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DAILY *manna*

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GENERAL EDITOR

Rev Isaac Ong

Daily devotions for reading through the Bible

Dear *Daily Manna* readers,

The Acts of the Apostles served as an important link between the earthly ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and the beginnings of the first century church. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus was the theme of the sermons in the early church. It was a message that could never silence the Apostles. The risen Saviour is also the motivation for the spread of the Gospel. What they had seen and heard and handled, they could not keep silent. So from a group of 120 huddled in that upper room [Acts 1:13, 15], Christianity spread like fire on a windy hot summer's day. By the end of Acts 28, Christianity had reached the corners of the Roman Empire.

In this quarter, we will also be looking at Paul's epistles to the churches in Rome and Corinth. We are glad that you could join us for this spiritual journey.

A note to new Daily Manna readers

In this book, you will find a reading plan that will guide you through reading the Bible in two years. You will also find a simple exposition based on the reading of the day. From the day's Bible passages, *Daily Manna* highlights biblical principles which may be applied in the Christian's daily living. We pray that the *Daily Manna* readings will make your reading through the Bible a more meaningful experience. Over the next two years, our focus will be on the New Testament with the aim of giving you a more in-depth study of the NT books.

A step-by-step approach

1. Read the day's Bible chapters assigned in *Daily Manna*.
2. Review the Bible chapters to get an overview of what you have just read.
3. Read the accompanying devotions in *Daily Manna* and reflect on the lessons learnt.
4. Pray and ask God to help you apply His Word to your life.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Isaac Ong
Calvary B-P Church

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 1

LESSON

Serving with your heart

VERSE 24

*And they prayed, and said,
Thou, Lord, which knowest
the hearts of all men, shew
whether of these two thou
hast chosen,*

The Book of Acts begins with the ascension of Jesus and the outpouring at Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit descended to be with us). It also tells of how God selected leaders of the church. The ascension of Jesus is only possible when He has resurrected. The resurrection and the ascension of Christ were physically witnessed by the thousands; they were real occurrences in history.

Both these events changed the behaviour of the early disciples. They were fearful and tried to hide from the authorities during the trial of Jesus. After these events, the disciples began declaring the Word of God. They became bold witnesses of God's Gospel.

The believers were the genesis of the church as an institution that transcends culture and language. The early believers were effective because they treated one another as a brother or sister "with one accord" [v. 14]. They prayed together for guidance in making decisions [v. 15–26]. Prayer should be our daily activity just as much as the taking of physical food is. The believers prayed steadfastly. They were sure that God would lead them in whatever they had to do. Although Jesus was no longer physically with them, they had the Word of God. The strength of our faith comes from the reading of God's Word and prayer.

We have seen, read and perhaps experienced first hand the blessings and mercy of God. How has your faith grown and how much time do you spend on God's Word and on your knees?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

**JOSHUA I
ACTS I**

THOUGHT

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. – Hebrews 10:24

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 2:1–13

LESSON

The Gospel for the whole world

VERSE 1

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

This chapter describes for us the Holy Spirit coming down to the believers. This happened on the Day of Pentecost (*penta* means 50), which is 50 days after the Feast of the Passover. Thank God that we have the same Holy Spirit today and He dwells in the heart of each believer. The Holy Spirit has been active since the Creation [Genesis 1:1–2] and has always been in existence because our God is three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) in One.

There were three physical signs that accompanied the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. They are the sound of rushing wind, the tongues of fire and the believers praising God in the various known languages (“tongues” here refer to known human languages).

The believers were baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit. When God destroyed the Tower of Babel (because the tower was built to glorify man), people spoke in tongues unknown to one another. God’s judgement at Babel scattered the people but God’s blessing at Pentecost united the believers in the Spirit.

Another reason for this gift of tongues, or known languages, was to let the people know that the Gospel was for all the peoples of this world. Every person should have the privilege to hear the Gospel in his or her own language. We are to be Christ’s witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth [Acts 1:8].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 2
ACTS 2:1–13

THOUGHT

**I’m singing for my Lord everywhere I go,
Singing of His wondrous love that the world may know.**

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 2:14–47***LESSON****Preaching the Gospel
with one accord****VERSE 47**

*Praising God, and having
favour with all the people.
And the Lord added to the
church daily such as should
be saved.*

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 3
ACTS 2:14–47**

What happened at Pentecost was indeed miraculous. The Holy Spirit came down upon the people and they spoke in different languages. Peter spoke in Aramaic, a language understood by those present. He spoke first about the Resurrection—Jesus was crucified and died but He kept His word and rose from the dead. He was seen and touched by many after the Resurrection. This is enough proof that Jesus is the Messiah! What doubt do you have?

Peter next spoke about the Holy Spirit. God has promised that after Jesus arose, He would send the Holy Spirit, Who convicts sinners of their sins. What followed was the repentance over one's sins and the confession of Jesus as the Saviour. Only by repenting and believing in Jesus alone can one receive the Holy Spirit and be saved. There is no other way to salvation. Believers are to take another step and identify themselves publicly as followers of Christ and by being baptised in His name. Baptism does not save but is an outward profession of our faith.

The believers assembled to pray and have fellowship with one another. The Church was unified, magnified and God gave them the increase. Worshipping God together serves as a powerful testimony to those who are still unsaved. Individual preaching of the Gospel is effective outreach to all but worshipping together encourages each and every one of us.

The early church loved, worshipped and prayed with one accord. We, too, should love one another as we serve the living God.

THOUGHT

While you have confessed your sins before God and have chosen to serve Him, do you love your brethren?

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 3

LESSON

**In the name of Jesus
Christ our Lord**

VERSE 26

*Unto you first God, having
raised up his Son Jesus, sent
him to bless you, in turning
away every one of you from
his iniquities.*

In verses 1–11, we read of how a lame man was healed by God through the Apostles. After the man was restored, he leaped and danced in joy towards the temple. It was natural then for the people to flock to both Peter and John for more of such miracles; perhaps some might even worship them.

Can the Apostles perform such wonders? Yes, but only in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the purpose of authenticating the messengers. Both Peter and John took the opportunity to point out that Jesus was sent to save us but the Jews had killed him. Though Jesus died, He rose again. After His ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to comfort and illumine His followers, strengthening the faithful ones [v. 16].

Peter then appealed to the Jews to repent. This message that Peter preached still applies to us today. In fact, the message is the same from the very beginning when John the Baptist first preached: “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” [Matthew 3:2]. What is more important, to be cured of our physical illness and then to die eventually, or to be cured of our curse of sin and live forever?

The curse is that man will die a physical death and then a spiritual death of eternal damnation. Jesus shed His blood so that those who believe in Him will be redeemed and have eternal life.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 4
ACTS 3

THOUGHT

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? – Romans 8:31

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 4***LESSON****Being fervent in prayer****VERSE 20**

For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

Preaching the Gospel was not easy for Peter and John. It is not an easy thing for us either. If we do so in our own strength, we will give up eventually because of resistance and ridicule.

Despite the healing of the lame and performing other miracles (in the name of Jesus), the council of the temple and the Sadducees ordered Peter and John to stop preaching Jesus. But Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and nothing could stop him from preaching the Gospel. His message was simple. The stone that the people rejected was the corner stone—Jesus. Being very much alive, Jesus is indeed the Saviour. Only Jesus is able to make a person whole [v. 9], that is, to “heal” (which is translated from the Greek word which means “save”). Only Jesus can heal mankind’s most dreadful affliction of sin. Yet Jesus not only saves us from our sin, He is also the Giver of eternal life.

Instead of accepting this message of hope, the council rejected it, though they noticed the courage and confidence of Peter and John. This “secret” (the source of their strength) is also available to us. They prayed together and God was pleased to answer their prayer [v. 23–31].

God’s love for us is the same yesterday, today and forever, and we can pray the same prayer, too. Are we united like the believers then? Division in our church will be a hindrance that robs us of our spiritual power. Stay united for the glory of God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 5
ACTS 4

THOUGHT

And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is. – Acts 4:24

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 5:1–16***LESSON****Fear****VERSE 11**

*And great fear came upon
all the church, and upon as
many as heard these things.*

This section of the Bible records for us the tragic account of Ananias and Sapphira. They had sold their possession and claimed that they had offered everything from the sale to God. However, the truth was that they had conspired to keep part of the proceeds from God [v. 2]. Peter confronted them individually [v. 3, 8], and both of them denied. As a result, they fell down dead on the spot [v. 5, 10].

It is wrong to conclude that this story is primarily about giving everything that one has to God. To understand the doctrine behind it, we need to look at the context. In Acts 4:36–37, a man named Joses sold his land and brought the money to the Apostles. Being a Levite, he should be a man of considerable social status, and he was affectionately known by his surname as “the son of consolation”.

There was no need for Ananias and Sapphira to do the same thing. Yet they did. It might be their fear of losing out to fellow believers that had caused them to do so. Yet they held back in their giving. Pride and fear of people’s opinions made them give but fear of losing financial security caused them to keep some for themselves. When Peter asked them, the two conflicting fears resulted in their lying.

Ananias and Sapphira had lied to God; they had not trusted God to provide for them, and they had taken their chances on God’s omniscience.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JOSHUA 6
ACTS 5:1–16

CONSIDERATION

Later, in verses 11 to 16, great fear came upon those who heard about this incident but the number of believers increased. This is a different kind of fear—one of awe and reverence. What kind of fears are you facing in your life?

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 5:17–42***LESSON****For God or for men****VERSE 39**

*But if it be of God, ye
cannot overthrow it; lest
haply ye be found even to
fight against God.*

We see here contentions between two groups of people who claimed that their works were of God. On the one hand, we have one led by the high priest, who sought to stop the Apostles from preaching Jesus. On the other, we have the Apostles, who sought to obey God instead of men. Be it through imprisonment [v. 18, 21], confrontation [v. 28], threats to kill [v. 33] or beating [v. 40], the former tried every means to stop the latter. But their attempts did not discourage the Apostles, who had always counted it worthy to suffer for the name of Christ [v. 41].

Throughout the whole episode, the persecutors were never at peace. They were “filled with indignation” [v. 17], they “doubted” [v. 24] and “feared (the response of the people)” [v. 26], and their hearts were “cut” [v. 33].

Disputes often result in the loss of peace for the parties involved. Neither side refuses to give in because both insist they are right. In the context of the church, both may claim that they are doing God’s work.

In this light, the advice of a Pharisee by the name of Gamaliel was apt. He quoted historical precedents [v. 36–37] to show that work that was not of God would eventually come to nought. Guard yourself against becoming an impediment to God’s work. Do not be prejudiced against men, too. God uses different men to do His work, even those whom you cannot get along with.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 7
ACTS 5:17–42

CONSIDERATION

When you find yourself feeling negative emotions or bearing grudges, take some time to reflect prayerfully the reasons behind these undesirable feelings, and commit everything to the Lord.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 6***LESSON**

**Full of faith and power
yet**

VERSE 15

*And all that sat in the
council, looking stedfastly
on him, saw his face as it
had been the face of an
angel.*

The Apostles taught and preached Christ daily in the temple and in every house [Acts 5:42]. The Church continued to grow and soon the Apostles needed help. Since they were primarily called to prayer and to the ministry of the Word, they had neglected the table or mercy ministries, and particularly the needs of widows.

As a result, the believers were asked to choose “seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” to be in charge of daily ministrations [v. 3]. The ecclesiastical offices of elders and deacons were later to evolve from here.

“Serving tables” is never a lowly job. In fact, it requires much divine wisdom and humility. In this chapter, we are introduced to one of these God-appointed men, Stephen, who “full of faith and power did great wonders and miracles among the people” [v. 8], whose wisdom people were unable to resist for the Spirit spoke through him [v. 10], and whose countenance shone like that of an angel [v. 15].

However, being a leader and, for that matter, even a servant leader, is never easy. Even with, if not precisely because of, his godly character and strong messages, Stephen was to face tough opposition from people who wanted him silenced or dead. Some even set up false witnesses to accuse him of blasphemy against Jerusalem and God’s law [v. 13]; they were to later stone him to death [Acts 7].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 8
ACTS 6

CONSIDERATION

Are you treating your leaders well? Remember to pray for them.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 7***LESSON****Peace that passes all understanding****VERSE 60**

And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

The entire chapter is devoted to Stephen, the first person to be called a “martyr” in the Bible (the original meaning of the word was actually “witness”). He was brought before the high priest and told to present his case. Instead of merely defending himself, he made use of the opportunity to witness for Christ in a powerful way, and it caused his death.

His message covered biblical history from the time of Abraham [v. 2–8] to those of Joseph [v. 9–16] and Moses [v. 17–43], before touching briefly on the reigns of David and Solomon [v. 44–47]. However, his focus was on Moses, as the allegation against him was that he preached Jesus, Who would “change the customs which Moses delivered us”.

Stephen delivered a grim message, that the Israelites had a history of persecuting their prophets [v. 52] and had often failed to keep God’s law [v. 53]. Stephen’s message “cut to the heart” of the crowd and they were greatly enraged. Yet Stephen continued to preach that the One Whom they had crucified was now “standing on the right hand of God” [v. 56]. This caused the crowd to go berserk [v. 57] and started stoning him [v. 58].

Facing imminent death, Stephen asked the Lord to receive his spirit and forgive these people, exactly like what Christ had done on the Cross [Luke 23:34, 46]. He had stood up for the truth; he had stood firm in his faith. And he left with perfect peace.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JOSHUA 9
ACTS 7

CONSIDERATION

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. – Philipians 4:7

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 8:1–25***LESSON****Thy Kingdom come****VERSE 1**

And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

We read of the death of Stephen at the hands of the people he tried to spread the good news to. What followed was a great persecution in Jerusalem. Christians then would have sunk into despair.

Yet the perfect counsel and will of God stands despite men's foolishness. Nothing can thwart God's plan. It was precisely because of the dangerous situation then that the Gospel was extended to Samaria. The people "were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria" [v. 1]. This was exactly what our Lord Jesus had said: "And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The history of evangelism had entered its second stage.

Like Stephen, Philip was one of the seven chosen for mercy ministry [Acts 6:5]. Stephen was the first to be called "martyr" [Acts 22:20] and Philip was the first to be known as an "evangelist" [Acts 21:8]. He played an instrumental role in bringing the Gospel to Samaria—a land that was heavily influenced by paganism and superstitions.

No finite being can hinder God's plan. Similarly, no one can earn his own gifts. Simon the sorcerer, who believed in Christ but was amazed by the powers of Peter and John, sought to buy such power from them [v. 18–19], only to be met with reproach [v. 20–23]. The Gospel had reached Samaria, where spiritual growth had just begun.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 10
ACTS 8:1–25**

CONSIDERATION

The extension of God's Kingdom is seen in the increase in the number of people who believe and the growth within the ones who have believed. Are you growing in Christ?

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 8:26–40***LESSON****Salvation****VERSE 37**

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

This is the famous story of the Ethiopian receiving salvation in an unlikely place. Philip was enjoying successful preaching at Samaria [v. 5–8] when he was called to go into the desert. He heeded God’s call and, because of that, the Ethiopian was opened to the Gospel.

The Ethiopian officer was reading the Book of Isaiah but not understanding it. Philip was able to explain and the Ethiopian was convicted by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, of the exact fulfilment of the Scripture, and was made to understand the nature of the Messiah’s kingdom and salvation.

The climax came when Philip asked a simple question and the Ethiopian’s answer was equally simple but sincere: “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” So convinced was he that he requested to be baptised immediately. Amazingly, they came across water in the desert and Philip baptised him. As soon as he was baptised, the Spirit of God took Philip from him so that he saw him no more, but this confirmed his faith and he went on his way rejoicing.

Have you been prompted to go to strange places to share the Gospel? Even if we are not called to go to strange places, there are the familiar places at work, play and home to share the Gospel. Wait no more but be like Philip. Be daring enough to speak to strangers and share the Gospel. Leave the conviction to the working of the Holy Spirit.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 11
ACTS 8:26–40

CHALLENGE

Venture and share the Gospel with strangers, like what Philip did.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 9:1–18***LESSON****Using anyone for the extension of His kingdom****VERSE 15**

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

Saul, the proud Pharisee, the unmerciful oppressor, the daring blasphemer and infidel, was chosen to bear the name of Christ to the world. What an unlikely candidate! Yet even eminent disciples, like Ananias, sometimes stagger at the commands of the Lord. The people whom God uses often surpass our scanty expectations; men we consider objects of His vengeance can actually become vessels of His mercy.

No man has shaped the history of Christianity like the Apostle Paul (formerly known as Saul). Even before Paul became a believer, his frenzied persecution of Christians had given him such a notorious reputation that it was no wonder that Ananias was surprised at God's choice. However, an encounter with Christ always proves life-changing and this happened to Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul was transformed from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher for Christ.

Faith in Christ can bring great blessings but great suffering as well [v. 16]. God calls us to a commitment, not to comfort. He promises to be with us through suffering and hardship, not sparing us from them. Are you ready to be like Paul and channel your energy into spreading the Gospel? Upon receiving his sight, Paul immediately preached Christ as the Son of God, starting in the synagogues.

What are you waiting for? We have the full revelation in the Bible. Go forth and preach the Good News! Do not wait to be blinded (like Saul) before you decide to tell people about Jesus.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JOSHUA 12-13
ACTS 9:1-18

CHALLENGE**Go now and tell the world the Good News.**

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 9:19–43***LESSON****To bravely preach Jesus****VERSE 20**

*And straightway he
preached Christ in the
synagogues, that he is the
Son of God.*

The most important event in human history apart from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. If Saul had remained a Jewish rabbi, we would be missing 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament and Christianity's early major expansion to the Gentiles might not have happened.

The bravery of Paul [v. 20] is difficult to understand, even in today's context. To an orthodox Jew, while there was no denial that Jesus existed then, to proclaim that He is the Son of God was totally repugnant. Judaism had no place for most of the Christian messianic beliefs. Nor was there any way to reconcile Jesus with the Jewish concept of the Messiah. The Jews could not accept the idea of a suffering Messiah who was eventually crucified on the Cross.

For Paul to "straightway preach Christ in the synagogues" was like a self-imposed death sentence. Indeed the Jews plotted to kill him more than once, but Paul was saved by God. To face death every single day was the routine of Paul's missionary work.

Being a Christian is a wonderful blessing, especially if you are living in a country that allows religious freedom. But let us not take this for granted. If you are living in a country where Christianity is persecuted, let the testimony of Paul or even Christ Himself be your source of strength.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 14–15
ACTS 9:19–43**

CHALLENGE

What is your life's motto? For Paul, "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain".

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 10:1–23***LESSON****Salvation for all****VERSE 15**

*And the voice spake unto
him again the second time,
What God hath cleansed,
that call not thou common.*

At the foot of the Cross, the ground is level. There is no platform of religious or ethnic heritage or practice that one must perform to qualify for God's saving favour. In this chapter, two men of totally different backgrounds set the precedent for the spread of the Gospel to non-Jews: Peter, a Jewish fisherman turned preacher; and Cornelius, a wealthy, powerful military man and a Gentile.

Cornelius had actively sought God, revered Him, was generous with alms and had prayed always. God rewarded him by sending him a vision to find Peter for a better understanding of the Gospel. Peter too was given a vision. In the vision to Peter, a vessel containing all manner of four-footed beasts, creeping things and fowls of the air descended unto him and he was instructed to kill and eat. The message was clear: God had cleansed all animals for food and we are no longer bound by the Mosaic dietary laws, but the more important lesson is that salvation is open to all [v. 15].

The oneness of the body united to its Head in heaven was not mentioned in this event but it prepared the way for the promulgation of this truth. Cornelius was to become one of the first Gentiles saved through hearing the Gospel.

Repentance unto life eternal is granted to the Gentiles as such. Do you have reservations about sharing the Gospel with other races? We should not. The Gospel is for everyone.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 16–17
ACTS 10:1–23

CHALLENGE

Do not let any form of discrimination or bias hinder the spread of the Gospel.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 10:24–48***LESSON****Level ground at the foot
of the Cross****VERSE 45**

*And they of the
circumcision which believed
were astonished, as many
as came with Peter, because
that on the Gentiles also
was poured out the gift of
the Holy Ghost.*

As Peter preached in Cornelius' house, salvation that was divinely worked, complete and authentic, was afforded to the Gentiles present. It was all of God, for Peter had not even finished his sermon when God poured out the gift of His Spirit on them, just as He did on the Jewish believers at Pentecost.

The Spirit literally came unto them with suddenness and intensity. By combining this description with the imagery of “pouring out” like an overwhelming tidal wave, it portrayed the completeness of the salvation experienced. Its authenticity was manifested by the Gentiles speaking in tongues [v. 46].

The Jews (“they of the circumcision”) who were present in Cornelius' house were “astonished” as salvation had been given to the uncircumcised Gentiles. This challenged the Jews' basic assumption that a holy and pure God would not pour out His Holy Spirit on profane, common and unclean Gentiles, and laid the precedent for more Gentiles (as well as Jews) to have the confidence that salvation can be theirs, too, if they would seek it earnestly.

The ground is indeed level at the foot of the Cross. God is no respecter of persons [v. 34]. We are all His creation and His children. If this were not so, He would not have sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross to save us from our sins. The blood of Jesus can save the most stubborn of sinners. For the saved, rejoice! For the unsaved, wait no longer but accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour!

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 18–19
ACTS 10:24–48**

THOUGHT

Witness how deep God's love is for us. Only through Jesus can we reach God.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 11:1–18***LESSON****The Gospel for non-Jews****VERSE 18**

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

The conversion of Cornelius' household was truly a momentous event. Churches throughout Judaea had heard about it. This proved beyond a doubt that the grace of salvation was extended to the non-Jews. This gave the critics no further reasons to doubt, and they glorified God with a confession that the Gentiles had been granted repentance unto everlasting life.

Jewish believers understood the “revolution in principle” that had occurred. It was not just an isolated God-fearer's household but all Gentiles—non-Jews—to whom the door of salvation was cast wide open. Furthermore, this repentance was not a result of human effort. It was a gift from God to the Gentiles, just as it was to the Jews [Acts 3:26; 5:31].

What then should convince us that God is at work even in ways that cut across the grain of our prejudices? A plain hearing of the facts and their interpretation, judged by the promises of God's Word, is how we can start. When we keep in mind that salvation begins with repentance by the grace of God, our prejudices of demanding a person to meet certain performance standards melt away. In their place come wonder and praise to God that His love has touched people whom we, left to ourselves, cannot bring to pass.

Therefore, do not worry about the results of our efforts to spread the Gospel. Our duty is to speak about the love of God, the gift of His only begotten Son and eternal salvation through Christ.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JOSHUA 20–21
ACTS 11:1–18

PRAYER

Thank you, God, for removing the perceived traditions and cultural prejudices that salvation is only available to the Jews.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 11:19–30***LESSON****Early Christians****VERSE 21**

*And the hand of the Lord
was with them: and a great
number believed, and
turned unto the Lord.*

The persecution of the early Church after the death of Stephen resulted in the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. From this account, we can learn about the proper roles of missionaries as well as ordinary Christians.

When the leaders at Jerusalem heard that large numbers of Gentiles were turning to the Lord, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. He rejoiced to see how wonderfully God had saved that large company of heathen Gentiles. He urged them to cling to this new faith and, with the help of the Apostle Paul, taught them the Word of God.

Thus we see that an important role of the missionary is to encourage, teach and rejoice with new believers. He should also recognise that it is only by God's grace that people believe [v. 23] and that he should be "full of the Holy Ghost" [v. 24].

As for the believers, we see that they loved the Lord with a shared harmonious spirit of faith, and they loved the truth and were hungry for the Word. The love of the church at Antioch for the Lord Jesus Christ must have been so obvious to the community around them that it was at Antioch that they "were called Christians first" [v. 26]. Furthermore, they were caring and loving, as could be seen from their generous giving to alleviate the sufferings of their fellow believers. "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" [v. 29].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 22
ACTS 11:19-30

PRAYER

Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 12***LESSON****The power of prayer****VERSE 5**

Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

Herod, who had come to power, proceeded to persecute the Christians. Many were arrested. James, the brother of John, was martyred and Peter was thrown into prison awaiting public trial and probable execution. Meanwhile, the church had been praying without ceasing. God answered their prayers and Peter was delivered miraculously. Herod met his tragic end.

As the church members prayed throughout the night before Peter's public trial [v. 6], he was sleeping soundly and had to be awakened by the angel. This reminds us of another faithful servant of God who slept peacefully in a den full of hungry lions whilst the king could not sleep a wink in the comfort of his palace [Daniel 6].

May this be an encouragement to believers everywhere. Let us put our trust in the God Who answers prayer. The majority of Christians spend very little time in prayer. This is wrong. Do not let the hectic pace of modern living eat away your prayer life. If you have not already done so, make a special effort to spend more time to commune with God in prayer.

As you go through trials in your life, rest in the knowledge that your Christian brethren are praying for you. Pray for yourself that God would grant you the faith to believe His promise that even if you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the One Who died on the Cross for your sins will keep His promise to be "with you always, even unto the end of the world".

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JOSHUA 23
ACTS 12

REMINDER

Come for prayer meeting.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 13:1–13***LESSON****Labourers together with
God****VERSE 2**

*As they ministered to the
Lord, and fasted, the Holy
Ghost said, Separate me
Barnabas and Saul for
the work whereunto I have
called them.*

Today, many churches in developed countries send their missionaries to remote regions to bring the Gospel of Christ to heathens. Acts Chapter 13 records for us how a Christian church sent forth the world's first foreign missionaries. We see a beautiful picture of individual missionaries, the Church and the Holy Spirit co-labouring together to fulfil the Great Commission. There are several lessons we can learn from this first missionary trip.

First, we can learn from the missionaries. These men were faithfully worshipping and serving in church when the Holy Spirit put the burden in their hearts to go forth and bring the good news to the Gentile nations. And as they journeyed into the distant lands—by the standards of those days—they preached the Word boldly everywhere they went.

Second, we note that their church supported them. A formal dedication service was held to send them off with fasting, praying and laying of hands. The work of missions is serious, not to be entered into unadvisedly by “lone rangers”. God has instituted the Church with a mandate, leaders and a congregation. His ministers must seek the recognition, endorsement and support of the local church when they embark on missionary projects.

Finally, we see the Holy Spirit working above and behind them, calling them [v. 2], sending them forth [v. 4] and empowering them all the way, including giving Paul supernatural powers to deal with the false prophet Barjesus, who tried to “pervert the right ways of the Lord” [v. 10].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JOSHUA 24
ACTS 13:1–13

THOUGHT

**And how shall they preach, except they be sent? –
Romans 10:15a**

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 13:14–52***LESSON****Preaching the Gospel****VERSE 49**

*And the word of the Lord
was published throughout
all the region.*

In Acts 9:15, we read that God had chosen Paul to be His vessel, to bear His name “before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel”. In today’s reading, we see Paul fulfilling this role.

Paul preached a model sermon to the Jews. Like Stephen before him, he recounted God’s past dealings with Israel and their recurrent ingratitude and folly. He explained the Gospel clearly to them and presented Jesus as the promised Saviour through David and his descendants, and heralded by John the Baptist. He then gave them the invitation to come to Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and be justified in a manner that the law of Moses could not [v. 38–39].

But their response was just like those of their forefathers, who had “sinned, and committed iniquity, and done wickedly, and rebelled, and departed from God’s precepts and judgements: and had not hearkened unto God’s servants the prophets” [Daniel 9:5–6]. In contrast, the Gentiles invited Paul to speak to them again the following Sabbath and when they heard the Gospel, “they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” [v. 48]. But the Jews were filled with envy; they stirred up trouble and expelled the missionaries from the city. Nevertheless, the missionaries were filled with joy and the Holy Ghost.

May we learn from the example of God’s servant and boldly preach the Gospel even in the face of opposition and rejection.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES I
ACTS 13:14-52

PRAYER

Lord, may Your Holy Spirit empower us to preach the Gospel boldly and lovingly to those around us.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 14***LESSON****Doing God's work****VERSE 27**

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

Chapter 14 continues the narration of the first missionary journey. At Iconium, many believed the Gospel but the Jewish leaders stirred up trouble again. At Lystra, Paul miraculously healed a cripple and the crowds wanted to worship Paul and Barnabas as Greek gods. They refused the accord and Paul was later stoned and left to die. But God raised him up and he continued preaching in Lystra and the surrounding cities. Finally, the team returned to Antioch and submitted history's first "foreign missions field report" by a returning missionary.

We can learn many lessons from these missionaries' methods and faith. They were humble and never robbed God of His glory. Instead of accepting the worship of the crowds at Lystra, they "rent their clothes" and proclaimed the truth. They tried to turn the folks from their worthless idols to the true living God of the universe.

In spite of their very special position in the church, they never acted as though they were indispensable. After planting a church in a particular city, they passed on the work to new leadership, praying for them and commending them to the Lord. At the same time, they encouraged the local congregation to be prepared for hardship in the service of the Lord.

Upon their return to Antioch, they rejoiced at the victories, even as they acknowledged that it was God Who gave the increase and "opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" [v. 27].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 2
ACTS 14

REMINDER

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! – 1 Corinthians 9:16

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 15***LESSON****Dealing with controversies****VERSE 10**

Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

While Paul and Barnabas were preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, there came men from Judaea with the notion that Christian converts should follow the ways of the Jewish people—to be circumcised and follow the laws of Moses. There arose such controversy that Paul and Barnabas were urged to go to Jerusalem and settle the matter with the Apostles and elders there.

Peter, through God's inspiration, pointed out that the saving grace of God as experienced by both Gentiles and Jews was the same. It was God Who elected and caused the Gospel to be witnessed unto a believer; it was God Who convicted a sinner of sins and subsequently it was God Who gave His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of the believer.

When the matter was settled in Jerusalem, the leaders promptly took steps to inform the believers in Gentile churches of their conclusions, and assured them of the right doctrines. They were not to be bound by the Jewish customs but observe the four restrictions: to "abstain from meat offered unto idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication".

Controversies in church have ensued since the days of the Apostles. It is important for us to have spiritual discernment lest we are led astray. God's Word is the basis for resolving any controversy. In matters where the Bible is silent, let us also humbly be silent as well. Commit the matter to the Lord and He will show you peace in times like these.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 3
ACTS 15

THOUGHT

Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. – Proverbs 11:14

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 16:1–24***LESSON****Boldly proclaiming the Gospel****VERSE 5***And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.*

Paul parted with Barnabas and came to Lystra, where he met Timothy, a disciple of good report. Paul soon became Timothy's mentor. Together, they laboured for the Lord to establish the faith of the churches.

As a result, the numbers increased in these churches. The Holy Spirit guided their ministries and travels in Asia Minor. In a vision, Paul received a call to go to Macedonia, and they promptly left to minister there. In the city of Philippi, Paul and his team met Lydia, a businesswoman, while they were observing Sabbath prayers by the river. The Holy Spirit opened Lydia's heart, and she and her household subsequently believed and were baptised.

While in Philippi, Paul and Silas got into trouble when Paul cast out a spirit from a slave girl, because her masters were not able to use her gift of divination anymore. They accused Paul and Silas of teaching customs that were unlawful according to the Roman laws. Paul and Silas were subsequently whipped and cast into prison.

Christians today also face the same opposition when we preach the Gospel to an unbelieving world. Our Lord encourages us with His words: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" [John 15:19]. Let us take courage and go forth boldly to proclaim the Gospel because greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 4
ACTS 16:1–24

CHALLENGE**Read and meditate on Matthew 28:19–20.**

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 16:25–40***LESSON****Grace to accomplish
God's Work****VERSE 31**

*And they said, Believe on
the Lord Jesus Christ, and
thou shalt be saved, and thy
house.*

While in prison, Paul and Silas continued to pray and sing praises to God. This was witnessed by the other prisoners. A sudden earthquake occurred, followed by the miraculous opening of all prison doors, and loosing of all the prisoners' bonds.

The keeper of the prison awoke and attempted to take his own life because he thought that all the prisoners had escaped. But Paul stopped him and told him that none had left the prison. The keeper was clearly affected by the change in the prisoners' behaviour and asked Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul answered that he must believe in the Lord Jesus, and promptly expounded God's Word to him. The keeper took Paul and Silas to his home, where he cleaned their stripes. He and his household were subsequently baptised.

The next day, the magistrates sent men to inform Paul and Silas that they were free to go. However, Paul charged the men to tell the magistrates that he and Silas were Roman citizens and were unjustly punished. Hearing this, the magistrates became fearful and went personally to meet the two, and to escort them out of the city. After they were freed, Paul and Silas went to Lydia to comfort the believers there.

We should follow Paul's example and constantly seek opportunities to share the Gospel, no matter what situation we are in. God is in control of every situation, so have faith and believe that God will grant us the grace to accomplish what He has commanded us to do.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 5
ACTS 16:25–40**

THOUGHT

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. – 1 Peter 3:15

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 17:1–15***LESSON****A guide for our daily life****VERSE 11**

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Paul and Silas went on to Thessalonica, where Paul preached in the synagogue for three days and taught that Jesus was the Messiah, how He needed to suffer and die for the sins of the world, as well as how He rose again from the dead. As a result of his preaching, some believed, but there were also others who did not.

Of those who did not believe, some plotted to cause trouble for Paul and his followers. They employed hooligans to create chaos in the city, dragging Jason and some other believers to the rulers, and accusing them of receiving Paul and Silas, who acknowledged another king besides Caesar.

After paying a fine, Jason and the other believers were released, and they sent Paul and Silas away to Berea by night. In Berea, Paul and Silas were met with a different crowd of Jews, who were nobler than those in Thessalonica. They received Paul's teachings with readiness of mind, and studied their scriptures daily to see if all that he had said were true. As a result, many believed, including the Gentiles in Berea.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God [2 Timothy 3:16–17] and we thank God that we now have access to it freely. God's Word has the power to convert the soul [Psalm 19:7] and is a source of joy and comfort to those who believe in it. Like the Bereans, we also should read the Bible daily, and make it our guide for everything that we do.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 6
ACTS 17:1–15**

PRAYER

Lord, guide me with Your Word every day, so that I will not stray from the straight and narrow path.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 17:16–34***LESSON****Seeking but not finding****VERSE 27**

That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.

During his stay in Athens, Paul was amazed by the rampant idolatry in the city. The Athenians spent most of their idle time discussing philosophy, and were always hungry for new ideas. They were curious about Paul’s teachings and he took the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them on Mars Hill.

Paul pointed out that the Athenians were too superstitious, going to the extent of building an altar to an “unknown god,” just in case they happened to miss the correct one. Paul proceeded to preach that God was the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and was not limited to the temples made with men’s hands. God could not be likened to any idols made of gold, silver or stone.

Paul further taught that all men should repent of their sinfulness. God’s judgement would be coming soon, and all men would be judged by the righteousness of Christ [v. 31], Whom He had raised from the dead as an assurance to all who put their trust in His redeeming work on the Cross.

We are not much different from the Athenians. Man is still hungry for new ideas and will not hesitate to add to their treasure trove of knowledge anything that sounds remotely reasonable, just in case this happens to be true. Without God’s illumination, men will continue to search but they will not find the truth, even though the truth is never far from us. Pray, therefore, for God’s Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 7
ACTS 17:16-34

THOUGHT

And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. – Ecclesiastes 12:12

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 18:1–17***LESSON****Encouragement in discouragement****VERSE 6**

And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Every Sabbath, Paul reasoned with the Jews and the Greeks in the synagogues, teaching them about the Lord Jesus. But when the people opposed Paul and his teaching, Paul shook the dust off his garment as a symbolic act that he would have nothing to do with them again. From then on, he ventured to preach to the Gentiles.

The Jewish leaders were not pleased with Paul and wanted him to be punished for shaking and questioning their Mosaic faith. They lodged a complaint against Paul to the new governor, Gallio, hoping that Paul would be punished. However, Gallio discharged the entire matter as a religious one and left it to the Jews to settle their own discontent. Despite this discouragement, God spoke to Paul to assure him of His guidance and protection, which emboldened Paul further.

In his discouragement, Paul could have despaired but he heard and saw the hand of God working in his life and through him. Similarly, however difficult our experiences are, if we likewise open the eyes of our faith, we will see God's hand blessing us in many ways.

On his way to Corinth from Athens, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who were fellow tentmakers. One important aspect we see in Paul's life is his fellowship with Christian friends. He had the support of Aquila, Priscilla, Silas, Timothy and other Jews who believed. We, too, can do with fellow Christian friends encouraging us in our lives to persevere in our faith.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 8
ACTS 18:1–17

PRAYER

I removed his shoulder from the burden: his hands were delivered from the pots. – Psalm 81:6

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 18:18–28***LESSON****Fervency of faith through
faith and fellowship****VERSE 25**

*This man was instructed
in the way of the Lord;
and being fervent in the
spirit, he spake and taught
diligently the things of the
Lord, knowing only the
baptism of John.*

Some time later, Paul left Corinth to return to Antioch. On the way, he stopped briefly in Ephesus, promising the Christians there that he would return, God willing. With his arrival in Antioch, his second missionary journey was formally concluded.

At Ephesus, there was a fervent Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria, who knew the Bible partially. However, this did not stop him from preaching and reaching out to many people. He was a man of fine character and obvious gifts from the Holy Spirit, which he put to good use. He was eloquent, had a thorough understanding of the Scriptures, was instructed in the way of the Lord, spoke with great fervour, taught about Jesus accurately and had always spoken boldly. We also see the auxiliary support he had from fellow Christians, namely Aquila and Priscilla, who provided him with accommodation, fellowship and more knowledge of the Lord.

Just like Aquila and Priscilla, we must strive to be devoted Christians who can indispensably support, facilitate and foster the effectiveness of the more visible servants of God. Whenever possible, we should support and have fellowship with fellow brethren who have devoted their lives for the ministry— both locally and abroad.

We also need more fervent men and women like Apollos, who not only had an inward call to preach and instruct but also manifest gifts and was not afraid to use them for the ministry. However, we must guard ourselves against fanaticism, which clearly Apollos was not, as his fervour was informed and intelligent.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 9
ACTS 18:18-28**

QUESTION

How can I increase my faith and knowledge in the Lord?

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 19***LESSON****Miracle healing****VERSE 11**

*And God wrought special
miracles by the hands of
Paul.*

Paul returned to Ephesus, as he had promised [Acts 18]. Along the way, he met 12 men who had not heard of the Holy Spirit. Upon their baptism, they immediately received gifts from the Holy Spirit. Paul ministered there for two years and did extraordinary miracles. However, there was also a group of Jews who tried to imitate Paul in exorcising demons but were instead overpowered by an evil spirit, as they were not true Christians. As a result of all these, many came to believe in Jesus.

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul met with more obstacles in the person of a silversmith named Demetrius, who roused the people against Paul for his preaching against the Greek deity Diana. In reality, Demetrius was mainly concerned about his lost income as the people now believed in God and not in idols anymore, his source of livelihood. An upheaval ensued, only to be quelled by the city clerk.

Paul could heal the sick and demon-possessed remotely through items that he had touched [v. 11–12]. Today, we also see people who claim they can perform similar “miracles.” We must not forget the failure of the so-called Christians in this chapter.

More importantly, we must remember that the miracles of apostolic times were attestations of the validity of the apostolic ministry, pending the completion of the canon of Scripture, and not usual components for the ministry today. In the past, miracles authenticate the messenger. Today, the authenticity is proved by the Word of God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 10
ACTS 19

WARNING

For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. – Matthew 24:24

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 20:1–16***LESSON****Honouring God by
listening attentively****VERSE 9**

*And there sat in a window
a certain young man
named Eutychus, being
fallen into a deep sleep: and
as Paul was long preaching,
he sunk down with sleep,
and fell down from the
third loft, and was taken up
dead.*

Acts 20:1–16 recounts Paul's movements around the Aegean Sea between the close of his three-year ministry in Ephesus and his farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus while on his way back to Jerusalem. We see a picture of a vibrant church life, one filled with four essential characteristics: heartfelt love [v. 1–3], supportive fellowship [v. 4–6], lively worship [v. 7] and the message and experience of a new life in Jesus Christ [v. 8–16].

An interesting event that occurred during this time was the fall of a young boy named Eutychus. He was so tired and sleepy from hearing Paul's sermons that he fell asleep on the window ledge and fell to his death. Paul revived him and comforted the crowd by proclaiming Eutychus alive!

We find many things happening in the early church that are missing from churches today. First, the church was jam-packed with people (Eutychus had to sit on the window ledge to listen to Paul). Second, they listened to his messages earnestly till past midnight. Third, the service was filled with the preaching of God's Word, not entertainment or performances.

How can we apply these virtues of attendance to church when we come for service on the Sabbath? Do we pay full attention or doze off? Do our minds wander because the message or service is too long and boring to our liking? Have we given God the honour He deserves for that one hour? Let us be like the fervent listeners of the early Church.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ**

**JUDGES 11
ACTS 20:1–16**

PLEDGE

**I pledge to go to church and give God the honour
He deserves.**

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 20:17–38***LESSON****The importance of church elders****VERSE 28**

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church to instruct them, bid them farewell, encourage them and strengthen them. He reminded them of their past experiences, how he had lived his life and what he had preached, his good intention for them, and his diligence and proclamation of the whole counsel of God. Indeed, Paul's ministry in Ephesus was selfless, earnest, faithful and manifestly blessed by God.

He wept with them after telling them that he would not see them again on this side of eternity once he made his way to Jerusalem. He had been warned by the Holy Spirit of hardship and imprisonment in Jerusalem. However, he saw his life as worthy of nothing; he had to finish the race and complete the task Jesus had given him [v. 24].

Paul's encouragement to the Ephesian elders was to go on without him. They were to rely on the Holy Spirit alone. These truths are applicable today to all churches. First, the Holy Spirit made the elders overseers of the church—to watch, teach, guide, correct, nurture and encourage the flock. Second, he warned the elders that problems would arise, and elders must be on their guard at all times. Third, he warned them that insurrection would follow too. They were wolves in sheep's clothing [Matthew 7:15].

On our part as members of the congregation, we must uphold our elders and support them in prayer and in deed, to see to the continued establishment of the church till Jesus comes again.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 12
ACTS 20:17-38

REMINDER

It is more blessed to give than to receive. – Acts 20:35c

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 21:1–26***LESSON****The will of the Lord be done****VERSE 14***And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.*

Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem. But the believers at Tyre, a prophet named Agabus and the Caesarean Christians were told through the Spirit that persecution awaited him, and thus they persuaded him not to go. When it was clear that Paul was ready to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus, they gave up and said, “The will of the Lord be done.”

Did Paul sin by resisting those repeated warnings? Paul believed that going to Jerusalem was part of God’s plan for him [Acts 19:21]. He was also aware of the unknown things that might befall him [Acts 20:22]. That he did follow God’s will gained further support later in the words of encouragement offered by the Lord in Acts 23:11. What the believers at Tyre and Caesarea did was merely out of their own concern for Paul’s welfare.

Paul’s testimony teaches us that God saves us not for our own agenda but for His purpose. He wants the message of His salvation to go out to all nations of the world. We are not all called to be missionaries, as Paul was, but neither are we called to live selfishly for ourselves while others perish in darkness.

We must be willing to do God’s bidding no matter what our obedience might cost. If we begin to grow comfortable as God’s chosen people and ignore His command for us to reach out to the lost, then we are missing God’s purpose for our lives.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 13
ACTS 21:1–26

THOUGHT

For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. – 1 Peter 3:17

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 21:27–40***LESSON****Suffer me to speak****VERSE 39**

*But Paul said, I am a man
which am a Jew of Tarsus,
a city in Cilicia, a citizen
of no mean city: and, I
beseech thee, suffer me to
speak unto the people.*

In this passage, we witness a dramatic scene where Paul was insulted, seized and almost lost his life. Paul was accused of bringing Greeks into the temple and polluting its holiness. However, just before he was about to be beaten to death, Roman soldiers appeared and had him bound but protected. Realising that he was in safe hands, he then requested for an opportunity to speak.

This incident brings out very strikingly the part played by the Jews and the Romans in carrying out God's purposes for Paul. They were both like pawns on a chessboard, ignorant of the intentions of the hand that moved them. We see Paul being persecuted by the Jews and yet, just when the game was thought to be over, Roman soldiers appeared on the scene. In fact, it was strange that Rome should shelter and Jerusalem persecute. It was clear an invisible hand was controlling everything by using them both to carry out God's will.

That God was controlling everything was something Paul knew very well. This was a doctrine he had, more than any other apostles, expounded and treasured dearly throughout his epistles. Had this not been the case, it would not have been easy for him to say "suffer me to speak" in spite of all the shouts and threats, and being chained.

Also observe the quiet courtesy, the calmness, the boldness and the clarity of his address. Such is a man who knows the God he serves—his God is the Lord Who controls everything.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 14
ACTS 21:27–40

THOUGHT

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. – 1 Peter 4:19

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 22***LESSON****What shall I do, Lord?****VERSE 10**

And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

Today's passage relates Paul's testimony to the angry mob of Jews in Jerusalem who were trying to beat him to death. Note how he presented his testimony. First, he built upon his identification with them by stressing their common Jewish heritage. Then he told them about how he was converted on his Christian-persecuting expedition to Damascus. Finally, he explained his subsequent calling of ministering to the Gentiles.

Paul's example reminds Christians afresh of the courage of Gospel convictions. It is evident from his testimony that Stephen's martyrdom had come to mean to him something quite different from what it did the day on which he gave approval to his death. Then, he felt hatred; now, he knew the love of Christ. Then, he despised Stephen; now, he rejoiced to witness for his Saviour.

Paul's conversion stands out as an impressive testimony to the truth of the Gospel. The Spirit of God saw it fit to include this testimony three times in Acts so that we can learn from it. Note how he spoke clearly of the Risen Christ, albeit in scriptural language, pointing his hearers to the Word of God, as opposed to his own experience. He also maintained a sense of awe for Christ, the intent of which is to humble the hearers.

If the Spirit chooses to work in the hearers, he or she would eventually be led to say: What shall I do, Lord?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 15
ACTS 22

THOUGHT

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. – Romans 12:1

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 23:1–22***LESSON****Be of good cheer****VERSE 11**

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

The Roman commander had no idea what Paul was charged with. So he called for the Jewish Sanhedrin to examine the Apostle and render some judgement on the matter. Paul was thus brought before this body that consisted of Sadducees and Pharisees. In his defence, he spoke of the risen Saviour. His message, however, divided the council. A great uproar ensued and things went out of control. But subsequently, he was pulled away to safety by the Romans and put into prison.

The Sadducees and Pharisees were bitterly opposed to one another. The Sadducees were liberals and did not believe in resurrection. The Pharisees were legalists, devoted to a scheme of salvation by works. Paul aimed straight for this fault line by declaring his doctrinal commitment to his hope in the resurrection of the dead. The heart of his message was really the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

What this ought to say to us today is that we, like Paul, should live as children of our risen Saviour. We ought to keep the focus of our testimony on the heart of the Gospel, which is the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, and confront the world with our Lord's claim whenever we can.

In letting the world choose the subjects upon which to debate and justify their rejection of Christ, we have too often given them the opportunity to set the agenda. Paul did otherwise. He did not let others take his eyes off the heart of the matter, which is the risen Christ.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 16
ACTS 23:1–22

THOUGHT

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. – John 16:33

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 23:23–35

LESSON

Trials and persecutions

VERSE 30

*And when it was told me
how that the Jews laid
wait for the man, I sent
straightway to thee, and
gave commandment to his
accusers also to say before
thee what they had against
him. Farewell.*

Claudius Lysias wrote a letter to the governor Felix, explaining the situation then with regard to Paul. Much of the letter was factual, and served as a good summary of the preceding passages. The main character in the passage was still Paul, who, though facing trials and persecutions, was enjoying the protection that clearly came from God, Who eventually brought him to Rome.

God has not used any other man in the history of the Church as mightily as He had used the Apostle Paul. That being the case, one would think that God would grant this man smooth sailing so that he could accomplish as much as possible. But that was far from the truth [2 Corinthians 11:23–28]. The Jewish leaders gave him 39 lashes five times, he was beaten with rods three times, stoned once, shipwrecked three times, and once spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. The list goes on.

Given that Paul himself was not spared, we should not be surprised when trials and persecutions come our way in our service for the Lord. The Bible often describes the Christian life as warfare, and warfare is hardly a promise of a smooth, easy existence.

So whenever you attempt to do anything to serve the Lord, be prepared for times when the enemy will oppose and attempt to hinder your service.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 17
ACTS 23:23–35

THOUGHT

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. – 2 Timothy 1:8

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 24***LESSON****A convenient season****VERSE 25**

*And as he reasoned of
righteousness, temperance,
and judgement to come,
Felix trembled, and
answered, Go thy way for
this time; when I have a
convenient season, I will
call for thee.*

Paul, during his trial before Felix, was accused of stirring up riots among the Jews. In giving his defence, Paul talked about the Way. Felix, seemingly interested to know more, adjourned the hearing and called for Paul days later for a personal hearing. Paul saw an opened door for the Gospel and went in with full force. His message, however, came a little too close for comfort. Felix, visibly disturbed, told him, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

Each of us needs to ponder Felix’s excuse: “When I have a convenient season.” Many things tend to crowd our daily schedules. We all know that we should make time for God but we are prone to say, “Not now, I have too many things to handle at this moment”, or “I’ll do that later, when I find the time.” Other common excuses could be “when the semester is over”, “when the kids get to school” or “when I’m older”. So life slips by and the things of God fade from view. And we miss our opportunity, just as Felix did.

This very day, God is giving you a great spiritual opportunity through the fact that you are reading and hearing His Word. It may be to trust in Christ for salvation, to deal with some sin in your life or even to talk to a lost person about the Saviour.

Do not be like Felix and miss your chance. Be like Paul and seize the day for God’s glory.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 18
ACTS 24

THOUGHT

For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. – 2 Corinthians 6:2

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 25:1–12***LESSON****On trial before Festus****VERSE 7**

*And when he was come,
the Jews which came down
from Jerusalem stood round
about, and laid many and
grievous complaints against
Paul, which they could not
prove.*

Acts 25:1–12 depicts a picture of three kinds of **A**men interacting with one another: a Gentile governor sitting in a courtroom listening to the unbelieving Jews making false charges against God’s faithful servant, Paul.

The Jews were trying to take advantage of the new governor. They wanted Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem. Obviously, their request was a sly political move to ambush Paul along the way. They fought viciously against the truth of God and His messenger because they feared losing their influence among the people.

Festus failed to deliver justice in his attempts to reach an unjust compromise. He knew the truth: Paul was not guilty. He should have acquitted him but he wanted to appease the angry Jews. He was anxious to secure the approval and friendship of the Jewish leaders. He lacked the courage to stand up for what he knew was right.

Paul’s response to the accusations paints a man filled with godly strength. He made it clear he would not refuse to die if he was truly guilty. But he refused to give in to false charges. He knew Festus lacked the courage to act justly. So he declared: “I appeal unto Caesar.” He knew the Lord was with him. God would overrule earthly events to protect His faithful servant. Consequently, the Apostle was moved to stand trial in Rome, which became a new harvest field where many Gentiles received the Gospel. Despite the uncertainty of his future, Paul’s sole purpose was to serve God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 19
ACTS 25:1–12

THOUGHT

God provides and points out His way.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 25:13–27***LESSON****The spiritually blind
governor****VERSE 19**

*But had certain questions
against him of their own
superstition, and of one
Jesus, which was dead,
whom Paul affirmed to be
alive.*

The new Roman governor, Festus, knew nothing about Jesus. Paul proclaimed the Gospel to him during the trial. Festus was in a position to respond to Christ but he remained spiritually blind. Listen to what he said: "... and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive" [v. 19b]. To Festus, the Gospel was incomprehensible. He didn't know how to give his verdict. He knew very well that Paul was no murderer or robber. But he preached Christ. To Festus, this was no crime either.

Festus represents all "broad-minded" people of the world. He himself did not believe in the resurrection of Christ but it was fine with him if someone else did. When a man of the world comes face to face with a true believer, he does not know what to say or do. The words of Festus rang true till this day: "Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord" [v. 26a]. Festus was a typical non-regenerated man with no spiritual understanding. This put him in a quandary about what to do with Paul's situation.

Festus did not care about the message that Paul was proclaiming. His focus was to send the "troublemaker" to Rome with a formal draft spelling out his charges. The Christian gospel was for someone else.

Similarly, many people today feel that faith in God through Jesus is for someone else, not for them. This is one of Satan's most powerful weapons: Christianity is not for me. Beware of it.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
JUDGES 20
ACTS 25:13-27

THOUGHT

Unbelief is a matter of choice. Unbelief means saying "no" to God in spite of the evidence.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 26***LESSON****Paul before Festus and Agrippa****VERSE 8**

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

The new Roman governor, Festus, did not know how to write a formal draft of the charges laid against Paul for the officials in Rome. So he enlisted the help of the Jewish king, Agrippa, who was familiar with Jewish laws and customs. The hearing was held in Caesarea. Paul, a prisoner with chains dangling from his gnarled hands, held the stage from the moment he spoke. It was as if Festus and Agrippa, not Paul, who were on trial.

What followed was the greatest defence of the Christian message. Paul retold the story of his conversion, from visions and revelations, to prophets and, finally, the resurrection. At this point, Festus thought he had heard enough. He interrupted Paul and shouted: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" [v. 24b].

Festus reacted the way all secular men would. It was too much for him to take. No sane man would speak like Paul. The Roman governor concluded that Paul, who was obviously well-educated, had simply gone nuts. For Festus, only two alternatives were possible. Unless he was ready to become a Christian, he must say that Paul was mad. If Paul was not mad, then it must be him. But it could not be him so it must be Paul.

Similarly, when faced with the greatest question of our life, that is, the one pertaining to our relationship with Christ, there are only two choices. We believe Him or reject Him. "Yes" or "No" means eternal life or eternal death.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

JUDGES 21
ACTS 26

THOUGHT

When witnessing to hardened hearts, we do not have to convince them; we just have to tell them the truth.

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 27***LESSON****Emerging triumphantly
from a shipwreck****VERSE 44**

*And the rest, some on
boards, and some on
broken pieces of the ship.
And so it came to pass,
that they escaped all safe
to land.*

This chapter records the dramatic scene of a shipwreck and a glorious picture of a believer's trust in God's promise. Paul's journey to Rome began when he and other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius. His journey to Rome was delayed by bad weather. His ship set sail into a raging storm and rough seas. Terrified by a storm that went on for days and caught in pitch darkness without food and sleep, the sailors and passengers fell into a hopeless depression. God spoke to Paul that all on board the ship would be saved and he believed Him. Paul stepped forth with commanding courage.

Paul's show of faith in the midst of the fierce storm gives courage to believers to sail through our sea of trials in life. We can always trust the promises of God. But to be saved, the crew and passengers (and believers) must obey God.

On the fourteenth day of the journey, the sailors plotted to escape when they thought the ship would crash onto rocks. The centurion Julius trusted Paul's proclamation. He cut the rope that held the lifeboat and it fell away. God kept His promise; everyone was saved.

God uses trials to make us turn to Him for salvation. Trials prove a person's faith in God. Trials make a believer stronger. The world needs to see God's presence and power. They know God is there when they witness how believers go through trials of shipwreck and emerge victoriously.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

**RUTH I
ACTS 27**

THOUGHT

If God sends you down a stony path, He will give you tough shoes.

BIBLE LESSON

Acts 28:1–15

LESSON

**God's protection through
yet another trial**

VERSE 15

And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

Paul was shipwrecked yet saved. He landed on Melita where he had to face the “barbarous islanders”; who actually showed kindness beyond expectations. While making a fire, a viper leapt out and bit him. But he was healed instantly.

Why did God allow the poisonous snake to attack Paul? Had he not suffered enough trials? He had just emerged from a terrifying storm. He was rushing about gathering wood in a torrential rain to start a fire. He had not even had a chance to sit down and get some warmth. The pain and suffering Paul had experienced in the past two weeks—the trials before Festus and Agrippa, the fierce storms and the poisonous snake-bite—would have crushed most people, but not Paul. Note his faithfulness. He did not moan or groan. Neither did he question why so many bad things were happening to him. Instead, he made use of every trial to witness for Christ.

Paul had his apprehensive moment, too. How much more suffering would he have to endure when he stood trial in Rome? Would the believers in Rome fear to be associated with him? While he was wondering, God sent welcoming parties of believers to escort him into the great city of Rome. He was encouraged again.

We often ask “Oh God, why me?” or “Why do I have to suffer so much pain or face so many trials?” Paul has shown us how he believed God’s promises and followed His instructions.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

RUTH 2
ACTS 28:1–15

THOUGHT

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, He it is that doth go with thee; He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. – Deuteronomy 31:6

BIBLE LESSON*Acts 28:16–31***LESSON****The Gospel reaches the
Gentiles****VERSE 28**

*Be it known therefore unto
you, that the salvation
of God is sent unto the
Gentiles, and that they will
hear it.*

The Book of Acts opens with Christ's Great Commission to His disciples to "spread the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria and "unto the uttermost part of the earth" [Acts 1:8]. By the end of the book, we see exactly how the Jews' rejection of the Gospel has resulted in it being taken to the Gentiles [v. 28].

The Jews' rejection of the Gospel in Rome was wilful and deliberate, as prophesised [Isaiah 6:9]. They heard and saw but refused to understand. "For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed" [v. 27a, Matthew 13:15a].

Paul had been serving Christ for over 30 years. Wherever he went, he tried to reach out to the Jews first. It is a glorious example of a man's love for his own people. Paul never gave up on the Jews no matter how badly they had treated him. It is also an example of a man's dedication to God, no matter how dire the circumstances were.

But the decision of God's chosen people was final. They wanted to have nothing to do with Paul and the Christ he preached. Now, at the end of his final missionary journey, Paul turned to the Gentiles. Here the Jews were forcefully brought face-to-face with the finality that "the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" [v. 28]. Do we not want to cherish this opportunity to receive the Gospel?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
RUTH 3-4
ACTS 28:16-31

THOUGHT

God is eager to welcome us and shower us with His blessings.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 1:1–16***LESSON****Unashamed of the Gospel****VERSE 16**

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is considered to be one of the most difficult portions of Scripture in the New Testament. But it contains some of the most important Christian doctrines in the entire Bible. As such, students of the Word have to approach this book with care and humility in order to appreciate the wonderful truths revealed by God.

Paul was commissioned as an apostle to the Gentiles [Romans 15:16]. Even though he was not the founding pastor of the Roman church and might not have met them personally, his heart burned with a great desire to be a blessing to them. His wish was to preach to them the glorious Gospel of Christ. He was not ashamed to acknowledge that he was their debtor and was thus bound to give them the truth.

The main reason for Paul's unflinching confession must certainly be the glorious Person of Christ. Christ was the most compelling reason for his untiring service. In fact, Paul was even willing to be a slave with no rights whatsoever for Christ, Who met him on the road to Damascus. He saw Christ as the Son of Man as well as the Son of God.

What is your view of Christ? Have you been touched with the power of His undying love for you through the Gospel? Should not your heart melt before Him in humility and contrition when you remember that He actually came and bore your sins on the cross? Repent, and embrace Him as your Saviour.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL I
ROMANS 1:1–16

PRAYER

O Lord, let me know the power of the cross of Christ so that I may not be ashamed to preach it.

BIBLE LESSON

Romans 1:17–32

LESSON

**God's righteousness and
the world's wickedness**

VERSE 21

*Because that, when they
knew God, they glorified
him not as God, neither
were thankful; but became
vain in their imaginations,
and their foolish heart was
darkened.*

The revelation of God in creation is an act of His grace and mercy. Without His light, we will still be groping in the dark, never knowing who the rightful Owner of all nature is. God deserves our thanksgiving and worship. The psalmist David acknowledges the hand of God in His works with exaltation: "I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well" [Psalm 139:14].

Unfortunately, man in their pride and ignorance refuse to bow before the God of heaven. In their foolishness, they worship instead the creatures more than the Creator. In spite of the clear display of His creative workmanship in everything, it pays obeisance to the works of their own hands.

As a result of their rebellion and obstinacy, God gave them up to their own devices. This judicial act of God exposed them to all kinds of gross acts and depravity. He no longer restrained them in their wickedness but allowed them to act out their sinful tendencies. They broke forth into various unnatural forms of wickedness, so much so that they were regarded no better than beasts.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God! Do not turn His kindness and mercy into anger and judgement by indulging in more sin. Flee from your dangerous position and hide yourself in the love of His Son Jesus Christ.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 2
ROMANS 1:17-32

PRAYER

O Lord, let Thine revelation show me the beauty and majesty of Thine Person so that I may render Thee true worship.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 2:1–16***LESSON****Dealing with men justly
and fairly****VERSE 11***For there is no respect of
persons with God.*

While the heathens in the world were boldly and unashamedly manifesting their wretched condition, the religious people around them were no better. Before God, they were equally guilty even though they observed all the religious ceremonies. This is true of the Jews, who approached God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him. While they pointed their accusing fingers at the wicked deeds of the pagans, their acts were condemned by the all-seeing God.

For example, King David was quick to react with indignation against injustice and had readily condemned the supposed act mentioned by the prophet Nathan [2 Samuel 12:1–6]. Men are judgemental when they see the offences committed by others, even when they themselves are secretly practising them. It is this attitude of hypocrisy that God condemns. None can escape His judgement, no matter how well the wrong is camouflaged. God will bring those who are guilty before Him and sentence will be meted out without favouritism.

The Jews thought themselves favoured by God because they were the descendants of Abraham. But in actuality they would be put to more severe trials. This is because of the privileges and blessings that they had enjoyed in time past. It is obvious that they had spurned and frustrated the rich goodness and long suffering of God with their sinful behaviour.

Remember that the Lord desires truth and sincerity in our worship and service. We may try to deceive others and ourselves but we can never hide from God.

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
1 SAMUEL 3
ROMANS 2:1–16**

PRAYER

Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable before Thee.

BIBLE LESSON

Romans 2:17–29

LESSON

**Honouring God through
holy living**

VERSE 24

*For the name of God is
blasphemed among the
Gentiles through you, as it
is written.*

The Jews could make their boast that they were children of Abraham and were favoured with the oracles of God. But these privileges did not give them the right to judge censoriously and run down others who were different from them. This critical mentality that they had adopted led them further into self-righteousness and self-deception. They were unaware of their own condemnation.

The Jewish nation had been given a special task to be witnesses to the goodness of God. They had the responsibility to be a source of blessing to people around them. They had been given the laws of God so that they might teach others not to be ignorant of the demands of God. They were to be guides to those blinded by sin, so that they might be led to the light and not stumble.

However, the Jews failed to fulfil their duties in that they did not practise what they preached. Our Lord condemned the Pharisees: “All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” [Matthew 23:3–4].

Let us remind ourselves not to put a stumbling block before the unbelieving world as they watch our every step. Let us walk the talk so that God’s holy Name will not be spoken of poorly but be glorified.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 4
ROMANS 2:17–29

PRAYER

O Lord, grant that I may know the preciousness of Thy holy Name so that I may do nothing to dishonour it but everything to glorify it.

BIBLE LESSON

Romans 3

LESSON

**Saved through faith, not
by works**

VERSE 28

*Therefore we conclude that
a man is justified by faith
without the deeds of the
law.*

The Jews were unhappy that they were on the same level as the Gentiles in the eyes of God despite having observed the Law, being circumcised and being children of Abraham. What advantage then was there in being a Jew?

Paul pointed out that the Jews were entrusted with the Old Testament, a privilege not given to any nation. The enjoyment of God's Word is the chief happiness of man. For those who have the Law but do not obey it, God is faithful to His word and He will judge them. You have the Bible. Do you read, believe and obey the Word?

Before God, we are all sinners. There is none righteous [v. 10]. Whatever you do, you can never deliver yourself from condemnation. Justification by work does not save you. However, there is hope, given freely to you through the redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus paid the price by dying on the Cross, shedding His blood as an atonement for your sin. In this way, your sin is pardoned and the punishment that you deserve is averted. Salvation comes to you through faith in Jesus Christ alone and not from works of the Law.

The Law proves everybody guilty and condemns them. The Gospel reveals how such guilty and condemned sinners may be put right with God. It is because the Law exists and is binding that the Gospel is necessary. If nobody is condemned, nobody needs to be saved.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 5-6
ROMANS 3

THOUGHT

**In God's eyes you are no longer a Jew or a Gentile.
You are either a saved sinner or a lost one.**

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 4***LESSON****Justification by faith****VERSE 16**

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Paul taught that there was no salvation through the Law, circumcision could not save the soul and salvation was by faith alone. These doctrines of grace did not go well with the Jews. In this chapter Paul went further to show that he was not preaching a new doctrine that voided the Law. He used Abraham and King David, whom the Jews revered as examples.

God gave Abraham a promise that he would be a father of many nations. Humanly speaking, this is impossible, as Abraham was beyond the age to father any children and Sarah was barren. Despite this, Abraham believed God and the Lord counted, credited and attributed it to him for righteousness [v. 3]. At this time, Abraham was 85 years old, and uncircumcised. His circumcision took place at the age of 99 [Genesis 17:24]. His acceptance by God was not by works but by faith.

Similarly, in Psalms 32 and 51, David penned his misery and confession of sin. By all rights, David should have been stoned for his sin of adultery and murder. But God attributed righteousness to David as he confessed his guilt to God and by faith cast himself upon the grace of God for pardon.

The promise of justification holds for all who believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised again for our justification. It has never been dependent on any form of works, rites or law-keeping. Faith alone is the way to God. Do you have that saving faith?

**TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 7-8
ROMANS 4**

THOUGHT

Only believe, only believe; all things are possible, only believe.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 5***LESSON****The blessings of justification****VERSE 8**

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Justification is God's free gift to every believer at the time of salvation [v. 8]. Being justified, we receive the blessings of peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. God's wrath and judgement on us is removed and our relationship with God is restored. We have access and a standing in grace before God. Believers can now approach God directly, walk with Him and enjoy Him. We can also rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only will we enjoy God in this present life, He will also receive us into His glorious dwelling place. How happy we ought to be of God's rich blessings that belong to us by His grace.

We are encouraged to rejoice in tribulations, knowing that it produces patience, experience and hope. Read James 1:2–4. The development of a proven character comes not so much from Bible study but from enduring through the suffering associated with applying the Bible to your life. It is inevitable that perseverance is one of the key factors in living a victorious Christian life.

All these blessings are made possible for us because of the love of Christ. The proof and measure of God's love is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. It is the shedding of Christ's blood that has secured our justification.

If He did such good to us while we were sinners, it is certain that He will do even more good for us now that we are His friends.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 9
ROMANS 5

THOUGHT

May our hearts burst with joy, gratitude, appreciation and worship for Jesus.

BIBLE LESSON

Romans 6

LESSON

**The sanctification of
saints**

VERSE 6

*Knowing this, that our
old man is crucified with
him, that the body of sin
might be destroyed, that
henceforth we should not
serve sin.*

Paul spoke of justification as being the act that removed the guilt and penalty of sin and declared you righteous at the point of salvation. Having been made righteous, you should henceforth reckon that you are dead to sin and freed from sin. You should yield yourself to your new master, who is God Himself, and do everything to the glory of God [1 Corinthians 10:31]. This is called sanctification.

The old master has no hold over you anymore. Refusing to serve the old master, however, is not enough. You should be busy serving your new master and walking in newness of life. You ought to see every day and hour as an opportunity to serve Him. May your daily prayer be, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

If no one is saved by keeping the Law, then what place does the Law have in a Christian’s life? You are free from the Law in the sense that you do not need to keep it to be saved. Yet you are not free from the Law because obedience to the Law is the mark of true salvation. The proof that you are a true believer does not lie in your words but in the life that you live.

Our Lord has declared, “Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven” [Matthew 7:21].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 10
ROMANS 6

THOUGHT

The power of the cross of Christ not only freed us from sin’s condemnation but also broke sin’s power over us.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 7***LESSON****War between law and
grace****VERSE 25**

*I thank God through Jesus
Christ our Lord. So then
with the mind I myself serve
the law of God; but with the
flesh the law of sin.*

Paul explained a little more about the Christian's relationship to the Law. He used a marriage relationship to show that, by law, a man and wife were bound to one another as long as they were alive. However, the marriage ended when a spouse died. Death breaks the marriage bond and the relationship to the Law.

As a believer, you died when Christ died. So your legal obligation to God's Law is ended. But the moment you died, you entered into another marriage with the risen One, the One Who gave the Law and perfectly fulfilled its demands. We must henceforth serve the Law in the newness of spirit, with glad obedience of love to God rather than as a legal code of conduct.

The Law reveals sin [v. 7] and arouses sin [v. 8–9]. The Law kills [v. 10–11] and shows the sinfulness of sin [v. 12–13]. The believer's will, mind and body are either controlled by the old nature (the flesh) or by Christ (the Spirit). One constantly faces the dilemma of not being able to do the good that one wants to do; and doing the evil that one does not want to do.

The Law cannot change you [v. 14]. The inward man may delight in the Law of the Lord [Psalm 119:35] but our old nature has trouble responding to the spiritual side of the Law. We need Christ to bridge the gap for us. Only He can change us, not the Law.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

**I SAMUEL 11
ROMANS 7**

THOUGHT

Are you guilty of calling your sins “weaknesses” and “mistakes”? Until we realise how wicked sin is, we can never oppose it strongly enough.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 8***LESSON****God sending His own Son****VERSE 3**

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.

This admirable chapter begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation. Almost every verse sparkles with great divine truth. It dazzles with beauty from the beginning to end. It furnishes us with unspeakable privileges of true believers—the freedom from condemnation, their hopeful prospects under tribulations, their assistance from the Spirit in prayer, their interest in the love of God, and their final triumph through Christ.

We are content to meditate upon this grandest truth of “God sending His own Son”, which even angels desire to look into. The method of the Law has failed as a justifying and sanctifying force. It failed because it was weak through the flesh. The Law could not overcome the obstructive forces of the depraved human nature.

So the method of love was set in motion through God sending His own Son, Who was made flesh and dwell among us. He kept the Law perfectly and, by His sinless perfection, condemned sin in the flesh. By His perfect obedience, He was able to offer Himself as a perfect sacrifice to satisfy divine justice. He was raised again for our justification.

Jesus is sin’s destroyer. He has opened up a way for justification and sanctification for those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. We mourn that our sins had resulted in the crucifixion of the Lord of light and glory. Let us show our true gratitude by not crucifying the Son of God afresh, by triumphing over sin and by walking after the Spirit of light and purity.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

**I SAMUEL 12
ROMANS 8**

THOUGHT

The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men can become the sons of God. – John Calvin

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 9***LESSON****God loves, God hates****VERSE 13**

As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

In this chapter, the Apostle Paul declared strongly his love for his countrymen and was deeply grieved that they were strangers to the Gospel. He showed them that God's promises were made good to the spiritual seed of Abraham. He answered their objections against God's sovereign conduct, in exercising mercy and justice. This sovereignty is in God's dealing both with the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews fell short because they sought justification not by faith but by the works of the Law.

Paul quoted from Malachi of God's election of Israel and the rejection of Esau as the reason for their preservation and existence. The Israelites were taken into the covenant of peculiarity, had the land of Canaan given them and were blessed with the more signal appearances of God for them in special protection, supplies and deliverance, while the Edomites were rejected and had no temple, altar, priests or prophets. In short, no kindness was shown to them.

God loves a person and therefore elects him purely out of His sovereign grace. There is nothing in him whatsoever to merit His favour. God hates a person because he voluntarily sins against God and rejected God out of his own freewill [Psalm 5:5b]. Justice is that which condemns a man. It is mercy and free grace that saves.

If we perish, on our own head must be our doom. If we are saved, it must be by God's free and sovereign grace. May God prove this doctrine to be true in our own experience.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 13
ROMANS 9

THOUGHT

Damnation is all of man, from top to bottom, and salvation is all of grace, from first to last. – CH Spurgeon

BIBLE LESSON

Romans 10

LESSON

God's Word is near

VERSE 8

But what saith it? The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;

In this chapter, Paul expressed his earnest desire for the salvation of the Jews. He explained the difference between the righteousness of the Law and the righteousness of faith. The Gentiles stood on the same level with the Jews in justification and salvation. The Jews might know this from Old Testament prophecies.

The way of justification and salvation has in it no such depths or knots as may discourage us, no insuperable difficulties attending it. It is not at all difficult. We need not perplex and puzzle ourselves with fancied difficulties nor must we create to ourselves such gross and carnal ideas of these things as if the method of salvation were impracticable. Salvation is not put at so vast a distance from us (Matthew Henry).

The word of faith is nigh through the mouth of God-sent messengers but also through the ears of the hearers, by a hearty and sincere confession. It is nigh "in their hearts," being attended with the power of God, received in the love of it, truly believed in, and cordially embraced. This is the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ received by faith because it proposes Christ as the object of faith, and encourages souls to believe in Him for life and salvation.

God's words are near. Day unto day, divine speech is uttered. But God's words are carried by a still small voice. Let us find time to be still. Open the written Word and we shall hear the word of God.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 14
ROMANS 10

HYMN

... and Thy Word our dearest treasure, shedding light upon our way.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 11:1–12***LESSON****Human works, divine
grace****VERSE 6**

*And if by grace, then is it
no more of works: otherwise
grace is no more grace. But
if it be of works, then is it
no more grace: otherwise
work is no more work.*

Having spoken of the calling of the Gentiles, and given a hint of the perverseness of the Jews in the slighting of the Gospel, Paul proceeded in this chapter to address the future of Israel. He had shown that the response of God's people was predicted in the Old Testament, before pointing out that it was the design of God to cast them off, as well as restore them eventually.

Paul's heart was so full of the freeness of God's grace that in the midst of his discourse he turns aside, as it were, to make this remark, "If of grace, then not of works". Grace and works cannot go hand in hand when it comes to human salvation. If salvation is a free gift, it cannot be earned. Grace is no more grace if it is of works. They are contrary to one another, and so unalienable and unalterable in their natures.

Salvation is so precious that it is above human price. Human efforts cannot reach divine heights. Human moralities have no redeeming force. The grace of God that brings salvation has done an effective work, a work wholly divine.

Grace is the pleasure of God to magnify the worth of God by giving sinners the right and power to delight in God without obscuring the glory of God (John Piper). Salvation is by grace alone but sanctification is by works. Let us, therefore, work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 15
ROMANS 11:1-12

THOUGHT

Faith justifies the person, and works justify his faith.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 11:13–36***LESSON****The manifestation of
divine glory****VERSE 36***For of him, and through
him, and to him, are all
things: to whom be glory for
ever. Amen.*

Paul continued to explain how God had overruled Israel's unbelief of making the Gentiles partakers of Gospel privileges. He cautioned the Gentiles against pride and unbelief, and foretold the conversion of the Jews in the future—that their rejection by God was not final. They would be brought into God's visible covenant again. He inferred and concluded thence, with the adoration of the infinite wisdom and sovereignty of God.

Let the adoring song arise. Of Him is the source; through Him as the channel; to Him as the great blissful centre of the whole system of things. Not only all things in nature and providence to whose glory they are all designed and directed, but all things in grace owe their origins to Him, as their first cause. They are produced by Him and created for His glory. They all spring from His sovereign will, are brought about by His almighty power and tend to the glory of His grace. So does everything in election, redemption and regeneration; to whom be glory forever.

Glory is the beauty of God unveiled. It refers to the visible splendour or moral beauty of God's manifold perfections. The glory of God is the exhibition of His inherent excellence; it is the external manifestation of His internal majesty. To glorify God is to declare, draw attention to and publicly proclaim His glory.

Let us show forth His glory with our lives as well as our lips. "Thanks-living" is the true thanks-giving.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 16
ROMANS 11:13–36

THOUGHT

For it appears, that all that is ever spoken of in the Scriptures as the ultimate end of God's works, is included in that one phrase, the glory of God. – Jonathan Edwards

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 12***LESSON****Be a living sacrifice****VERSE 1**

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Paul exhorts Christians to present themselves as living sacrifices for the service of God in total consecration. This is the only reasonable response: to devote ourselves to live for Him and please Him. Instead of bringing a sacrifice, as in Old Testament times, let us offer ourselves as living sacrifices for God's use.

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” [v. 2a]. Let this be the fixed principle in your mind—a call to consecration and separation. There are two aspects to this new life in Christ, one negative and the other positive. We are not to pattern ourselves to the lifestyle of the world. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” [1 John 2:15a]. Positively, transformation must take place from within our renewed mind as a new person in Christ. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” [2 Corinthians 5:17].

The ultimate supreme act of spiritual worship is to offer oneself as a living sacrifice in total commitment to the service of God. This is only reasonable, as we are His redeemed children and because of His love and act of mercy on the Cross. Jesus is our new Master and we must do His bidding.

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?

Your heart does the Spirit control?

You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest

As you yield Him your body and soul.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 17

ROMANS 12

THOUGHT

Be transformed, not conformed!

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 13***LESSON****Submitting to authority****VERSE 1**

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Paul emphasised the duties and obligations of a citizen towards the government and those in authority. Our allegiance to God includes secular responsibility, respect and obedience for the law of the land. The role of government is divinely sanctioned; the authority of God is delegated to those in positions of authority and power. “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” [v. 1].

God is the source of all authority, and He has appointed human governments for the welfare of man. The existing government over us is to be regarded as a divine appointment. Therefore, to resist civil authority is to resist God, incurring His displeasure. However, if the law of the land contradicts the law of God, then Christians “ought to obey God rather than men” [Acts 5:29].

Two great examples are Joseph and Daniel. They were useful to God in their roles in the civil service but they did not disobey the law of God. Christians ought to be model law-abiding citizens, doing good and living peaceably, manifesting our transformed lives to reflect the saving power of God. Paul gave the same advice in 1 Timothy 2:1–2 and Titus 3:1–2.

Remember the words of our Lord Jesus: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” [Mark 12:17].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 18
ROMANS 13

REMINDER

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. – 1 Timothy 2:1–2

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 14***LESSON****Loving one another****VERSE 19**

*Let us therefore follow
after the things which
make for peace, and things
wherewith one may edify
another.*

This chapter is yet another good exhortation on charity. Paul wrote this chapter because there were apparent disputes between certain people who insisted on eating herbs [i.e. vegetarians] and observing special appointed days, and there are others who ate all things and esteemed every day alike [v. 1–5]. This was a conflict between weak and strong Christians [1 Corinthians 8].

Paul makes his stand clear. In things that are non-essential, where the Bible is silent, he allowed liberty. This is specifically spelt out in verse 6. Both who regard and regard not the day, regard it to the Lord; and both who eat and eat not, give thanks to Him. In everything we do, from living to dying, we do it unto the Lord [v. 7–8]. Both are His children and both will eventually receive glorification [v. 9].

This chapter is definitely written for the prayerful consideration of the strong Christians. In it, Paul appeals to the strong Christians not to judge the weaker ones, and lay a stumbling block in their way [v. 13]. If a fellow Christian deems a certain act undesirable, then let him be [v. 14–15]. The issue is not one that should be escalated into serious contentions. In addition, they should not do the very act that he deems inappropriate lest by doing so, they stumble him in his faith.

Paul channels the attention of the strong Christian to the bigger picture. In doing everything, one should always consider the peace of the church and the souls of fellow believers [v. 19].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 19
ROMANS 14

THOUGHT

**Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other
better than themselves. – Philippians 2:3**

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 15***LESSON****Patience and peace****VERSE 4**

*For whatsoever things
were written aforetime
were written for our
learning, that we through
patience and comfort of the
scriptures might have hope.*

Every church has strengths and weaknesses. The church in Rome, like that in Corinth, is a gifted church strong in knowledge. The members there were “full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” [v. 14b].

The strength of a church can also be her very weakness. Knowledge puffs one up [1 Corinthians 8:1]. When one is strong in knowledge, one tends to belittle a weaker brother. This is why Paul stresses a lot on patience [v. 4–5] and peace [v. 13, 33] in this chapter.

He reminds strong Christians to “bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves” [v. 1]. He has envisioned that as the Gospel extends to the Gentiles, cultural differences will cause doubts and disputes, leading to disruption of harmony. So he quotes extensively from the Law [v. 10], the Psalms [v. 9, 11] and the Prophets [v. 12] to show that having the Jews and Gentiles as one body in Christ has always been God’s plan.

In this light, Paul finally shares his aspiration to preach the Gospel to new lands, not building upon another man’s foundation [v. 20]. He echoed the call of Isaiah, speaking to those who are not spoken of and have not heard, so that they can see and understand [v. 21], bringing us back to the central theme of the whole book of Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” [Romans 1:16].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 20
ROMANS 15

THOUGHT

Let us, through the study of the Word, be attuned to His will for us to be like-minded one towards another.

BIBLE LESSON*Romans 16***LESSON****Greetings and salutations****VERSE 19**

*For your obedience is come
abroad unto all men. I
am glad therefore on your
behalf: but yet I would
have you wise unto that
which is good, and simple
concerning evil.*

The formal part of Paul's letter ends with the "Amen" in Chapter 15. What follows are Paul's greetings and salutations to like-minded co-labourers in Christ. The list of people who have contributed to the cause of Christ came to Paul's mind.

Yet amidst these happy recollections, he still worried for the church. His main concern was still the unity and harmony of the Church. He beseeched the church leaders to "mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned"; and advised the leaders to "avoid them" [v. 17] instead of confronting them.

Facing people who "serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" [v. 18], Paul does not advocate an active engagement which may lead to further conflicts. He is convinced that "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" [v. 20a].

Instead, he placed his focus on those who served Christ with simplicity and humility, and was pleased with their obedience [v. 19]. They had set good examples as servants of Christ and he urged them to persevere in their work, to be "wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil". By obedience in faith according to the commandment of God and Scriptures of the prophets, they have stayed faithful in their preaching of Christ and the Gospel, and will thus receive confirmation from God [v. 25–26].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 21–22
ROMANS 16

THOUGHT

Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. – 1 Corinthians 14:20

BIBLE LESSON

1 Corinthians 1

LESSON

In Christ

VERSE 4

I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

Corinth was a large city—the capital of Achaia, Greece. Its inhabitants were well-known for their skills in the arts but their morals were corrupted. Christianity was first preached at Corinth by Paul, who remained there for one-and-a-half years.

This epistle was written to rebuke disorderly conduct within the church, which had been made known to the apostle, and to address some queries raised to Paul in a letter from the Corinthians themselves. Thus, the scope of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians was two-fold: to recommend suitable remedies to the disorders and abuses prevailing in the church in Corinth then, and to give satisfactory answers to all the points upon which his advice had been sought.

All Christians are dedicated and devoted to Christ; they are called to be holy. The true church of God comprises all who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, who are called to be saints, and who call upon Jesus as God for all blessings of salvation. They acknowledge and obey Him as their Lord, and as Lord of all. Salvation is through Him and Him alone.

Paul gave thanks for their conversion to the faith of Christ, that grace was given to them by Jesus Christ. They were united to Him by faith and, being partaker of His merits and Spirit, were the objects of divine favour. God loves them, and bestows on them grace and knowledge. The same applies to us. Are you a good steward of God's gifts?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 23
I CORINTHIANS I

THOUGHT

God, Who has brought us into a near and dear relation to Christ, into sweet and intimate communion with Him, is faithful. He can be trusted with our dearest concerns.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 2***LESSON****The power of the Gospel****VERSE 4**

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Paul had made up his mind to drop all oratorical adornments and preach nothing to the Corinthians but the simple message of Jesus Christ on the Cross. At the beginning, he was without strength, in fear and in doubt. It was at times like these, and in view of these circumstances, that the Lord spoke to him by night in a vision, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" [Acts 18:9–10].

True enough, there were no words of worldly wisdom in Paul's preaching. The apostle was depending on the power of the Spirit to make it clear to the Corinthians so that their faith might be based not on man's wisdom but on the power of God.

Even those who were spiritually mature received wisdom from the Gospel—wisdom not of this age, nor of the rulers of this world, which would come to nothing. Rather, Paul was faithful in preaching the revealed wisdom of God, which He had kept in store before the world came into existence, revealed for His glory, the knowledge of which not one ruler of this world possessed. If they had, they would not have put the Lord of glory on the cross.

The faith that is the effect of the inward and powerful teaching and demonstration of the Spirit rests upon, and is supported by, the power of God. It is certainly saving and will endure through all trials, even to the end.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 24
I CORINTHIANS 2

THOUGHT

Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 3***LESSON****You are God's planting****VERSE 10**

According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

When one claimed that he was of Paul and another declared that he was of Apollos, were they not talking like natural men? Who then was Apollos? Who was Paul? They were nobody [v. 7] but servants of God through which the Gospel was given. Paul planted and Apollos watered but it was God Who gave the increase. The glory of the fruit belonged to God, not the other two. Likewise, the responsibility of the fruit-bearing is God's. This is a great relief in the Gospel ministry. All that is required of Christians is diligence and faith in our planting and watering. The growing is God's responsibility.

Using a second metaphor, Paul called himself a wise (skilful) master-builder. In building the right foundation, Paul employed his skills and diligence. He took care *how* he built [v. 10]. The outcome of what he built was God's responsibility. Paul planted many churches and helped bring many souls into God's Kingdom. Some may say that Paul had done great things for God. But it was God Who did great things through Paul.

This was evident in Paul's life. By the grace of God, he became a wise master-builder. Spiritual pride is abominable. It is using the greatest favours of God to feed our own vanity, making idols of ourselves.

We should not be proud of our gifts and graces. Instead, the better qualified we are for the work and the more successful we are, the more thankful we should be to God for His goodness and mercy.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 25
I CORINTHIANS 3

THOUGHT

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 4***LESSON****Following the footsteps of
a mature Christian****VERSE 17**

*For this cause have I sent
unto you Timotheus,
who is my beloved son,
and faithful in the Lord,
who shall bring you into
remembrance of my ways
which be in Christ, as I
teach every where in every
church.*

Paul told the Corinthians what he wrote was not for their reproach but for admonition [v. 14]. Indeed, reproof that is harsh usually causes anger and is not constructive. However, when made kindly and affectionately, reminders and warnings for the good of a person are likely to change him.

The apostle urged the Corinthians to follow him even as he followed Christ [1 Corinthians 11:1]. Though Paul spoke with authority as an apostle, he would rather beseech them in love, like a parent. They were to be his disciples as far as he showed himself a faithful minister and disciple of Christ, but no further.

Ministers should set an example by the way they live so that their flock may pattern after them. They should guide them by their lives as well as by their lips, going before the congregation as if on the way to Heaven, instead of only pointing the way. Paul taught the same things in every church and lived after the same manner in all times and places.

The truth of Christ is unchanging. Individual styles notwithstanding, what one true minister of Christ teaches, every other faithful teacher would teach, at all times and in all places. It is in this light that Paul planned to send to the Corinthians his spiritual son, Timothy, as an example of a godly person. Timothy was faithful in the Lord and would bring to them into remembrance of “his ways which be in Christ”, as he had taught everywhere in every church.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 26
I CORINTHIANS 4

THOUGHT

Christians may mistake and differ in their apprehensions but the truth of Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 5***LESSON****Purging sins****VERSE 6**

*Your glorying is not good.
Know ye not that a little
leaven leaveneth the whole
lump?*

A terrible event had taken place at the church in Corinth: a man in the congregation was sleeping with his stepmother. This act of gross indecency was made known to them, but they did nothing, except perhaps enjoyed some gossip about it. Instead of feeling sorrowful over this heinous sin, the Corinthian church was puffed up with the gifts, learning and eloquence of its preachers, particularly of this man, who was thought by some to be one of their teachers. Though he was guilty of a crime so foul, the congregation adored him.

Indeed, a party spirit and a false sense of Christian liberty seemed to have secured the sinner from censure. Had the congregation been godly, they would have mourned over this and would have separated this man from the congregation.

A little leaven quickly spreads fermentation through the great lump. The bad example of one of influence is potentially deadly; it spreads far and wide like a virus. Such corrupting practices and examples, if overlooked and ignored, will soon cause the downfall of a church. Therefore, it is only right that the corrupting influence be stopped and immediately purged.

That which applies to the church must be applied to ourselves. We should stay clear from all impure and corrupt practices that are prevalent in our post-modern world, such as gambling, immodest dressing, pornography, exploitation and taking advantage of the poor and lowly-educated. We should strive to be holy, even as God is holy.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 27
I CORINTHIANS 5

THOUGHT

The life of a Christian must be a feast of unleavened bread. The old leaven needs to be purged and keep the feast with the unleavened of sincerity and truth.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 6

LESSON
Not your own

VERSE 19

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

The Holy Spirit is the third Person in our One Triune God. Also called the Comforter [John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7], the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement [John 16:7–11]. He illumines the minds of believers to the truth of the Scriptures. He also works to promote unity and peace in the church by providing various gifts to its members and enabling it to function properly [1 Corinthians 12:7–11].

Today, the Holy Spirit dwells in believers individually [v. 19] and in the Church collectively [Ephesians 2:20–22]. The indwelling presence of the Spirit is one of the proofs of salvation [Romans 8:9]. Paul tells us that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Temple of God in the Old Testament was a place wholly dedicated to God and His glory; nothing that has been defiled was allowed to enter within. Similarly, we should guard our body and keep it holy, not allowing any impurity and sin to enter.

Paul reminds us that we have been redeemed, and are thus not our own. Jesus Christ has shed His blood for our redemption. In verses 13–18, Paul exhorts us to refrain from sexual immorality. God has created our bodies to worship, praise and serve Him.

May God forgive us of our sins, cleanse us and help us to cast out everything that defiles the temple in which He alone has the right to dwell.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 28
I CORINTHIANS 6

THOUGHT

Lord, the knowledge of Your Holy Spirit living in my heart gives me comfort and strength.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 7***LESSON****The time is short****VERSE 20**

Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

Paul was answering a question that had been addressed to him by the church in Corinth: whether marriage or celibacy was the better way of life. Some believers insisted that everyone should marry and that celibacy was a sin, while others insisted that marriage was unspiritual and carnal.

Both marriage and singlehood have its advantages and disadvantages. Paul defends celibacy for some and marriage for others. He says it is “good” and even “better” not to marry. Singles should remain single so that they can dedicate themselves fully to God. Part of the reason he encourages marriage is the shortness of time [v. 29]. “The time is short” is a reference to both the brevity of life and the second coming of our Lord. If singles cannot control their sexual desires, then they should marry.

The Old Testament presents marriage as a divine institution ordained by God. In Ephesians 5:22–33, Paul pens one of the most beautiful descriptions of marriage ever written. To the Corinthian married couple, Paul laid down clear directives [v. 10–11]. Though Paul saw marriage as a possible hindrance to the Lord’s service, he did not condemn it. Paul taught that those who marry would face trouble in the flesh [v. 28, 33].

Whether we are single or married, our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our time is short but eternity is long. So let us lay up our treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust can corrupt [Matthew 6:20].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

I SAMUEL 29–30

I CORINTHIANS 7

PRAYER

Almighty God, help me to glorify You, whether I am single or married.

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 8***LESSON****Judge by love, not by
knowledge****VERSE 1***Now as touching things
offered unto idols, we know
that we all have knowledge.
Knowledge puffeth up, but
charity edifieth.*

Paul gave this instruction to the Corinthian Christians on food offered to idols: “We know that we all have knowledge” [v. 1a]. Unfortunately, this knowledge boasted by the mature Christians had puffed up their minds with vain conceit, making them bold and rash, and rendering them careless of the conscience of others.

Paul continued, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” [v. 1b]. Love, not knowledge, must form the foundation of Christian behaviour. Paul says that our knowledge is limited and the purpose of knowledge is not to boast how much we know but to love God more perfectly. True knowledge involves loving God and loving man. Idols are but lifeless and powerless inanimate objects of human artifice. Paul reminded the Corinthians that there is only one true and living God.

Paul then asserted to the Christians in Corinth that food is immaterial to God. It does not make one spiritual; only love does. He urged mature Christians not to demand their rights in ways that may cause a younger Christian to stumble [v. 9]. Paul modelled this principle by his own example. If any food caused his brother to stumble, he would not eat it. He was willing to forego pleasures in his life to build up the body of Christ.

Paul’s message for the Church today is this: One may have freedom in Christ but it must be used with discretion. Believers should not become stumbling blocks to the weak.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
I SAMUEL 31
I CORINTHIANS 8

THOUGHT

It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. – Romans 14:21

BIBLE LESSON*1 Corinthians 9***LESSON****Preaching the Gospel****VERSE 19**

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

The call to preach the Gospel is an awesome responsibility. Paul, after his startling conversion, “straightway preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” [Acts 9:20], “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him” [Acts 28:31].

Paul said he was free from all men, and that he was not obligated to any man’s ideas or opinions. He surrendered himself as a servant to all men in order to win more souls for Christ. He declared: “I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some” [v. 22b].

Paul gave the example of a runner in a race who competed for a prize [v. 24]. A runner must train diligently, have a proper diet and carry out strict training every day. He must also guard against possible distractions. In a race with many participants, only one person wins the wreath, which soon wilts. Paul had run with purpose and discipline to win an eternal crown and he encouraged others to do the same. A Christian should do all he can to bring lost souls to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

How can we put this into practice at home or at work? We should pray for unbelievers, preach Christ to them using our personal experience, give testimonies of God at work in our lives and share with them the love, joy and peace that our Lord has given us.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 1
1 CORINTHIANS 9

THOUGHT

Jesus loves all people. Let us love the lost and lead them to Christ.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 10

LESSON
Temptation

VERSE 13

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

The history of Israel has shown us that people who enjoy God's greatest privileges are far from being safe from temptation. Paul, using the nation of Israel as an illustration, warned the Christians in Corinth not to repeat the same errors.

Paul singled out lessons to be learnt and acted upon [v. 6–11]. In our daily walk with Christ, there are temptations of grumbling, idolatry, fornication, murmuring and even that of tempting Christ. Paul emphasises the importance of vigilance: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" [v. 12]. He reminded the Corinthians that temptation was common to all men. However, God is faithful and He will not let them be tempted beyond their endurance. With every temptation that He allows, He will also provide a way out.

Indeed, every one of us faces temptation of some kind. It is not a sin to be tempted. We should always pray for God's help in our fight against evil, and thank Him for sustaining us in the midst of temptations [Hebrews 2:18; 4:15–16]. When tempted, Joseph fled from Potiphar's wife [Genesis 39:7–12]. Daniel and his companions were tempted to forsake their godly heritage but they stood firm. Our Lord Jesus overcame His tempter by using Scripture [Matthew 4:1–11].

Therefore, seeing that we are compassed with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us face every trial and temptation with confidence and strength. God, Who is omnipotent and faithful to His promise, will surely deliver us.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 2
1 CORINTHIANS 10

THOUGHT

To resist temptation, we must live in close fellowship with Christ.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 11

LESSON
A time to remember

VERSE 26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

In this chapter, Paul disclosed two problems concerning public worship and offered his advice. The first dealt with the veiling of women [v. 2–16] and the second, with the Lord's Supper [v. 17–34].

Paul gave specific instructions concerning the role and conduct of women in worship service. He asserted that Christian women were to pray or prophesy with their heads covered because they were under the authority of their husbands. Both men and women are created in the image of God [Genesis 1:26–27]. They are mutually dependent on each other and are equal in the sight of God. Yet the woman has to recognise the man as the head of the family, just like Christ is the head of the man.

Paul also rebuked the way the Corinthians were conducting the Lord's Supper [v. 17]. There were divisions and cliques within the church, and the poor were neglected. There was also gluttony and drunkenness. Paul angrily rebuked them, "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not" [v. 22b]. Paul reminded them of the real meaning of the Lord's Supper, and the significance of the bread and the wine. Paul cautioned everyone to examine himself if he was eating and drinking worthily.

The punishment for abusing the Holy Communion is severe. Christians have suffered physical ailment—even death—as a result [v. 30]. It is in this light that we see what Paul means when he says that the one who judges himself does not have to fear God's judgement [v. 31].

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 3
1 CORINTHIANS 11

THOUGHT

Come to the Lord's Table in faith and humility, for the past (Christ's death), present (His abiding presence in us) and future (His coming in glory) are united in the sacrament.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 12

LESSON
**Knowing and using your
spiritual gifts**

VERSE 7
*But the manifestation of the
Spirit is given to every man
to profit withal.*

All of us have a role to play in the work of spreading the Gospel, and each role is significant and important in different ways. God has given to every believer a way for him to serve. He wants us to be engaged rather than merely observe. He wants us to walk with Him and serve Him rather than sitting back to watch His redemptive drama unfold.

In the church, God desires us to serve Him in ways that we have been equipped to serve. Paul told the Corinthians that each and every one of them was given a gift for the common good. Spiritual gifts are not designed to advance our personal agenda. These gifts are supposed to enrich and build up the Church and those around us. God gives us abilities that we can use to reach out to the world and also to encourage and support one another and, in doing so, glorify Him.

Look at your life. Ask yourself what you can do to honour and serve the Lord. Do not underestimate yourself. Neither should you find excuses not to serve nor leave it to another day. You can make an enormous difference in the world if you would stop dwelling on what you cannot do. Do what you can do!

We have an amazing message of hope and life to give to the world. If everyone plays his part, the message of His grace will touch others deeply and change them forever!

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 4
1 CORINTHIANS 12

THOUGHT

God will do for you what you cannot do for yourself if you will do for God what you can do.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 13

LESSON

Love is not easily angered

VERSE 5

*Doth not behave itself
 unseemly, seeketh not her
 own, is not easily provoked,
 thinketh no evil;*

We get angry for many reasons. We may be angry when people offend us for seemingly no reason. We may be angry with a friend who, out of love, points to a weakness in our character. Sometimes we may even take it personally and strike back.

From Paul's words, we learn that one of the keys to being a loving person is learning to deal with the seeming offences against us. How we respond shows how loving a person we are. When you are angry, do you yell and scream? How does this solve the situation? Or do you bury your anger?

Buried anger is like a toxic waste dump. It slowly consumes a person and eventually gives rise to greater damage. If you are angry right now, find the true cause of your anger. Is it hurt, fear or frustration? Or is it just because of a misunderstanding? Identify the real cause and address the issue with the person you are angry with.

Do you need to forgive someone? If so, work prayerfully to reach out to that person the grace that God has extended to you. Will you still remember the offence? You will, initially. Does it still hurt? Yes, perhaps for a while. However, when we choose to forgive, we set free the person who has trespassed against us. More importantly, by doing so, we also set ourselves free. When we act with such grace, we advance God's kingdom.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 5
1 CORINTHIANS 13

THOUGHT

Time does not heal wounds. Forgiveness does.

BIBLE LESSON

1 Corinthians 14:1–25

LESSON

Edification

VERSE 12

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

Spiritual gifts are given by God to help the Church grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. They are designed for the edification of His Church. To edify is to instruct and improve in spiritual knowledge.

The Corinthian church was a gifted church. If they had used their talents correctly, they would have accomplished great things for God. However, together with their gifts came pride and, subsequently, strife. Everyone was out to be number one. As such, gifts were desired for the glorification of self and not God.

Today, the same problem exists. Gifts are zealously sought after because the seeker wants to benefit himself; a gifted man is often esteemed and popular. It is not wrong to seek spiritual gifts. In fact, Paul exhorted his listeners to “desire spiritual gifts” [v. 1] but we should ask ourselves the motivating reasons behind our desires.

Do you ever wonder why we are in church, other than to worship? We are here to build up the Christian body. We are in church not only to receive but also to give. This responsibility does not just belong to the church leaders alone. Every member is gifted, and so is responsible for edifying the body of Christ with his gifts. For the whole Christian body to be edified, all our gifts are needed. If we do not practise good stewardship of the gifts given to us, the Church suffers. The body is maimed if all the members do not function as they should be.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

2 SAMUEL 6

1 CORINTHIANS 14:1–25

THOUGHT

Gifts are meant for service, and thus their focus should be on others, not self.

BIBLE LESSON

1 Corinthians 14:26–40

LESSON

Biblical worship

VERSE 26

*How is it then, brethren?
when ye come together,
every one of you hath a
psalm, hath a doctrine,
hath a tongue, hath
a revelation, hath an
interpretation. Let all
things be done unto
edifying.*

Paul emphasised the need for the Corinthians to worship God prepared and in earnest expectancy [v. 26]. Our corporate worship ought to be done in an attitude of expecting God to meet us to reveal Himself to us, and to work in us.

One of the problems we face in the church today is that Christians have become too distant from God. They have forgotten that God is the chief reason why they are in church. True worship is about meeting God. It should bring honour to the King. There is a sense of awe and reverence for Who God is. He is the focus of our worship. The most important and highest activity that God’s people could ever engage in is to offer God acceptable worship.

How do you behave when you are with a very important person? You would probably be very careful to show respect in what you say and do. If you show respect for important people, how much more should you show reverence for God? How should you come to God in worship? What should your attitude be?

The Bible says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” [John 4:24]. Because God is a Spirit and we cannot see Him, it is perhaps easy to forget that He is right here with us. But He is here. He is real and He is with us. He deserves our reverence, honour and respect. Honour Him in your thoughts and your words.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ

2 SAMUEL 7

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26–40

THOUGHT

Our primary focus is on God Himself. Life makes sense only when He is at the centre of our lives.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 15

LESSON
God's amazing grace

VERSE 10

*But by the grace of God
 I am what I am: and his
 grace which was bestowed
 upon me was not in vain;
 but I laboured more
 abundantly than they all:
 yet not I, but the grace of
 God which was with me.*

Grace is the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, and keeps, strengthens and increases them in the Christian faith, knowledge, affection and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.

With a strong conviction and even empirical proofs, Paul was defending the resurrection of the Lord Jesus against the doubts of unbelievers. Yet he did it with great humility. Probably because of his sins and attacks against the Church before he became a Christian, he himself confessed that he was the least of the apostles and not worthy to be named among them. However, he went on to say that he knew God had used him and that anything he had, was, or ever would be, was because of the grace of God.

Many things in life fail us. Friendships blossom and die. Health can prove to be elusive. Riches and wealth often remain just beyond the reach of our fingertips. Those we love pass from the scene, leaving voids in our hearts. However, there is one thing that every child of God possesses that can never fail, never end and never run out, and that is the grace of God.

The road may be long and dreary, and the days may be filled with difficulty and struggles, but rest assured that there is grace sufficient for every need and every trial. That is the promise of God and that is the hope of the saints.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 8
1 CORINTHIANS 15

THOUGHT

Let your life tell of God's amazing love and grace.

BIBLE LESSON
1 Corinthians 16

LESSON
Spiritual warfare

VERSE 13

*Watch ye, stand fast in the
 faith, quit you like men, be
 strong.*

The Bible clearly warns us that there is a war, which is largely unseen by human eyes, going on. Christians are in a spiritual battle today. The forces of evil are on the attack against the forces of God and righteousness. Spiritual warfare is the struggle to have life in this material world, with God's governance and lordship.

Satan and his invisible demon emissaries are active, devious and want nothing more than to break your family apart, weaken your conviction, destroy the unity of your church, tarnish the integrity of its leaders, and render you powerless in ministry and useless in battle. Because the stakes are so high, you need to be ready to defend yourself from attacks and fight the good fight.

Will you stay alert against these spiritual dangers? Will you stand fast against the forces of darkness and fight the battle for God? Will you rely upon the Lord for strength and courage in this fight? And can you withstand bitterness and hatred, and always obey the greatest command, which is to love?

But how much do you know about your enemy, his tactics and his long-term plans for your spiritual ruin? How has God equipped you to meet the enemy? You may have been defeated by the forces of darkness already by yielding to some temptation. Many have not had the courage to win souls for Christ. Some have failed to love. If any of this is true for you, make things right today.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 9
1 CORINTHIANS 16

THOUGHT

The spiritual battle is won by our submission to Christ.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 1***LESSON****The God of all comfort****VERSE 3**

*Blessed be God, even the
Father of our Lord Jesus
Christ, the Father of
mercies, and the God of all
comfort;*

Paul's second epistle to the church at Corinth was written when Paul was in Macedonia. It was written about a year after the first epistle. In this letter, Paul expressed his warm affection for the Corinthians as well as to encourage them in helping the poor brethren in Judaea. In this epistle, more than in any of his other writings, Paul reveals his personal side—his human weakness, his spiritual strength, his sternness in rebuke and his tenderness of affection.

In the salutations of this letter, Paul describes God as the Father of mercies. This is a common address that Jews used for God, Who is “full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth” [Psalm 86:15].

Mercy is more than just kindness. It is one that is extended at a time of great pain and sorrow. God's common grace extends to all [Matthew 5:45] but He is the God of all mercies to all who are fallen and helpless. God is also the God of all comfort. Christ is the consolation of Israel [Luke 2:25]. To one who is hurting, He is the all-powerful God Who knows the afflictions of the powerless. He Who controls the planets also consoles those in pain.

There is also the added promise that, regardless of the nature and extent of our afflictions, God comforts us all. The Christian is not left on his own to fend for himself in the power of his own flesh. God is the Father of all mercies and all comfort.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 10
2 CORINTHIANS 1

THOUGHT

God is the healing balm for all our hurts. Share the divine balm with others. God comforts us so that we may comfort others.

BIBLE LESSON

2 Corinthians 2

LESSON

Forgiveness and comfort

VERSE 6

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

Continuing with our meditation on God being the One Who comforts us, Paul applies this truth to a specific case mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. A man had come under church discipline because he had committed an abominable sin [1 Corinthians 5:1]. Paul had asked the church to deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh [1 Corinthians 5:5]. The man was put out of the church.

Paul revisited the case because the man had truly repented, but the Corinthians were slow to restore him to fellowship in the church. A failure to discipline exposes the church's spiritual and moral declension. However, over-discipline, which is ungracious, exposes its immaturity. Paul, who had demanded for the man to be disciplined, now pleaded on his behalf to have him restored to communion.

The word "forgive" literally means "grace giving". It is used to describe our Lord Jesus giving sight to the blind [Luke 7:21]. They who could not see were given sight freely. Likewise, forgiveness is extended not because punishment has been meted out and the sentence served. Forgiveness is not a matter of justice but a matter of favour. The person who realises his sinfulness flees to Christ humbly and He gives him grace.

"Comfort" is a compound word meaning "to come along side and strengthen". Just as God receives every penitent sinner, so it is the duty of the Church to treat every penitent sinner with kindness and love. What a repentant sinner needs from the Church is not a cold shoulder but a warm embrace.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 11
2 CORINTHIANS 2

THOUGHT

Forgive and comfort. The former is the giving of grace. The latter is the strengthening of it.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 3***LESSON****The epistle of Christ****VERSE 3**

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

In Chapter 3, Paul defends his ministry by appealing not to his own accomplishments or human commendations. The Corinthians are proof of Paul's ministry—"ye are our epistle" [v. 2]. More than that, they are an "epistle of Christ" [v. 3].

What a commendation from the apostle. The church at Corinth, in spite of all her imperfections and failures, is an epistle of Christ. The Corinthians were what they were because of Christ. They are "manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ" [v. 3], the source of their faith. Christ was the very matter of their lives. His image was stamped in them. His law was written in their hearts. The marks of grace were evident in all their being.

Paul adds that image of Christ in the Corinthians is not penned with ink. In other words, a person is not a Christian because his life is written over by lifeless religious activities but his heart remains stone cold. "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ... written ... with the Spirit of the living God ... in fleshy tables of the heart" [v. 3]. The author is the Holy Spirit. The subject matter is divine grace. The pages are hearts of flesh. Thus, the Christian is one whose life bears every stroke and letter of God's divine penmanship.

Books are written to be read. Every believer is the Bible that the world reads. In the believer's life, the handwriting of God ought to be legible to all because we bear the Truth that can save souls.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 12
2 CORINTHIANS 3

THOUGHT

Is your life "manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ"? Let your life be an open book for our Lord Jesus.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 4***LESSON****Treasure in earthen vessels****VERSE 7**

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

In Chapter 3, Paul tells us that we are the pages on which God pens His truth. In Chapter 4, the apostle uses another analogy. We are the earthen vessels in which treasure is hidden. As earthen vessels, we are weak instruments—fragile, empty, perishable and valueless. It is a picture of the human body. The Bible reminds us that we are made of dust [Genesis 3:19].

No man in his right mind will place a high value on an earthen vessel. Neither will he hide his treasure in such a vessel. But this is not true of God. The Psalmist tells us that God “knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we *are* dust ... But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” [Psalm 103:14, 17].

Thus it is an act of superlative grace that God places in the weak earthen vessel that is man His great treasure, the Gospel, “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” [v. 6b]. A weak human instrument has become the depository of divine treasure. Wretched sinners become preachers of righteousness. Such is the grace of God when He applies it to our lives.

This blessed reality should humble every Christian in his ministry. When the Gospel is preached and sinners are converted, we have to realise that the power to save comes not from the preacher but his God. Just as the power is of God and not of us, so ought to be the glory.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 13
2 CORINTHIANS 4

THOUGHT

All that we are and do, may it be evident that they are all of God and Him alone.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 5***LESSON****The joy of reconciliation****VERSE 20**

*Now then we are
ambassadors for Christ,
as though God did beseech
you by us: we pray you
in Christ's stead, be ye
reconciled to God.*

Despite the Apostle Paul's longing for heavenly glory, he faithfully ministered for the Lord. Verses 1–8 show us a glimpse of life after death. Paul compared the human, earthly body to that of a tabernacle. Paul's evangelistic zeal was prompted by Christ's constraining love [v. 9–15]. In order to be ready for the judgement seat of Christ, this faithful apostle kept on reaching out to the lost. Continuing, Paul stressed the necessity of regeneration and reconciliation with God [v. 16–21].

Webster defines an ambassador as a minister of the highest rank, employed by a prince or a state at the court of another, to manage the concerns of his own prince or state, and to represent the dignity and power of his sovereign. Ministers are ambassadors for Christ and His representatives to do His bidding.

The office of an ambassador is one of great responsibility so all believers ought to conduct themselves blamelessly as ambassadors for Christ. To be an ambassador for one's country is a great honour. To be an ambassador for the King of kings and Lord of lords is the greatest privilege and responsibility. Reconciling man to man is not easy. Reconciling man to God is impossible without the working of the Holy Spirit in that sinner's heart.

This ministry of reconciliation is not the responsibility of the pastor alone. As God's ambassadors, let us redeem the time and be faithful in our evangelistic fervour for our Lord. If you are a non-believer, be reconciled to God now.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 14
2 CORINTHIANS 5

QUESTION

Are you prepared to face the terror of the Lord?

BIBLE LESSON

2 Corinthians 6

LESSON

Offending no one

VERSE 3

Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.

In line with the injunction of being Christ's Ambassadors, the need for holy living is emphasised. The Apostle Paul and his co-workers lived exemplary lives, as faithful servants of God [v. 1–10]. Their exhortations to the Corinthian believers demonstrated their loving concern for them. Paul exhorted the people in Corinth to pledge full allegiance to God alone. There must be no compromise at all with pagan idolaters [v. 11–18].

“Giving no offence in anything” does not imply that Paul was a perfect person. He was simply cautioning his readers not to stumble others in their Christian conduct. It is possible even for ministers to hinder the progress of the Gospel by their own misconduct. Paul's warning here is a reminder for us to live holy lives. Speaking personally from his own experience, Paul was able to testify that he did not offend anyone by his conduct. All believers must be Christ-like in word and deed. As God's children, whatever we do reflects back on our Lord. Hence, our testimonies must be God-honouring.

Can we echo the words of Paul in verse 3? His confidence in the Lord is also clear: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” [1 Corinthians 11:1]. He endured physical, mental and verbal abuse for the Lord's sake.

Bearing in mind that the ministry is not to be blamed, let us not give cause for anyone to find fault with us. If there is anything between you and the Lord, make right with Him now by seeking His forgiveness.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 15
2 CORINTHIANS 6

CAUTION

**Abstain from all appearance of evil. –
1 Thessalonians 5:22**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 7***LESSON****Godly sorrow versus
worldly sorrow****VERSE 10**

*For godly sorrow worketh
repentance to salvation not
to be repented of; but the
sorrow of the world worketh
death.*

Continuing with the emphasis on separation from the world, Paul now exhorts his readers to pursue holiness in the fear of the Lord. Paul was joyful when he saw the changed attitude of the Corinthians as reported to him by Titus [v. 1–4]. Paul was able to speak freely because of his close bond with them. The evidence of a changed lifestyle was proof of true repentance on the part of the Corinthian believers. Paul also rejoiced in the fact that they were willing to allow God to work this change in them [v. 5–11].

There is a great difference between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world [v. 10]. Obviously, godly sorrow comes about through the Holy Spirit's working in the heart of the sinner. Conversely, worldly sorrow can only result in death. Peter's bitter tears of sadness after denying his Lord comes to mind as an example of godly sorrow, whereas there was no change in Judas Iscariot's conduct after his remorse.

How do you express your sorrow after sinning? Do you just offer lip service by saying sorry without meaning it? Are you genuinely sorry for the wrong that you have done or only sorry just because you were caught?

The only evidence of true repentance is a changed lifestyle. Have you repented of your sin and acknowledged the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 16
2 CORINTHIANS 7

QUESTION**How do you express true repentance?**

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 8***LESSON****Giving first to God****VERSE 5**

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 teach us the Stewardship of giving. We find here the lengthiest discussion on giving in the New Testament. A famine in Jerusalem was the occasion for alms collection from churches nearby. Paul commended the Macedonian believers whose generosity was prompted by their love for God. Thus inspired, the saints in Corinth took up a collection to help needy believers in Jerusalem [v. 1–6]. Nothing is comparable to Christ’s sacrificial love for us on Calvary’s Cross [v. 7–9]. Paul was very much encouraged by the Corinthians’ willingness to give of their meagre substance [v. 10–15]. Titus was accompanied by two other brethren as trustees to send the collection to Jerusalem [v. 16–24].

Such a willing and joyful giving attitude of the Macedonian saints could only be wrought by God’s grace. Their response was even beyond Paul’s expectations. When any believer dedicates himself fully to the Lord, God can use him mightily.

Any service rendered to God becomes meaningless when our hearts are not in it. In fact, the prophet Isaiah called such people “hypocrites”. We must heed this injunction: “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” [Colossians 3:23]. Beware of the temptation of being men-pleasers.

Our labour of love is God-honouring when it is done for the Lord’s sake. This can only happen through the Holy Spirit working in our hearts. Whole-hearted dedication to God in our service will result in our willingness to labour together with our pastors and fellow church members.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 17
2 CORINTHIANS 8

PRAYER

Teach me to serve others out of love for You, Lord.

BIBLE LESSON*2 Corinthians 9***LESSON****The greatest gift of love****VERSE 15**

*Thanks be unto God for his
unspeakable gift.*

The Apostle Paul's love for the suffering saints in Jerusalem was evidenced in his sending of Titus to Corinth to collect funds for the needy. He encouraged them to give generously [v. 1–5]. He used the analogy of agriculture to share the guidelines on giving. The right perspective on the Christian's ministry of giving is based on the biblical understanding of God. This chapter ends with the greatest example of giving—the Lord Jesus Himself sacrificing His life on the Cross out of His love for mankind [v. 6–15].

Paul's reminder to “sow sparingly and reap sparingly; sow bountifully and reap bountifully” [v. 6] is always true. God's giving of His one and only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the best example of giving at the highest level. Our actions must speak loudly that our words need not be heard.

The spirit of giving is more important than the external act. The account of the poor widow's giving despite her poverty is held in high esteem by our Lord than the rich who gave out of their abundance [Mark 12:41–44]. The how and why of giving are aptly covered in this chapter.

Let us be challenged to check on our motives in giving. If every believer in the church gives faithfully to the Lord's work, then that church will never be in want. Giving need not be only in cash; it can also be rendered in other ways. For instance, how willing are you to give of your time to someone in need?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 18
2 CORINTHIANS 9

QUESTION

What is your attitude towards giving?

BIBLE LESSON
2 Corinthians 10

LESSON

**Using God's weapon for
 God's work**

VERSE 3

*For though we walk in the
 flesh, we do not war after
 the flesh.*

Paul's opponents questioned his apostolic authority. They invaded the church he had founded in Corinth and sought to destroy his work. With meekness and gentleness born of the power of God, Paul defended his authority and sought to bring obedience to those who had strayed away from God.

Ministerial work is spiritual warfare. Although we are weak humans, we should be bold in our spiritual battle, as we rely on divine power to win. We are assured that God's weapons are powerful and effective. We must be steadfast in our love, faith and hope in Christ, putting on the full armour of God (which consists of peace, truth, righteousness, faith, love, light, the sword of the Spirit and salvation) so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. Pray and read God's Word to gain divine strength from the Lord. From His people, God requires faithfulness to His precepts, commands and purposes. Dedication and wholehearted commitment to the Lord are the hallmarks of true believers.

We are encouraged to grow in our faith so that we can become a church that commissions, sends and supports missionaries to other regions. We are reminded that the glory of our work is not for boasting but for the extension of the kingdom of God and to bring glory to Him.

Be wary of false teachers and strive to serve the Lord faithfully. Give thanks and glory to the Lord for all the talents, wisdom and strength He has blessed you with.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 19
2 CORINTHIANS 10

PRAYER

Lord, teach me to be humble and gentle. Work in my life so that I may increase my faith in You and be a channel of blessing to others, all to Your glory.

BIBLE LESSON
2 Corinthians 11

LESSON
Devotion to Christ

VERSE 2

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

In this chapter, Paul uses an illustration taken from marriage. Christ is the husband of believers, who should be pure and unaffected by false doctrines. Believers should live a consecrated life and stay away from temptation. We should avoid falling into the traps of Satan and repeating the mistake of Eve, who lost her focus after the serpent spoke to her. Focus your mind and soul on Jesus alone so that you will not be corrupted and deceived by Satan and led astray from your devotion to Christ.

The Corinthians had a soft ear for eloquent and persuasive speakers. Their devotion to Christ became compromised. False teachers are agents of Satan who masquerade as servants of righteousness and distort the truth about Jesus and teach a different gospel other than God's Word.

Today, believers face similar problems. Jesus has warned us that false christs and false prophets will appear before His second coming [Matthew 24:24]. It is sad indeed that some will be enslaved as a result. Their stance has blinded them to reality and the truth. They worship their leaders, whom they consider as messiahs.

Darkness is the realm of Satan but God dwells in unapproachable light [1 Timothy 6:16]. The Bible should be our authoritative guide. Through His Word, God dispels darkness and gives light, life and love. Stay close to God's Word so that you are not swayed by deceitful teachings. When we faithfully discipline ourselves to be more Christ-like, our spiritual journey flourishes and we stay pure, saving our love for the Lord Jesus.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 20-21
2 CORINTHIANS 11

THOUGHT

There are many false teachings and worldly distractions today that keep us away from our pure devotion for Christ. How do you keep Christ as top priority in your daily life?

BIBLE LESSON
2 Corinthians 12

LESSON
The grace of God

VERSE 9

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

In this chapter, we learn that Paul received visions and revelations from the Lord. He was given the privilege to ascend to paradise. This celestial experience could lead to sinful pride. To keep Paul from such sin, God gave him a thorn in his flesh. Three times Paul pleaded with the Lord to remove his affliction but Jesus told him, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Regardless of how successful we are in this world, there will still be times of affliction, failure and disappointment. When these happen, always remember to claim the promises in God’s Word. His amazing grace is always there to revive your hope and restore you. When we are afflicted, always pray to the Lord for relief. Ask the Lord to strengthen your spiritual well-being through the trials and temptations that you go through. “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” [Philippians 4:19].

Our God is great and we are assured that His grace encompasses kindness and goodness. His strength is sufficient to enlighten and enliven us. His strength is made perfect in our weakness: “For when I am weak then am I strong.” Paul delights in his weakness for the sake of Christ. All deeds are performed through and for Christ so that He receives glory and honour.

Remember to thank the Lord not just for the roses but also for the thorns in your life, as these keep us humble and remind us of our need for constant close communion with the Lord.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 22–23
2 CORINTHIANS 12

PRAYER

And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. – Exodus 33:14

BIBLE LESSON
2 Corinthians 13

LESSON
Of one mind

VERSE 11

*Finally, brethren, farewell.
 Be perfect, be of good
 comfort, be of one mind,
 live in peace; and the God
 of love and peace shall be
 with you.*

Paul's final words to the Corinthians apply to us today, too. We must examine ourselves to test if Jesus Christ lives in us [v. 5]. Do we walk with faith in the footsteps of the Lord and commune with Him in prayer intimately in our daily life? We should continually live out the Word of God in our lives and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide our words and actions. We are also reminded that we should not do evil but be honest in our daily dealings [v. 7]. Refrain from any inappropriate words or gossip against one another.

Just like the Corinthian believers, we are all urged to become mature in our faith. Be perfect, mend your ways, remove every disorder and restore everything in your life so that whatever you do and whatever you say are pleasing to God.

Be of good comfort so you can find rest in God's blessed promise. Beyond this, encourage and reassure one another with the great hope of salvation. Look around and support one another in words and actions. Be of one mind and strive for unity and live in harmony. Pray to the Lord to give the Church a spirit of unity so that you may glorify God. Intimately linked with that, be peaceable and love one another.

We have the promise of peace and love from God when we obey Him and apply His Word in our daily lives.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
 IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 SAMUEL 24
2 CORINTHIANS 13

QUESTION

Do you aim for perfection in your spiritual life? Plan some steps to keep you away from sin. Are you obeying the Lord's commandment to love one another? Do you desire to grow in grace and increase in holiness?

