even selecting leaders who would reflect his own convictions. He chose Hananiah because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most do. "Emet", the Hebrew word translated in 7:2 as "integrity", conveys reliability, faithfulness, and continuance. It is the primary Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to signify "truth." Hananiah was the kind of man who did what was right even when no one was looking or holding him accountable. He was loyal and unified with God's purpose. He feared God more than he feared what man could say or do to him. (See Jesus' comment on this same attitude in Luke 12:4,5) Nehemiah was careful to choose leaders who would value the cause. Are you like Hananiah? What is your reputation among the people of God in your life? How does one build a reputation of integrity with man and with God?

In Nehemiah 7:3 we see that he was careful to keep the doors shut until the sun was hot. The gates were not to be opened till sunrise or later, and to be shut at sunset, which is still the custom in many cities of the East. If a traveler arrives after sunset, he finds the gates shut, and on no consideration will they be opened until morning. With the gates locked until the heat of the day when the sun was shining clearly, any nearby enemies would be easier to spot and the inhabitants of the city would be up, alert, and ready to defend themselves. Nehemiah did

not fail to take any necessary precautions to guard the great work that God had given him. We should arm ourselves with the same attitude.

Nehemiah set gatekeepers and guards up on the wall as watchmen. How many times has a victory been won in our lives, only later to be lost because there was no guard? An enemy comes in because we are not watching. Walls can be climbed if there is no one there to stop the enemy, but a watchman can easily push down a foe from the wall. In later years, the walls of Jerusalem were built with special slits and holes so that arrows, stones, and hot oil could be hurled out on anyone who tried to climb up. Remember what Peter wrote, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8) An unmanned wall does not stop the devil. If you plan to keep your convictions from failing in a time of testing, they must be accompanied with prayer, confession, and boldness.

Day 12. (Sunday 12-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 7:4-7:73

The reading of such a genealogy of names may seem boring or without reason at first. (Some may have even skipped reading it altogether!) But with a little research, patience, and care, golden nuggets of truth can be extracted from such a list.

Nehemiah took a census of the people because he knew that these men and women were the few who were willing to give up the 70 years of stability established in Babylon for the rocky new fortress of building God's kingdom. These were the pioneers who would lay down their comfort to pursue the will of God. Only a small percentage of the people that went into captivity returned for the rebuilding.

During the building of the wall, there had been some difficulty with keeping the people faithful to God. Perhaps the census was initiated to expose those who had crept in, but were not in the genealogy register, or who had intermarried with the pagan Babylonians during the captivity. A discussion on land rights and ownership was about to occur, and it is certain that Nehemiah wanted to insure that properties went to their rightful heirs. Whatever the reason, God had put it in the heart of Nehemiah to check this register to see who were Hebrews, and who were not. It reminds me of the parable of the wedding feast that Jesus told in Matthew 22. When the king noticed the guest without the proper garments, he had him cast out. Many people try to reap the benefits of God's Kingdom without truly committing to its ranks. God will not tolerate this forever.

Nuggets to consider:

Nehemiah 7:7--Zerubbabel had brought the first group back from captivity. He brought the largest number of the people back to their homeland. Notice also that Mordecai is here. He is also mentioned in Ezra 2:2. In the absence of any other qualifier, this might be evidence that may allow us to assume that this is the Mordecai, the great and renowned man of conviction, of Esther 10:3. This identification would shorten the chronology as far as the book of Esther is concerned, and indeed would tend to identify Esther's Ahasuerus as Darius.

In Nehemiah 7:44 we read about the singing descendants of Asaph--Asaph was a singer, prophet, and leader appointed by David (1 Chronicles 16:4,5). These men who journeyed to Jerusalem were Asaph's offspring. Twelve of the Psalms are credited to him: Psalm 50, and Psalm 73 thru 83.

In Nehemiah 7:61 we see that some of the people were rejected from the priesthood because they could not prove their lineage. God had made very strict requirements for who would serve in the Levitical and Aaronic orders. A lost genealogy could put one's status as a Jew at risk. Even today, if one wants to become a citizen of Israel, he must first prove through his genealogy that he is a Jew. (Exodus 28, 29 & Leviticus 8) Thank God that today, all disciples serve as Kings and Priests in His Kingdom. We no longer have need of an earthly High Priest to sacrifice for our sins because Jesus, our heavenly High Priest, has done it for us once and for all, through the shedding of his own blood (Hebrews 10 & Revelation 5:10). We no longer need to dedicate our time to endless genealogies (1 Timothy 1:4). Some take great pride in their earthly family trees, their heritage, and their last name; but Jesus let us know that we all need to be born again in order to be part of His family (John 1:12,13; John 1:3-5). Thank God our names are written in the most important registry--the Lamb's Book of Life!

In Nehemiah 7:65, The Urim & Thummim are mentioned. This was a means of determining God's will (Exodus 28:30). The implication here is that those who could not come up with their rights to the priesthood through the genealogies, could eventually be admitted when a priest serving with the Urim and Thummim could determine God's will for each person's individual case.

In Nehemiah 7:70, we notice the unity and great contribution of all the people. This was an incredibly large sacrificial offering for the work of God. Like our brothers and sisters of long ago, we too should have such hearts to give.

Day 13. (Monday 13-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 8:1-12

The Water Gate led from the old City of David to the Gihon Spring located adjacent to the Kidron Valley. This was the spring to which Hezekiah had a tunnel dug (2 Chronicles 32:30). Jerusalem was one of the few great cities of antiquity that was not built near a great river, and the city depended on reservoirs and springs for its

water. The text in chapter 3 does not say that this gate was repaired, but only that the workers repaired the walls adjacent to it. The temple servants were descendants of the Gibeonites who were made drawers of water (Joshua 9:23). They would naturally want to live near the most important source of water for the city.

What a day that must have been when Ezra spoke from daybreak until noon about the Law in commemoration of the wall's completion! The people had gathered together as "one man" in perfect unity to hear him speak from the first five books of our Old Testament. Nothing is more pleasing to God than the unity of His body coming together to worship him. Ezra stood on a platform and the people also stood while he preached from the holy book--they responded with lifted hands, shouts of "amen," and with worship to God. They wept openly and did not hide their shame. These types of reactions to the preaching of the Word should not be foreign to our own services today.

Although the words convicted the people, piercing their hearts, they learned that the "joy of the Lord was their strength". They would celebrate with great rejoicing instead of sulking in worldly sorrow over their new awareness of the neglect they had shown towards the Law. We also need to be reminded not to wallow in self pity when God's Word convicts us, but to follow the pattern of repentance that shows Godly sorrow outlined in 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. Notice that in verse 8:10, they not only fed themselves in their celebration, but they also gave to those who had nothing prepared. Celebration is a time for sharing, not a time for introverted selfishness.

It is significant enough to mention at this point that Ezra was the designated spiritual and religious leader, not Nehemiah. Nehemiah was not a prophet or a priest; he was just a layman. He was motivated by his relationship with God, and he devoted himself to doing God's will amidst his common secular life. Nehemiah understood that the spiritual aspects and duties of a relationship with God are not limited to those in the ministry, but to everyone called a child of God.

Day 14. (Tuesday 14-01-03)

Please read Nehemiah 8:13-18

The great assembly of the day before was gone and the celebration a day old, but the people's desire to keep looking into the Word was kindled again. They discovered that it was the time of a specific festival, the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:33-36), when they were to live in booths or rough tents and huts to symbolize the 40 years they spent in the wilderness after they were delivered with Moses from Egyptian captivity. The feast also served as a week of thanksgiving for the harvest God had granted them. For four decades in the wilderness, the Hebrew nation relied entirely on the provision of God Almighty. Their clothes and shoes did not wear out (Deuteronomy 29:5), and they--and their flocks--did not lack for food or water (Nehemiah 9:15,20-21). God provided everything. This festival was a pause in an otherwise busy world, for one week out of 52, to remember God's faithfulness in providing for His people and to give Him the honor He deserves. Even today, in our wanderings through life, God has been the unseen Provider who has been faithful to us even when we have forgotten Him.

As one of the three pilgrim festivals, along with Passover (*Pesach*) and Pentecost (*Shavuot*), the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) was the third appointed time for all Jewish males to come to Jerusalem with their tithes and offerings. At this time of year, and for the week of *Sukkot*, Jerusalem would have traditionally been overflowing with people. By Tishri 15, the normal population of about 600,000 people swelled to between 2 and 3 million in Jesus' day. Amid the throngs of people and the din of activity, the priests of the temple had their own endless jobs to do. Behind the scenes of temple life, they meticulously carried out instructions given to them in the Torah (The Law). Part of their duty was to sacrifice a total of 70 bulls during the festival of *Sukkot* (Num. 29:12-39). Jewish teachers and rabbis apply great importance to this instruction.

In the sacrificial system, bulls were offered on behalf of a nation or nations. On *Yom Kippur*, the high priest sacrificed a bull for his own sins as he represented the nation of Israel. During *Sukkot*, many rabbis assert, the 70 bulls represented the 70 nations that descended from Noah, the ancestors of all the Gentiles of the world. These bulls, according to Hebrew scholars, were sacrificed for the peace and well being of the Gentiles, so that they might one day acknowledge the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was Jewish doctrine for hundreds of years and, though many Jews remain unaware of it, their prayers have been answered: Gentiles who believe in the Messiah of Israel have been faithfully grafted in (Rom. 11:17-24) and have become adopted children of Abraham (Gal. 3:29).

What can you do in your schedule to take some time out to reflect on how God has provided for you? Consider what a great family he has joined you to and the joy it provides when we all live together in harmony.

3rd Week. 15th to 21st of January. Nehemiah—Rebuilding the walls of Commitment.

Day 15. (Wednesday 15-01-03)

Reading: Nehemiah 9:1-3

Fasting (Today Is a day of fast)

On the tenth day of the seventh month between the feast of trumpets (Neh 8:2) and the feast of tabernacles (v:14) is the day of atonement (Yom Kippur). This day had a special symbolism. Two goats were taken to bear the people's sins. One was killed as a sin offering; the other was sent off into the desert to bear away the sins of

the people. The two goats thus symbolized both forgiveness for sins by death and complete removal of the sins for which atonement was made (Lev 16). The ordinary Israelite remained at home, and the priests carried out the ritual. It was the only day of fasting required of Israel and was to be a special Sabbath of rest and personal reflection. It was a time of special sorrow, special sin offerings, and atonement.

On occasion, there was a fast that was kept two weeks later as a day of humbling before God. It appears that Nehemiah 9:1-3 records just such a fast. Fasting is much more than simply going without food (Isaiah 58:1-9). We can see from this passage the type of fasting in which God calls us to participate.

A day of fasting is first of all a **day to humble yourself**. In Exodus 10:3, God asked Pharaoh "how long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?" Pharaoh had stubbornly refused to acknowledge God's right to exert his authority over him. His stubborn refusal eventually led to God's ultimate judgment when not only Pharaoh but also the armies of Egypt were drowned in the Red Sea. We, like Pharaoh, struggle to submit ourselves to God's righteous authority in our lives. Fasting is to be a time when we choose to pursue a posture and heart of humility before God. It is a time to admit, not only to ourselves but also to God that we have been disobedient and that God is completely justified in his right to judge us for our sins.

A day of fasting is a **day to separate yourself** from what is of the world. With a spirit of repentance a decision must be made to stop sinning. It is amazing how sophisticated we can be at times in making excuses for our sinful actions and attitudes. Yet, God tells us clearly that it is only with repentance that we can receive times of refreshment (Acts 3:19). Sin never refreshes but only brings about a suffering of our souls (Psalm 51:7-9)

A day of fasting is a **day of communion with God**. In Nehemiah 9:3 it is recorded that they spent a quarter of the day (3 hours) reading from the Book of the Law and another quarter of the day praying (confessing sin and worshipping God). For a relationship to be strong and continually growing communication must go both ways. Here Israel listened to God speak to them through his Word and then spoke to God through prayer.

Application: It is apparent from Isaiah 58:1-9 that God expects us to maintain a spirit of fasting every day, not just on those days when we go without food.

1. How is your spirit of humility before God? Are there sins that you have held on to and made excuses for? Choose now to humble yourself before God, accepting his right to expect obedience, and confess your sin before him.
2. It is important to have a plan in order to enable yourself to separate from what is of the world (i.e. sinful actions and attitudes). Sit down and prayerfully consider what your plan is going to be. Write down your plan or communicate it with those God has placed in your life to help you.
3. Take some time to consider how your communion with God is going. Commit yourself to spending great and consistent time reading from God's Word and praying to the God who makes all the difference in our lives.

- **Consider taking a day to fast and take some extra time to study your Bible and pray to God.**

Day 16. (Thursday 16-01-03)

In Neh 9:4-38, we have an account of the prayers that were offered up on this day of fasting and humbling before God. Their focus is immediately drawn toward adoration of who God is and then what God has done. It seems crazy to have to admit it but all too often our prayers are filled with what *we need*, what *we want*, and what *we would like changed*. We naturally tend to become self-focused instead of God-focused. When we take time to reflect on whom God is, in all his glory, our faith, gratitude, and heart of adoration is stimulated. We get back to being focused on God and what God desires for our life.

Not only is it to our benefit to offer prayers of adoration but the Bible tells us that it is fitting and proper to do so because God deserves this from us (1 Chron 16:29; Ps 29:2; Ps 96:8). The Hebrew writer identifies the proper attitude of worship to be one of reverence and awe (Heb 12:28). The word "idol" can be defined as any person or thing devotedly or excessively admired. Therefore, the sin of idolatry is attributing greater worth, affection, or devotion to something other than God. In our hearts, God becomes common and therefore of less value to us than the other things we pursue in our lives.

A sure sign of this happening is when we find ourselves struggling with devoting consistent and great time to prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and God's work of saving the world. It becomes difficult to desire to sacrifice financially to God. There is a general lack of excitement in our commitment to God and His Church. Sin becomes more alluring and exciting and we find it seemingly impossible to resist.

This is exactly what had happened to Israel as they fell headlong into the sin of idolatry. They lost their vision of the transcendent glory of God. Because of this they drifted away and were ultimately sold into captivity to foreign nations (Neh 1:5-9).

God's people had rebuilt the wall not just through hard work but through a recommitment to standing in awe of God. The prayer of adoration we see in Neh 9:4-6 is just one example for us to consider as we focus on standing in awe of God in all his glory.

They began their prayer by adoring God as the only living and true God (v:6). It is interesting that as God taught this truth to his people through Moses, He immediately followed it by the command to "Love the

LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4-5). They adored God as the creator of all things and the source of all life. God's creation, including the heavenly host worship and praise Him (Ish 6:2-4, Rev 4:8-11). They also recognized that no matter how much they, or the angels of heaven, praised God that they would never even come close to capturing the magnitude of God's glory (v:5b).

Application: The Jews spent a quarter of the day offering prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, and confession because they had repented of idolatry. They gained the conviction that they had treated God as something common and resolved to worship God acceptably, with reverence and awe.

1. Spend some time everyday reflecting on who God is and what he has done, especially in your own life. The Psalms are a great place to look for help. Spend some time every day praying prayers of adoration to God.
2. Take some time to evaluate your devotion to God as seen in your time of prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. Are you tempted to treat God as common and less than Holy?

Day 17 (Friday 17-01-03)

Gratefulness (consider start a "gratitude journal)

God's people continued their prayer by listing some of the ways that He had shown them kindness and favor. God calls us to "devote ourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Col 4:2). In fact it is impossible to worship God acceptably without a heart of thanksgiving (Heb 12:28). Let's examine some of the things they mentioned and make application to our own lives.

In vs.: 7-8 we see **God's call** to Abram. God decision to choose Abram was based solely on the goodwill of God. Abram did nothing to deserve this choosing. The childless man's name was changed to Abraham (father of a multitude) because God had a great vision for his future. He was given the promise of a land that at the time was possessed by six other nations. The parallels are obvious in our own lives. As disciples of Jesus, we too have been chosen by God (Eph 1:11, 1 Pet 1:2). God has a vision for our lives, to bless us and use us to bless the lives of others (2 Cor 2:14). God has also given us the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey; **heaven**.

In vs.: 9-11 is recorded **God's deliverance** of Israel from bondage in Egypt. What a timely reminder to the remnant in Jerusalem as they were working and praying for the completion of their own deliverance out of Babylon. They were reminded that God delivered their forefathers out of compassion for their suffering. That He had responded to their cry for help as He miraculously intervened to bring about their release. God has intervened in our own lives in much the same way. Out of compassion for us He has delivered us from the bondage we were in to sin (Rom 8:7-8).

In vs.:12 they are reminded of **God's presence** with them in the pillar of cloud and fire. His presence not only guided them but also provided protection for them from their enemies (Ex 13:21; 14:20). We have been given the same promise of God presence with us to guide and protect us (Mt 28:20).

As was mentioned during yesterday's study, we are often consumed by what *we need, what we want, and what we would like changed*. We become self-focused and self-reliant instead of God-focused and God-reliant. We can become overwhelmed by life's challenges and the obstacles we face. Spending time in prayers of thanksgiving remind us of all that God has done and that there are not any obstacles which are to great for God to overcome.

Application:

1. As you think about your prayers do you tend to be self-focused or God-focused? Take some extra time today and remember what God has done for his people through out time.
2. Especially consider how God has blessed your life. Remember how you have been chosen, delivered, guided and protected. Spend some extra time giving thanks to God in your time of prayer today.
3. It might be helpful for you to start a "**gratitude journal**". Spend a few minutes each day recording the ways that God has blessed your life and offer up a prayer of thanksgiving.

Day 18. (Saturday 18-01-03)

The greater part of the prayer recorded in Neh 9 is filled with a focus, not on the needs of the congregation, but on the glory, power, and faithfulness of God. Our greatest need is to remain God-focused. Intuitively we realize that we are limited and therefore incapable of overcoming all the challenges we face. We need something "bigger than life" to strengthen and guide us. We need God.

In their prayer they remember **God's faithful provisions** for them. He supplied for their spiritual needs by giving them His Word and instituting a system of worship and communion with Him. He provided for their physical needs by giving them bread from heaven (manna) and water from out of a rock. He gave them a land of their own (Canaan's Land) with homes they had not built, fields they had not plowed and wells they had not dug (vs.: 20-21, 25).

He not only gave them a land to live in but also enabled them to be **victorious in conquest** and multiplied their numbers to fill the land. Throughout Nehemiah we are told how it was God that enabled his

people to accomplish what ordinarily would have been impossible. We are often tempted to allow the enormity of our task to overwhelm us and instead of turning to God for the help to accomplish the impossible we give up or become stalled out in our faith. God has blessed us with so much. It seems so easy to focus on what we don't have instead of on all that we do have. We can become like little children on Christmas morning that tears through their gifts without taking the time to be grateful for what they have already received that morning.

In Matthew 19:16-26, Jesus taught the rich man what it would take to enter into the Kingdom of God. When confronted with the challenge he went away sad because it was more than he thought he could bear. Jesus seized the opportunity to teach the disciples, who were with him, an important lesson. With man alone it is impossible to manufacture the spiritual fruit that God desires. However, with God all things are possible. As we strive to build up God's wall in our own Geographical area, (Sector, Zone, FG, Region), families, work places, schools, neighborhoods, and congregations remember God's faithful provisions and the promises of victory we have in Christ.

Application:

1. Take some time to write down some of the ways God has provided for you and your family. Be thankful in prayer.

What situations or challenges tempt you to be discouraged? How have you seen God bring you victories over some of the different challenges you have faced and overcome? Commit to praying prayers of thanksgiving for past victories. Then pray about the present day challenges you face with the conviction that all things are possible with God.

Day 19. (Sunday 19-01-03)

They remembered **God's continued mercy** in spite of their rebellion. We tend to have a grave misunderstanding of grace, mercy, and justice. When we feel in our heart that God is being unfair in his dealings, in any given situation, in essence we are saying he is being unjust. What we are demanding is that God responds with justice. Justice is the administration of deserved punishment or reward. If God were to grant us justice based on our own performance in life we would all be doomed for our failures with others, ourselves, and especially with God. Mercy means that we don't receive punishment, which we justly deserve, for acts that have been committed (Matt 18:23-28). Grace means that we receive blessing we haven't earned and we don't deserve (Eph 2:8-10). God continued to give grace and mercy to his people while lovingly disciplining them for their rebellion in the desert. He continued to send the prophets to teach and admonish them. Even when he disciplined them through neighboring peoples he did not put an end to them or abandon them.

As we studied the Bible to become Christians we became convinced and convicted of our sinfulness before God. The more deeply we understood this the more we began to appreciate God's mercy and his grace extended to use through Christ. Rather than embolden us to sin more it became a source of determination to stop sinning. The more we understand and embrace God's grace in our lives the more we have the power to say no to sin and to chose to live righteously (Titus 2:11-14). Each day we need to spend time thinking about and admitting our weakness before God and excepting his mercy and grace in order to experience true growth.

We must always guard our hearts from becoming like the Pharisees who lost connection with their own sinfulness. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus tells the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Pharisee was not involved in the more "obvious" sins that seemed to be prevalent in those less committed than himself (ie. the tax collector) and felt his righteous acts made him righteous before God. The tax collector, on the other hand, felt his sinfulness and begged God to act toward him with mercy. Jesus, clearly teaches that it was the heart represented by the tax collector who would receive mercy and not that of the self-righteous Pharisee.

Application:

1. Think about who you are in your sinful nature. Remember how God has worked in your life despite these deficiencies. Allow your gratitude for God's grace to motivate you to live righteously today and to say no to sin.
2. In what ways are you tempted to rely on your "righteous deeds" to make up for areas of sin in your life.

Day 20 (Monday 20-01-03)

Finally, after considering the greatness of God and his incredible faithfulness to his people, they end their prayer with a confession of sin and a solemn resolve to repent. The more thankful we are for God's mercies the more humbled we will be for our own sins and the more determined to produce fruits of repentance in our lives.

Although they ask God not to take lightly the sufferings they have endured, they confessed that it was because of their own sins that they found themselves in their present circumstances. God had been fully justified to punish them and had acted faithfully towards them through all their sufferings (v: 33). They acknowledged that God had warned them to return to his word and that they had taken his goodness to them for granted (vs: 34-35). It has been said, "fatness and fullness often breeds pride and self-indulgence". This is particularly pertinent to those of us who live in the United States and have reaped an incredibly disproportionate amount of God's blessings. We

must be constantly on guard that we do not allow the relative wealth that we live in to cause our hearts to become prideful and our spirit to become self-indulgent.

The result of their sin was that they found themselves slaves in their own land. They were impoverished in spite of the fact that the land produced an abundant harvest. This was due to the fact that they had to give the fruit of their labor to their masters (Assyrian Kings) by way of taxes. This is what happens to us when we embrace sin and refuse to repent. The blessings of God's Kingdom are all around us but we can't seem to experience them in our own lives. We can be tempted to conclude that God's blessing just aren't available or that He has in fact lied and that we would be better off looking outside God's Kingdom for satisfaction. Like the Jews of Nehemiah's day we simply need to confess and repent of our sins. God is eager to bring his blessing into our lives as we return to him (Neh 1:9).

The people eagerly turned back to God and recommitted themselves to follow the Law of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations, and decrees of the Lord (Neh 10:29). They were so intent on repenting and recommitting themselves to God that they wrote out a binding agreement. Nehemiah was the first to sign it, followed by the leading priests and Levites, and the family leaders. It is encouraging to see that the people willingly followed the example of their leaders as they recommitted themselves to God. Nehemiah 10:28 describes true biblical repentance when it says they "separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God." (see also, 2 Cor 7:8-11)

Application:

1. Repentance should be an ongoing process in the life of any disciple of Jesus. Ask God to show you in what areas of life He is calling you to a higher standard than you are presently living.
2. Sit down with those who know you best and ask them if they perceive that you have allowed material comforts to dull your commitment to carefully obey God, or to become self-indulgent.
3. Consider writing out an agreement of commitment, between you and God, for those areas of your life that you are striving to more perfectly conform to God's will (ex. Prayer, Bible study, particular areas of temptation, outreach, personal commitment, etc.).

Day 21 (Tuesday 21-01-03)

God has called his people to be holy (Lev 11:45). To be holy means to be separate and dedicated to God for his exclusive use. In the book of Leviticus God gave the rules and regulations by which Israel would be able to live in state of holiness. These rules and regulations stipulate how they were to separate themselves from the things, and actions, that would make them unclean. In other words they were not to live or worship like those in the surrounding nations. If they did, they would no longer be holy but would become common (ie. like the people around them). As the priests, Aaron and his sons were told by God "you must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses." Their responsibility as priests was to safeguard the holiness of God's people.

Nehemiah and the people recommitted themselves to a life of holiness. They were making the commitment to stop living as the common people of the world live and to start living like God's people. Although this section addresses two particular areas of recommitment, remember they had already committed to carefully obey all of God's Law as given through Moses (Neh 10:29).

They recommitted themselves to holiness, **relationally** (v:30). God had warned his people not to make treaties with foreign nations or to take husbands or wives from foreign people because they would lead them into idolatry (Ex 34:15-16). The history of Israel is filled with the sad accounts of God's people allying themselves with foreign peoples, either through treaty or marriage and the idolatry that came from these alliances. The Apostle Paul writes the Corinthian church and warns them not to be yoked together with unbelievers but rather to purify themselves and perfect holiness out of reverence for God (2 Cor 6:14-7:1). It is sometimes a fine line that we must tread as we follow the example of Jesus who lived among the people of the world but never became like the people of the world.

They recommitted themselves to holiness, **materially** (vs: 31-39). It is important to remember that the Jews were very poor and that many of them previously had had to sell their sons and daughters into servitude in order to be able to pay their taxes and buy food to eat (Neh 5:3,4). Yet, they were committed to never allowing God's house to fall into disarray or disrepair again. They recommitted to providing the offerings, tithes, temple tax, and first born of their livestock as well as the first fruit of their harvest. In other words they committed to seeking first God's kingdom and his righteousness no matter what the cost was to themselves (Matt 6:33).

Application:

1. How has Satan worked to tempt you to sacrifice your personal holiness either relationally or materially?
2. Pray to support God's plan to rebuild the walls of his kingdom with all of your heart. How can you put this prayer into practice wholeheartedly today?

4th Week. 22nd to 28th of January. Nehemiah--Rebuilding the Walls of Conviction.

Day 22 (Wednesday 22-01-03)

**Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 11
The Heart of God's People**

For a variety of reasons, no one wanted to settle in Jerusalem itself. The people had spread out into the surrounding countryside to occupy their own historic villages and small farms. Lots were cast so that one out of every ten families would move into Jerusalem. As you would expect, most of the family heads are listed.

We read that the people commended all of the men who *volunteered* to live in Jerusalem. We can see over and over again that it is easier at times to make specific sacrifices to serve God, as long as those sacrifices fall conveniently into our lifestyle. But when it comes to giving our entire lives to do what we must to glorify God (like these men volunteering to move their families to a place where no one wanted to go), our hearts get challenged.

Today we are going to tie in the teachings of Jesus in looking at the hearts of men, so that we can make sure that our hearts are right before God. The religious leaders in the Old Testament had a tendency to 'honor God with their mouths, but not their hearts'. As his people today, we can tend to lose the joy and honor of serving God, and when this happens we will do the religious duties, but lose the heart and sincerity that God desires.

Nehemiah was involved in a great project to build the wall and restore the prominence of God back into the lives of his people. Today, as Christians we have a similar task ahead of us in restoring the prominence of God into the hearts and lives of all men. This begins with us looking at ourselves first.

In the New Testament, we see Jesus teaching a parable in which he uses a Priest and a Levite to help us understand what is of utmost importance to God from his people.

Luke 10:25-37

Maybe the Priest was too busy to take the time to help
Maybe the Priest didn't want to get involved
Maybe he didn't know how to help
Maybe he was just lazy
Undoubtedly he was selfish

Conclusion: The question is not really 'Who is your neighbor', but rather 'To whom are you a neighbor?' The people that you serve, those are your neighbors.

Helping the teachers at your children's school
Helping your disciples your sector. Baby sitting, having children over at your house, having singles over.
Helping your neighbors with whatever they need
Helping your community

What are ways that you see your heart being that of the Levite or the Priest?
What keeps you from having the heart of a good neighbor?

Challenge: Today make it a point to keep your eyes open to opportunities to be a good neighbor to someone. Act on those opportunities. "Go and do likewise".

Day 23 (Thursday 23-01-03)

**Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:1-26
The People's Representative**

The first half of this chapter lists many of the priests and Levites who had served during the approximately 90 years since Zerubbabel had returned from exile.

Throughout the book of Nehemiah we have seen the priests, Levites, and leaders of the people highlighted in helping to build the wall. It may help for us understand who these people were, and their roles.

Priests -- The Priests were direct descendents of Aaron and served as the people's representative to God (Exodus 2:1-10)

Levites -- Forbidden to serve as priests, a privilege reserved, on penalty of death, for Aaron's sons (Numbers 3:10) the Levites were dedicated to an auxiliary ministry for the priests, especially in regard to the manual labor of caring for the tabernacle. The Levites had a specific role in building the tabernacle of God. The Levites came to prominence after Aaron led the people into apostasy with the golden calf (Ex. 32:25). The sons of Levi avenged the Lord's honor by punishing many of the rebels.

When Jesus came on the scene we see how he is for us the new High Priest, and we take on the role of the priesthood as his body.

Jesus -- In the book of Hebrews we see the author persistently pressing the point that Jesus has been appointed by God (Heb. 5:5-10) to be the new, the true high priest that can finally deal with human sin. His priesthood surpasses that of Aaron (Heb. 7:11), contains the perfection missing in the older sacrificial system (Heb. 7:18) and is based on God's own oath (Hebrews 7:20-22)

The Commission of the Church -- As Christ's body, the church is anointed to a priesthood in the world, providing a service that declares the will of God to humankind and bears human needs before God's throne in prayer (1 Peter 2:5-9)

How does knowing that you are a 'Royal Priest', serving the creator of the universe, affect the way that you are living your life everyday?

How has this relationship with God changed your view of yourself, or your value as a person?

In what ways are you going to serve the church in fulfilling your responsibility as a member of the royal Priesthood (1 Peter 2:5-9)?

What actions are you going to take today to intercede for the people in your geographical area, family, neighborhood, social circles, through prayer? In what way are you going to 'declare' the praises of God to your family and friends?

Let's pray to feel in our hearts the joy and honor of being God's representatives on earth.

Day 24. (Friday 24-01-03)

Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:27- 43 Joy of Celebration

This half of chapter 12 deals mostly with the dedication service of the new wall in Jerusalem. In Nehemiah 4:3, Tobiah had criticized the wall saying that it would topple over if even a fox climbed up on it. It must have been embarrassing for him when the huge procession of choirs and leaders paraded around the city *on top of the new wall!*

Celebration has always been part of the history of God's people when a great victory has been accomplished. It makes us realize that celebration must be a part of our God's character and heart. In fact King David, the 'man after God's own heart' celebrated with singing and dancing as the ark was brought back in to the city of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:1-5). Celebration and worship seem to go hand in hand as we glorify God. In our lives to day, it seems like it is very difficult to understand a celebration mindset in our relationship with God. We celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and victories of our favorite sports teams. In reality we have a habit of glorifying men. Yet in Luke 4:5-8 we read where Jesus emphasizes that we are to worship God and serve him only.

We see how Jesus spent a lifetime worshipping God, and yet he also participated in a celebration as he entered the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey as the Prince of Peace and King of Kings (Matt. 21). If we take a peek through the scriptures into the future, we can see the celebration of the heavenly hosts as Jesus enters the city to bring salvation to man, conquering death.

The celebration that we can feel as disciples can be overwhelming, knowing that Jesus has won the victory over death, and we as his people are more than conquerors in life and death through Jesus. (Romans 8:37)

As we come together to meet at our Sunday services, let us come together with a spirit of celebration, worshipping God as his people! Are we coming to our meetings early, excited to be there? Or do we run in late, wishing that things would start a little later to better suite our weekend sleep schedule? What is our spirit like? Are we there to worship God, or to fulfill a duty of attendance?

The joy and honor that we should have in our hearts every day should be inspiring - but also should be evident on Sundays when we meet together as a church.

The people of Nehemiah worshipped with singing and joy.

Joy and Gratitude are two of the greatest challenges that we face in the United States today. We are tempted to see through the eyes of what we don't have, and complain about all of the things that we do. What are specific things that you can do today to see things with a more joyful outlook and more grateful heart?

At times we feel we don't have enough time, money, or patience. Meanwhile, we spend endless amounts of time trying to entertain ourselves and sedate our burdens. Let us pray to have a grateful heart for the abundant life that we have in Christ, and the hope that we have through our relationship with God.

Let us pray to not see things as the world does, but to have eyes that are spiritual, seeing things with an eternal perspective.

Day 25. (Saturday 25-01-03)

Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 12:44-47 Faithful with what we've been given

We see in this chapter that certain men were given certain responsibilities to make sure that other people's needs were met. Men were put in charge of the contribution and tithes that the people would give to the priests and Levites. We see here a two-fold commitment: the commitment of the people to give and meet the need; and the commitment of the ones who had been given to, the responsibility of bringing in the portions required by the law to fulfill their responsibility.

As Christians, we are all given the responsibility to be faithful with the various things that God has given us. Let us think for a moment of what we have. First of all we have the fruits of the Spirit given to us through the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). Are we giving to others these fruits through our life? Love? Joy? Peace? Patience? Etc. The only hope that the world has to grow in these qualities is for us to give these continually through our life. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that we are the light of the world.

What about the physical things that God has blessed us with? Time -- are we giving others our time? Finances -- are we using our finances for God, or are we making sure we are taken care of and then giving to God as sort of an insurance payment so nothing bad happens to us? Our family -- are we giving of our family to help others. For example; are we inviting our kid's friends, school friends..... over to spend time and be part of our relationships as a family?

As we think about our life in the church -- are we giving of ourselves and being faithful with our responsibilities as a family? Are we eager to help out in KKC, Ushering.....? Are we eager to help out if there is a need in severing communion? Do we give rides to church? Are we using our talents to encourage the church and build it up?

One of the greatest gifts that we can give to each other is a gift that the world cannot give outside of Christ; that is the gift of forgiveness. One of the greatest gifts that we can all give to each other, that would be light to the world, is the gift that we received from the blood that Christ shed on the cross. May we forgive each other, as God has forgiven us.

Is there anybody that you feel that you have not forgiven? In the spirit of Matthew 18, meet with that person this week and truly from the heart forgive whatever has been done against you.

Now let us go and give God's love to each other and to the world! John 13:35-35.

Day 26. (Sunday 26-01-03)

Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 13:1-14 Are we still Sacrificing?

This is certainly an inspiring chapter. Nehemiah had served as governor of Judah for 12 years (444 to 432 BC). Beyond his rebuilding of the wall and the organizing of Jerusalem, little is known of this period of his life. I suspect he was an excellent governor.

In 432 BC he returned to Persia to serve once again in King Artaxerxes' court. It appears he was there for maybe two or three years. Whatever the case, he returned to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13) to sort out some serious problems in Jerusalem. You will enjoy this chapter.

The people in Jerusalem had rebuilt the walls and went on to live their lives. Over the years their convictions had softened and God's house was being neglected again. Places that were once holy and righteous were now being used for selfish purposes - and this being done by the priests.

If we are not careful, we too can become complacent with our lives. The newness of having a relationship with God and the joy that we had knowing that our sins were forgiven, and making sure that our hearts and lives were holy, can be replaced by the comforts and desires of the world. The joy that came from sacrificing to build the wall was replaced by the unhappiness of feeling that their lives were not being taken care of. Today as we look at our own heart, we must ask ourselves if we are taking care of God's temple (our heart), and God's family (the church) with the same desire for holiness that we had when we first became a Christians.

Are we sacrificing with the same joy? Are we sacrificing more or less of our time, money, and heart? Are we seeking to build God's kingdom first, or are we first taking care of our life, waiting for the church to tell us what they need from us?

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his Kingdom". Are we seeking ways to serve the Kingdom? Or are we depending on the Kingdom to seek us out, and take care of our needs? Are we waiting or seeking?

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". What are some ways that we are putting our treasure in our relationship with God and his family?

Let us all make decisions to get back to a heart of sacrifice that will get our own heart in the place that it needs to be to put the Kingdom first in our lives.

Day 27. (Monday 27-01-03)

Reading: Nehemiah Chapter 13:15-30 Remember Me

As we read through chapter 13, we see Nehemiah's repeated desire to be remembered by God. This echoes in our minds and hearts as we remember the same desire that the penitent thief expressed to Jesus in Luke 23:42 while both were hanging on their crosses left to die. When the entire destiny of our future rests on the will of another, it puts us in a place of humility that will pierce our pride and crush our independence. To feel totally dependant on God is where we all need to strive to be, and yet we fight with all of our self-sufficient might to avoid.

Nehemiah had just finished a great work and had impacted the lives of the Israelites forever. He had poured out his life to be used by God and had worked side by side with God to accomplish one of the greatest tasks to date. Yet, his greatest longing, was not to be recognized by men, but to have God remember him and his life. When we remove ourselves from the battle we get insecure. So, we must stay in the battle.

As I think about my life, it is the times that I am the most dependent on God that I feel the sense of His Spirit involved in every aspect of my life. It is a place spiritually that we have the most security, and yet from a worldly point of view, it is a time that produces the most insecurity. We don't like to be busy. But when we are not working hard is when we get insecure in our relationship with God.

Let's look at some of the other times in the Bible that people have asked either God or others to remember them.

- Genesis -- Joseph asking the cupbearer
- Judges 16:28 -- Samson
- 1 Samuel -- 1:11 -- Hannah
- Nehemiah 5:19, 13:14, 22, 31 -- Nehemiah
- Psalms 25:7 -- David
- Jeremiah 15:15 -- Jeremiah

We all want to be remembered. When people remember us it makes us feel important. When they don't remember who we are, we feel devalued and unimportant. When people remember our birthdays or special days, we feel special. We all desire to be important enough for people to remember who we are. We want to be remembered for being a great friend, a good mother or father, a responsible son or daughter, a caring neighbor, as well as just making a difference with the life that God has given to each of us. As we reflect on this, we must ask the questions "Have I been a great friend to anyone? Have I been a spiritual father or mother? Have I been a good son or daughter? Have I been a godly neighbor? Have I used my life to make a difference in eternity for others?"

How good are we at remembering others? Do we remember the people that have impacted our lives, and do we thank them. Do we see the value in others, or are we focused on whether others see the value in us? We all know how true Jesus' words are: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Why then, are we so focused on what we get and not what we give? We are more joyful while giving of ourselves and impacting others lives, if only for a moment.

As we learn from Jesus, we see how he was always showing others how much he cared about them, yet rarely do we see the people in his life remember the challenges that Jesus was facing in his own life. Yet it's through the words of the scriptures that we try as hard as we can to remember what Jesus did. We take the Lord's Supper every week at our services to remember him, and pledge our commitment to him. The scriptures that we base our lives on are written through the Holy Spirit by those who remembered what Jesus did while on earth and wrote it down to give us faith.

The need for total dependence on someone else to remember us is a powerless position to be in - and precisely where God wants us to be in our relationship with him.

Day 28. (Tuesday 28-01-03)

The Battle is God's

Think back to your baptism. Why did you become a Christian? What commitment did you make to God? When you said, "Jesus is Lord," was it unconditional?

During the last 23 years the Kingdom of God has grown tremendously. The completion of the 6 year plan (to see a church planted in every nation of the world with a city of 100,000 or more in population) was absolutely miraculous. Christians from all over the world sacrificed their material possessions, sold property and cherished

items and went where they were called to go. Many gave up great jobs, left their universities and withstood great persecution while preaching the good news of Jesus. God was pleased, but Satan was angry. We were not ready for the retaliation by the demonic forces of evil. He has attacked us with distraction, despair, disillusionment, materialism, comfortability and the lure of this world. Some of us have become faithless and hopeless. We have become like Gideon when he asked the Angel of God, "if the LORD is with us, why has all this happened to us? Where are all his wonders that our fathers told us about when they said, 'Did not the LORD bring us up out of Egypt?' But now the LORD has abandoned us....." (Judges 6:13). Nehemiah was in a similar situation. He had done well gaining the trust of his King. He had a great job and he had a comfortable life. God had not abandoned His people, he was waiting for them to repent and return to Him.

When Nehemiah saw the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem he was distraught. He wept, mourned and fasted. He made a decision to have a personal impact--to make a difference. He would have to come out of his comfort zone, he would need to sacrifice, he would have to have faith. He prayed and prayed and prayed. He begged God for success, and then he went to work.

Two months ago during the Pac Rim BT Leaders Conference in Manila, the Kim's d-group met to discuss a plan to rebuild the "wall" of the Pac Rim churches. God was moving in a powerful way as Frank made a proposal of a plan which he termed the "Nehemiah Project." (See Nehemiah 6:3). The plan would call for all of the disciples in the Pac Rim to study the book of Nehemiah and to begin rebuilding the "spiritual walls" which were broken down. Walls of faith, hope, discipleship, evangelism, love for God, true family, and leadership needed to be rebuilt. Also of great urgency, was the need to rebuild our zeal to see people become Christians. We began in the month of August with calling everyone to be dedicated to prayer. The Southwest family of churches joined together and took our place in a 24 hour prayer chain that the Pac Rim has been doing since 1994. As we drew closer to God the "scales" began to fall off our eyes and we saw the devastation Satan had wrought in our lives. Stories of disciples praying all night, waking early and praying for hours became common--God was pleased. During September, we all began to study the book of Nehemiah. We all heard the same sermons and Bible Talks and we studied the same quiet times--it has been awesome! God is pleased! We also began to sow the seed. Thousands have been shared with and God blessed our invitation services last week. Now it's time to see God bring in the harvest. We need to continue to have faith and hope that God will give success to His church but we also need to be on our guard against distractions. Let's remember the Great Commission of Matthew 28 to "go and make disciples." Let's remember the words of Hebrews 12:1 to "throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles..."

Conclusion:

When Nehemiah's enemies heard of his success in rebuilding the wall they were ticked. They tried to get him to stop building by distracting him. Satan will do the same to you. In what ways will he try to distract you?

As we conclude the month of September with our study of Nehemiah let's remember the lessons:

- 1) Honest Evaluation of where you have been spiritually.
- 2) Sincere prayer asking God for forgiveness, help and success.
- 3) Commitment and sacrifice for God's plan.
- 4) Joyful work day by day.
- 5) Don't give into the distractions and temptations that Satan will throw at you.

Challenge:

Read Ephesians 6:10-18.

Satan wants to stop you. He will do anything that it will take. You have been promised the victory as you stay close to God. Put on the full armor of God. Remember the wall of Jerusalem was built in 52 days. It was built brick by brick. It took everyone being involved. God granted Nehemiah and His people great success. He will grant you success.

The Battle is His!