

Wednesday January 1

A New Beginning

Rev. 21: 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new”. And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful”.

“In the beginning, God created”. That is the first thing we learn about God. He is Creator. He made everything, beautiful things, great things, impossible things, out of nothing. Can you imagine Him just speaking, describing the flowers and the insects and the nature of the soil, the fur of the cat, the process of photosynthesis, long neck of the giraffe and the notes of the nightingale’s song – and they just appear? None of those things existed before He made them. They were all brand new. Then He took some mud and made bone and skin and blood and hair and muscle; out of mud! The first man, the most perfect man was created. And at the end of that first week He looked at it all and said, “Mmmm! That’s very good!”

Have you ever wished you could go back to the beginning? The beginning of you? I mean, like start over? Ever found yourself with some habits that are really bad but just won’t go away? Do you find yourself in destructive friendships and relationships that you need to get out of? Are you perhaps feeling dissatisfied with your Christian life and wondering why you’re not as good as you used to be, or as you should be? Do you sometimes wonder if you’ve gone just too far and that your life cannot be fixed anymore? Are you perhaps becoming afraid because you know that if you don’t change you are headed for destruction?

Listen! God is still the Creator. He still just loves to make beautiful things. In Revelation He promises to make all things new. Yes, He will do that at the end when sin is destroyed. But it is more than that. Today He is willing to make all things new in you; to wipe out the past and give you a new start, a new you. You can begin again and do it better this time. Habits can change. Relationships can change. Directions can change. Everything can change for the better if you will let the Creator God create a new life for you.

On this the first day of a new year the Creator wants to create a new you for you. If He could make the first man out of mud, He can fix one that is already made. Just ask Him to make you over, to give you that new start and promise to cooperate with Him as He does His work. This can be the start of new and beautiful things. This can be the best year of your life.

Dear Lord, You know how much I need a new start. Beginning today, Lord, make me a new person I pray, in Jesus’ name, amen.

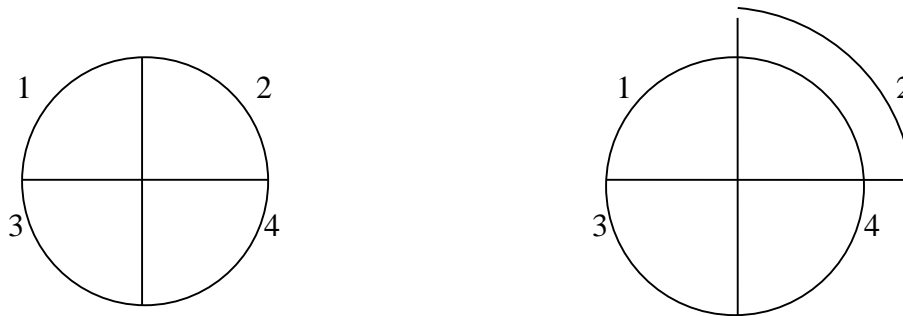
Thursday January 2

Wheel and Come Again

Luke 2: 52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and Men

One of the basic laws of life is that all living things grow. So if you are not growing you are dead! It's true! This is true in everyday life. It is also true in your spiritual life. Jesus said that everyone who wants to be saved must be born again (John 3:5). If you are born again it means you become a new person – a spiritual baby. And then, like every baby, you need to grow up.

Luke 2: 52 tells how Jesus grew. It says He grew in wisdom (intellectually), stature (physically), in favour with God (spiritually) and in favour with man (socially). Jesus, our Example, developed in all areas of His life. We too must know that if we are Christians every part of our lives must be dedicated to God and as we grow spiritually to please God more and more every day, we must do the same physically, mentally and socially. If God is not Lord of our entire lives, He is not Lord at all. Let me use an example to show you what I mean.



The perfect circle (wheel) on the left is all of you and the quarters (quadrants) represent the physical, spiritual, mental and social parts of your life. If the entire circle grows - no problem. You can still turn smoothly. But if one quadrant grows more than the others (like the wheel on the right, you can't turn smoothly any more. Your life is totally unbalanced.

If we want to be real Christians, growing in Christ, we must grow in all areas **TOTALLY**. This year we will try to grow together in Christ. Each quarter we will focus on one quadrant of our lives as we seek to grow totally in Christ.

*Lord, we commit ourselves to seek you each morning, trying to grow in all areas of our lives as we seek to be **Totally Yours**, in Jesus' name, amen.*

Friday January 3

Know Who is Number One

Ex. 20: 3 You shall have no other gods before Me

When God gave His Ten Commandments, the first one He gave was, “God must be Number One”. We all grow up more or less agreeing with that idea. But, let me ask you? Is God really number one for you? How do you show it? And why should He be Number One anyway? The first question is one only you can answer. The second question, we’ll deal with tomorrow, but let us begin with question number three. There are several reasons that God is Number One.

1. God was before everything else. As far back as we can think, God was already there – Number One.
2. God made everything and everybody. It ***all*** belongs to Him. He is therefore the Most Important Person in the universe.
3. God is the One who keeps it all going: the sunrise and sunset, rain, growing of the plants, the beating of your heart, climate control – everything! If He stopped controlling the universe we would all die.
4. He takes a personal interest in each person and supervises the happenings in the lives of the over 6 billion people who live on Earth.
5. He knew that on Earth we had no future. We were hijacked by Satan and would die without hope. He sent Jesus to die for us and provide the only hope that we have in life.
6. He has placed us first because He gave the Very Best He had for us and every day He makes us His number one priority.

When you think about all of that, does He deserve to be Number One? Should we allow anything to be more important to us than the One who made us, owns us and loves us more than anything? I don’t think so. Let Him be your Number One today.

Lord, thank you for making me Your first priority. Help me today to make and keep You as number one in my life, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sabbath January 4

Practice Makes Perfect

Matt. 6: 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.

Yesterday we remembered how important it was to know that God is Number One. Ok, so now we know, but how do we show it? You see, serving God is a practical thing. We can talk all we want but in the end actions speak louder than words. So, let us look at some practical ways to put God first in our lives.

1. Let Him be the first Person you speak with every day. Make a pledge that (outside of emergency situations) before you get into the activities of your day and before you get into conversations with others you will spend some time talking with your Number One.
2. Let His words be the first thing you read every day. After all, His voice should be the first one you listen to each day.
3. Let your first song of the day be a song of praise to Him.
4. Remember that He is always with you so let your daily behaviour be decent and respectful to Him.
5. When you have to make important decisions in your life – what subjects to take, what career to choose, what job to take, which person to date – always pray for guidance and seek to follow God's will.
6. Obey His commandments and always put His requirements first
7. Take out His portion, the tithe, first out of whatever you earn or receive and faithfully give it to Him.
8. Talk about Him with your friends and let them know how important He is in your life.

That sounds like a whole lot and I almost hear you saying, "Wow, that's hard". Let me tell you, it might be challenging to get accustomed to changing your life and behaviour so drastically, but once you have decided to do it, God will give you the strength. After a while, many of these things will become natural for you to do. The best thing is, as you do them your love relationship with God will grow and the love will make it easier to give Him your best.

Lord, help me as I try to put you first to do my best, because I really love you, in Jesus' name, amen.

Sunday January 5

God Wears Red-Tinted Glasses

Is. 1: 18 ...Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they are red like crimson they shall be like wool.

Hey, here is an interesting experiment you can do. Get a piece of red-tinted glass or plastic or cellophane and look through it. Everything will look red-tinted. (Did I hear somebody say “d-uh!”?) Ok. But now, look at something red and – aha! It looks white! You know, it reminds me of today’s text. When I am full of sin – red, scarlet, corrupt – God looks at me through the red blood of Jesus and I look clean and white!

But what does all of that really mean? Well, you see, all of us are sinners. Even when we try hard we fail to be as good as we should be. All of us deserve to die because “the wages of sin is death”. Death is the punishment, the price we pay as sinners. We would disappear forever, never to come back. But God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to die for us. Jesus has never sinned so He was qualified to die for our sin. He did that when He died on the cross. John 3:16 tells us that if we believe in Jesus we will not have to die but will have everlasting life. In other words, we will not disappear forever but will instead live forever.

So here it is: if we accept Jesus as Lord of our lives, repent of our sins and try to live for Him, at the time of judgement, even though we have made mistakes God will be looking at our red imperfections through the red blood of Jesus and we will appear clean and white. You see, God will accept Jesus death as the price for your sin and for mine, and His perfect life as a substitute for our sinful lives. We will be seen as if we never, ever sinned. That’s true! He says He will forgive our sins and remember them no more. Awesome, isn’t it?

Lord, thank you for Jesus and for the great plan you have made to take away my sin. I choose to accept Him today and thank you that my sins are all forgiven, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Monday January 6

God Loves a Good Hypocrite

Matt. 5: 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect. (KJV)

In Matthew 23 Jesus seriously rebuked the scribes and Pharisees and called them hypocrites. Ouch! That's rough. You wouldn't like to be called a hypocrite, would you? The word hypocrite sounds like stern, self-righteous people who always think themselves to be perfect while seeing all the faults in everybody else. Maybe you can even think of one or two of them right now. But wait a minute before you start pointing fingers, because maybe, just maybe you are one!

A hypocrite is someone false, who is not all that he pretends to be or is expected to be. Christians are followers of Christ and are expected to behave like Christ. Actually, the Bible says we are to strive to be as perfect as God is perfect! You can't be serious! Yes. It's right there in today's text. But that's impossible! You're right, it is. Yet that is the standard God expects us to strive for. When we aim so high we will achieve our very best, but we cannot reach God's perfection.

Are you beginning to see where I'm going? All of us, therefore will be less than we are expected to be. We all make mistakes. We are not what we are expected to be. We are hypocrites. But while I make mistakes I must not accept my mistakes as ok. I must always hold up God's perfection as the target to aim for, acknowledging my mistakes and striving for better. That's being a "good hypocrite". Those who are satisfied with their mistakes, or try to make others believe that they are perfect when they are not, are bad hypocrites. The scribes and Pharisees were like that, thinking themselves better than others. However, when we are not as good as we should be and we know it, but we ask God to forgive us; when we keep trying and help others as they try also, we are the kind of hypocrites that God loves.

Let us be genuine and humble as we strive every day to be more and more like Jesus.

Dear Lord, help me today to be genuine and humble as I try to be like you and to be perfect as you have commanded me to be, in Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday January 7

When Did I become a Monster?

**Ps. 51: 1, 3, 4, 10 Have mercy on me, O God...for I recognize my shameful deeds...
Against You alone have I sinned...Create in me a clean heart, O God.**

The passage above is part of the prayer that David prayed when he sinned against God. Take some time out and read the whole psalm and when you have the time read the story again in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. David is one of the most admired persons in the Bible. Even God called him a man after God's own heart! That is what makes it so hard to believe he would do the things he did; but the Bible does not cover them up. It tells us that David acted irresponsibly, coveted, betrayed his friend, committed adultery, lied and committed murder. Wow! What a monster! Could this really be the same David we have admired? Mmmhm! Same guy, unfortunately.

The truth is that Satan is always trying to get us to sin and he fights hardest against those who are known to be God's committed children. If we become careless or too self confident and do not depend on God to help us fight we will lose the struggle; we will slip, then slide, then fall – drifting so far from what we should be that after a while we will not even recognize our own selves. We become monsters. But here is the good part. We can always go back to God. If God could forgive David He will also forgive you and me! No Matter what we have done. No matter what!

The important thing is to repent. Ah, but that is a little different than many people think. It is not enough to say "I am sorry, Lord. Please forgive me". You have to be genuinely sorry; so sorry that if you could press "rewind" and go back to the same situation, you would not do it again. If we truly repent God will forgive us every time – even a zillion times! Isn't that wonderful? That is what is known as grace. Let us repent genuinely, being sorry for our sins. If you find it hard ask God to help you to be really sorry. That is the secret of real repentance.

Lord, help me to be genuinely sorry for the wrong things I do that I may genuinely repent. Thank you for your promise of forgiveness, in Jesus' name, amen.

Wednesday January 8

The Ghost who Lives with Me

John 8: 36 Therefore, if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

A man stood on a street corner in New York City (so the story goes) holding out \$5 and \$10 bills, saying to the people who were passing by: “Here, take one. It is free, take one.” People looked on him as if he was crazy. Some walked far from him. Nobody just gives away money. Maybe some of those same people would be happier to trail him after he left there, catchup with him in some lonely place, hit him on the head and take the money away. *You have to do something to get something.*

I suppose that is why so many people have problems becoming Christians. They can’t believe salvation is free. So, we hear people telling their children that God will love them if they are good. But God’s love does not depend on your being good. He loves good and bad – all people. “God so loved the world...”. There are many Christians who keep the commandments, or give away money, or do missionary work so that they will go to Heaven. Nobody is that good. Nothing we can do is good enough to earn eternal life. It is free! When we believe God and accept His free gift of eternal life, *then* we do the good things because we love Him and we are grateful.

That is also why some people are always unhappy. They repent and God gives them forgiveness for their sins, but the problem is, it is free. So they can’t believe they are forgiven without doing something. They still walk around feeling badly about themselves, they find it hard to take active part in church and cannot say positively, “I am a Christian” They just think they are not good enough. They also allow other people to keep on reminding them about what they used to be, always haunted by the ghost of the person they used to be. If God has forgiven you and set you free from your sin, claim your freedom. It is free and you are free. That’s what grace is all about. Celebrate your freedom.

Lord, thank you that I don’t have to try to earn my forgiveness but that Jesus paid for it at Calvary. It is free for me and I am free, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Thursday January 9

He Had to Change Course

Phil. 3: 8 ...I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I may have Christ. (NLT)

Paul was one rough guy. He hated those Christians and they knew it. He put all his energy into persecuting them. He hunted them down, arrested them, threw some of them into jail, deprived them of their jobs, beat some of them, drove some away from their homes and even joined with other enemies in stoning some of them to death. These enemies made him feel important, treated him like the “real big man”. When he had caused a lot of trouble for Christians in Jerusalem he got permission to go to the city of Damascus and persecute Christians there too.

But God loved this bad guy and God knew that the bad guy would be a good guy to do His work instead of Satan’s work. So God stopped him on the road to Damascus (you can read the story in Acts chapter 9) and God showed him that what he was doing was wrong. Paul got to see Jesus and how much Jesus loves people – even sinful, wicked people who persecute His children. Paul saw that through Jesus everyone in the world can have forgiveness and hope for a happy life. Paul saw that after all that he had done God was willing to forgive him and give him a new life.

So, guess what! This bad guy became a good guy and worked even harder for God than when he was a persecutor. When he really got to know Jesus he said, “Nothing else in life is as sweet, or valuable or important as knowing and serving Jesus”. If you really know Jesus you will say the same thing too. Your studies, your job, your career, your relationships, your popularity, nothing will be as important to you as Jesus. So, get to know Him by studying His word, by talking to Him in prayer and by trying to follow His instructions. You too will be happy that you “changed course”.

Lord, if you could change Paul, I know you can change me too. I want that change. Help me today, I pray, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Friday January 10

How to be Really Great

Is. 57: 15 For thus says the High and Lofty One...I dwell in the high and holy place with him who has a contrite and humble spirit

When we think about Moses, we remember him standing up before the great Pharaoh and ordering him to let go God's children. We also remember how he made water become blood and called down frogs over Egypt and made the Red Sea divide and made a dry rock give water. Of course, it was God who allowed Moses to do those great things. Yeah, Moses was a great guy. But what really makes Moses a role model was not those miracles but the kind of person he was.

In the beginning, Moses had a bad temper and violent behaviour. He even killed a man and had to run away from Egypt. But God changed Moses, just as he can change you and me and he became so much like God! Moses gave up everything he had and even put his life at risk to save the people of Israel. Even though he was afraid of Pharaoh he still went to Egypt when God sent him because he was obedient to God and he loved God's people.

Moses was loving and kind and forgave the people over and over, even when they were ungrateful and wanted to kill him. He worked really hard for the people. Although sometimes he was very tired he didn't stop to think about himself. He taught the people God's law and was patient even when they wouldn't learn. One day when God was angry with the Children of Israel and said "I am going to destroy them", Moses actually said to God: "Please don't destroy them. If you have to punish somebody destroy me instead of them"!

Would you be willing to say that? What made Moses such a special person? He was not a superman. He was a person like you and me. But he wanted to be like God and he allowed God to change him and make him truly great. You know, God can do the same thing for you or me. In fact He wants to do it. All we need to do is tell Him how willing we are to allow Him to change us.

Lord, I am so far from the kind of person I should be and that I want to be. Begin to change me today that I will truly be like you, in Jesus' name, amen.

Sabbath January 11

God's Special Child

Gen. 39: 8,9 But he refused and said, "...how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

We all know the story of Joseph and how he became prime minister of the greatest country in the world at that time. But he was not always famous and powerful. As a teenager, his own brothers turned against him. They sold him as a slave and he spent many years as a servant and even did time in jail! What made him rise from being a slave to be a ruler? It was because of Joseph's love and respect for God and because he tried to be so much like Him.

Joseph knew that he was a child of God and that God loved him, so no matter how people treated him he never felt like a nobody. He remembered he was God's child. God promises to be always with His children, so Joseph was not afraid, knowing that God was with him to protect him and provide for him. But because God was with him he was always well-behaved and disciplined. As a member of God's family, he represented God. In Potiphar's house, in prison, wherever he was, he was careful how and what he spoke and how he acted because he wanted God to be proud of him.

It was because of this that Joseph did his best in everything he did. He was also honest and respectful, kind and fair to those around him. His boss saw how well he worked and gave him the highest promotions. Eventually he became rich and powerful. But all this was not so important to Joseph. What was most important to him was that he could please God. That was why he didn't listen when Mrs. Potiphar tried to tempt him; why he was able to forgive his brothers who sold him as a slave; and why after many years in Egypt they still knew that he was a Hebrew, a child of God. That is also why God was able to bless him so much. And if you try to please God in all you do, you will find yourself blessed as Joseph was blessed.

Lord, please help me to love you and to try to please you as Joseph did that you may be able to bless me like you blessed him, in Jesus name, Amen.

Sunday January 12

Exceptional!

Phil. 2: 3 ...Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. (NLT)

He had everything: good looks, *mucho* money, popularity, position, power – you name it! He was an excellent soldier, courageous and smart. He was also a prince, one day to be king. In spite of all of that he was a good guy. What a mix! Eat your heart out girls! But it all goes to show that you can have a lot and still be a good man or woman of God. And Jonathan was an exceptional man of God.

Exceptional? Yup, that's what I said. First we find him making friends with David. Now, David was from the poor side of town, but he was beginning to steal some of the limelight from Jonathan. A handsome guy as well, he was also coming up rapidly as a great warrior – after all this was the guy who brought down Goliath! Instead of resenting him, Jonathan took him as his best friend and shared the best of everything he had with him. But it didn't stop there.

Jonathan's father, King Saul, didn't like David one bit and tried to turn Jonathan against him. It didn't work. Jonathan was a loyal friend. David was promoted in the army and kept on growing in popularity. Lovindeer wasn't there, but after one battle they made a song that topped the charts and it put David even ahead of the king as a warrior. That did it. The king took out a contract on David and tried more than once to kill him, but Jonathan helped him to escape. And when the king lost popularity people started saying David would make a good king. As a matter of fact, it seemed that God had chosen him to be the next king. That should have turned Jonathan against him if Jonathan had been like you or me. But, no. Johnny simply said, "If God has chosen you to be the next king, that's ok. I will be next to you"!

Oh yes, he was exceptional alright. It takes a real big man to not be "frightened" by money or power. If you love God and have His love inside you, you really have all you need. It makes you kind, unselfish, humble and honest. It makes you truly good. And that's *exceptional*.

Lord, make me so comfortable in your love that I will be happy with what you've given me. Make me an exceptional child of God, I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Monday January 13

Like Son, Like Father

Luke 6: 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

Have you ever been told that you take after your mother or your father? Usually it makes a son proud to hear somebody say “He’s just like his father”. But wouldn’t it be kinda weird for somebody to say “He takes after his son”. Fact is, though, this is true about this guy. His name was Joseph and he was chosen to be the earthly father of Jesus. Out of all the good men in Israel, why was Joseph chosen? I think it is because he had some good “Christ-like” qualities that would make him a good father and a good example for Jesus as he grew up.

First of all, the Bible says he was “a just man”. That means he was righteous, somebody who loved to do what was right and tried to avoid doing the wrong. It also meant he was obedient to God’s word. To be obedient to God was so important to Joseph that when God told him to marry a lady who was pregnant with a child who was not his child, he obeyed God. He knew that it would cause a lot of embarrassment and would spoil his reputation; that many people would lose respect for him; but he did it anyway.

Another great thing about Joseph was how he treated his fiancée when he found out that she was pregnant. According to the laws in those days she should have been punished very harshly, but Joseph tried to cover for her, to save her from pain, embarrassment and even death.

That is just like Jesus (God the Son). He was willing to face pain and shame and to risk His reputation to be one of us. He did not think first of His own comfort and happiness, but thought of us first because He loves us. Joseph was like Jesus. I want to be like Him too.

Lord, change my heart I pray, that I might be kind and loving as Jesus is, in His holy name I pray, Amen.

Tuesday January 14

Take That!

Eph. 6: 17 And take...the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God

The Big Fight; that's what it means. Of course, the theological folks like to call it the Great Controversy. Same thing. We are all in a fight. Satan hijacked this planet long ago and decided that all of us should go to hell with him. God loved the world, so Jesus came to save us. He has already done what He needed to do. Every one of us has a chance to be saved. All we need to do is to accept the life that Jesus offers instead of the life we are tempted to live.

So, the fight still goes on but it is now a fight for your attention and your loyalty. God and the devil are fighting over you, fighting to get you to make a choice for Heaven or for Hell. In the end, it is a matter of *your choice*! You are in the fight. You can't escape it. Every day, every moment the devil is tempting us to choose things that are against the will of God and the plan of salvation. We need to fight to survive spiritually. But how can we fight against such a strong enemy? Many people get frightened and just give up, but you don't have to.

When Jesus came to earth to live and die for us, He had to fight as well. In fact, He had to fight harder, because the devil knew that if He could get Jesus to sin He would have all of us in one shot! But Jesus had a powerful weapon and He used it to beat Satan. Matthew chapter 4 tells of how Jesus fought. When Satan attacked Him, He said, "It is written..." He quoted scripture. Jesus read the scriptures and memorized texts and passages. So each time the devil came He pulled out a scripture text. "It is written" – bam! Take that! "It is written" and that! "It is written"!

Jesus used scripture against Satan and He was able to defeat Him. That same weapon is available for you and me. If you find that you are losing the fight against temptation, maybe it is time you begin to follow Jesus example. Study the Bible. Memorize a text each day. It is your secret weapon; your sword – the word of God. Hit the devil with. Bam! Take that! You will be a winner.

Lord, thank you for this powerful weapon. Teach me how to use it as I fight against Satan every day, in Jesus' name, amen.

Wednesday January 15

Help!

John 14: 16 And I will pray the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever.

Have you ever met anyone who is a truly great person, doing lots of good things, but being so quiet about it that hardly anyone really notices? The Person I want to tell you about today is like that. He is not just a VIP, He is an MIP (Most Important Person)! And yet, even the ones who are closest to Him sometimes take Him for granted and ignore Him altogether. This person is God, the Holy Spirit. He is God and God is Number One in the universe; but in addition, He is so important in our lives that we cannot survive and we have no future without Him.

When Jesus was going back to Heaven, He promised His disciples that He would send them another Helper. When you read the original language (Greek) it is actually saying, “I will send you another Helper *just like the One before*”. The first Helper is Jesus. He came to help us understand what God is like, to teach us how to love God and obey Him, and to give Himself so that we can be saved. The Holy Spirit is God, just like Jesus is God, and He came also to do the same work Jesus did. When Jesus became a man, He limited Himself in many ways. He couldn’t be everywhere at the same time. When He returned to Heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit to continue the work. The Spirit is a spirit so He can be everywhere at the same time and be a Helper to all God’s children everywhere.

How does the Holy Spirit help us? He is the One who lets us know when we are going wrong. He works with our consciences and urges us to do the right things always. Without Him we will never know when we are doing wrong, never want to do the right. As such we will never repent and cannot be saved. He gives us power to overcome sin and to live good Christian lives. Aren’t you happy for the help of this wonderful Helper?

Lord, thank you for the help of God the Holy Spirit. Teach me how to listen to Him that I might be a better Christian, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Thursday January 16

He Really Hears!

John 14: 13 And whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

My first experience with answered prayer happened when I was about four years old. I had been ill with bronchitis and was just recovering when we went to visit with my grandparents in the country. Church was some distance away and taxis and buses were not so easy to get in the heart of the Cockpit Mountains. As we walked home from church that Sabbath, my mother and I were amazed to see a heavy shower of rain approaching. As we watched it coming closer and closer we realized we would get a thorough soaking as there were no houses nearby. This could lead to pneumonia and – oh well, we didn't even want to think about it.

Right then and there we decided to pray and ask God to intervene. We asked Him to save us from the rain, claiming His promise when He said, "Ask and it shall be given you". What happened next amazes me even now. The rain came and fell all around us, leaving a dry space in the centre where we were standing! It was God's rain and we were God's children. No problem.

You see, God hears and answers prayers. He loves you and He has your best interest at heart. He likes when we pray to Him and ask Him for what we need. Not every prayer will be answered exactly how or when you want it to. That is because sometimes we ask for the wrong things or want them at the wrong time. Like a baby who wants to touch the fire, we sometimes can see no reason why God does not give us what we demand. However, like a wise parent, sometimes even when we cry like that baby He still knows it is best to say no. The secret is to just trust Him and know that He will do what is best for you. In the end you can be confident that if you ask for the right things, He will "give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). Prove it for yourself. He really hears!

Dear Lord, teach me today to trust You and to know that You hear our prayers and keep your promises to your children, in Jesus' name, amen.

Friday January 17

Copies, Soap and Tissue Paper

Phil. 4: 19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

I watched the last little bit of soap I owned go down the drain and I lack the words to describe what I felt that morning. Like most young Adventist trying to get an Adventist education, my college days were financially meagre and everything, including soap, was rationed. As I wrapped my towel around me that Tuesday morning, and returned to my room, I pondered my dilemma. I had exactly 35 cents (US) in my purse. My last roll of tissue paper had finished, leaving only cardboard and I still needed to photocopy five pages of material for Friday's test at ten cents per copy.

Photocopies, tissue-paper and soap should not cause despair, but when you don't have any and can't afford to buy more, they do; and unless Christ came that morning, I was sure I'd find urgent need for at least one of them before the day's end. Everyone I knew was also broke, and I could think of no one I could ask for help. Standing at my room door on my way to class, I prayed, "Father, I need tissue paper, soap and five photocopies. I have 35 cents to contribute. You'll have to provide the rest, please."

Then in class, someone suggested the teacher leave copies at the student centre, instead of the library, as they charged only 7 cents per page for copies. "Five times 7 is 35", I thought realizing God intended to use all my money first. Copies in hand, I walked towards my room and met a friend who gave me half a bar of soap, saying "It smelled so nice, I just had to share it." In my room, I opened my locker, to secure my half-a-bar of soap and noticed a little piece of paper stuck to one of the shelves. Moving the shelf, I found a huge wad of tissue paper that had "somehow" fallen unnoticed behind the shelf. No one had known of my situation, yet within hours of my prayer and before I had need for either soap or tissue paper, God had provided all of them.

The lack of soap and tissue paper may be so simple compared to what you may be facing today. But if God cares about soap and tissue paper, how can He not care about everything else we need? No matter the need, no matter how desperate it may seem now, God is always near and will take care of you.

Lord, teach me to trust Your word when You promise to take care of all my needs, in Jesus' name, amen.

Melissa Martinez

Sabbath January 18

My Personal God

Matt. 16: 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

What does God look like? Do you know? I don't think so. We know things about Him but even those things leave us with many questions. Nobody has really seen Him. He is a Spirit. He is so large He fills the whole universe. He is so complicated we can't understand Him. We don't know where He came from. We can't figure out why He does the things He does. He is so wise, so good, so *everything*...!

And yet we need to know God. Jesus said in St. John 17: 3 that knowing Him leads to eternal life. He wants us to know Him. He is constantly revealing Himself to us, through the things that He has made, through His word, through Jesus Christ. But He speaks to each of us in special ways through the things that happen in our lives. In this way each of us can get our own glimpse of God and know Him for ourselves. Like the blind men touching the elephant, each of us will get our own picture of what He is like.

So for Abraham God was the Promise Keeper; for Moses He was the Great Deliverer; for Daniel He was the Revealer of Secrets; for Naomi, He was the Husband of the widow and Father of the fatherless; For Mary Magdalene He was the God of Mercy' for the little children of Israel He was the Children's Friend; for Blind Bartimeus, He was the Healer; and for the five thousand hungry people on the hillside, He was the Provider. He is always the same God, the Bible says He does not change; yet He is different and special to each person, your own personal God.

So, who do you say that He is? Is He your personal God? Is He your Protector, your Healer, your Defender, the Answerer of your questions, your Guide when you are confused? You will not know till you give Him a chance to reveal Himself to you. For me, He is the “Always God”; always kind, always forgiving, always good, always there! Hey, Talk to Him today, share your life with Him and experience Him for yourself. Then you will be able to tell of your personal God. One thing that everybody who knows Him will always tell you: God is good.

Lord, today I want you to go through this day with me that I can discover for myself who you really are, in Jesus' name, amen.

Sunday January 19

Better than the Lotto

Mal. 3: 10 ...I will...open for you the windows of Heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

“When I win the lotto....” Do you remember when they had that ad on TV? The lady would dream of all the fancy things she would do if she won. I have watched people join long lines to buy “a ticket to their dreams” and watch them get excited when the radio rang out “Super Lotto-o-o!” A genie in the bottle giving you three wishes; a fairy godmother offering better days – people are always looking for a way to riches, a way to prosperity. Funny how so few people want to try God’s way.

God has promised special blessings to those who enter into a stewardship agreement with Him to return their tithes and give an offering. Hold on! Don’t stop reading! Listen. God wants you to prosper. He said so in 3 John 2. He set out this really cool plan in Malachi 3: 8-10. Simply put, He says: “I will bless you by supplying all your basic needs. You will show that you know that the blessing comes from Me by giving back one tenth of all you gain. I will honour your faithfulness by blessing you so much that you don’t know what to do with it”. Sounds fantastic? It actually works. That is prosperity.

You see, God freely supplies all your food, shelter, protection, health care, enjoyment – every thing that’s good. He doesn’t ask for anything in return - well, no payment. But He does want something. He wants your loyalty, your love and your friendship. He says: “If you really recognize Me as Creator and Lord, then return to Me 10% of all you gain as your way of showing your loyalty. I don’t need it, it is already Mine. You are Mine. But it makes Me happy when you recognize Me.

“When you do that, I will give you more and more and bless you in all areas of life. This will build a relationship between us which is what I really want. Can you trust Me to honour my word and guarantee your prosperity? Just try Me.”

Lord, I want to have faith and to trust You with my success and my prosperity. Give me more faith today, I pray, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Monday January 20

Better than the Lotto II

Heb. 11: 6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Tuffy is busy romancing Millie under the big Mango tree in Mas Rupert's cow pasture. "I love you more than cooked food. For you I will climb the highest mountain, swim the widest ocean... I will stick by you till eternity end..." Just then Mas Rupert's bad tempered bull appears and starts to head their way. Tuffy clambers up into the mango tree, calling out over his shoulder, "Right now you deh pon you own, my girl. If you can't climb, run fe you life!"

OK. So it's just a touch of drama, but it illustrates the point. Talk is cheap. Many times those who talk strongest about love fail when it comes time to put it into action. And this is very true when it comes to us and God. So many people talk about loving God, but if showing the love calls for a bit of sacrifice or inconvenience, well....

Yesterday we talked about God asking us to return a tenth of our gains to show our love and loyalty. But many people, like Tuffy, forget love and appreciation when it comes to the point of testing. "I don't have enough money", they say; "I have bills to pay". But wait! You had *nothing* before God gave it to you. Since even the little that you have came from Him, don't you think He can replace what you give back to Him? That is the love test. Can you pass it? Or is your love "Tuffy" love?

Now, some people say, "My income is so small, one tenth is nothing!" Well, that is the beauty of the plan. The amount is not important to God. He doesn't need it. It is the relationship that matters. That is why even students and children who are not earning are asked to be a part of this covenant, because you too can have a love relationship with God, returning God's tenth from whatever He gives to you. And when that happens, He promises to bless you abundantly. What a wonderful way to express our faith in Him! Try it and see how God comes through for you.

Dear Lord, today I accept your offer of a love partnership and promise to return a faithful tithe out of all you give to me, in Jesus 'name, amen.

Tuesday January 21

Smadditization

Mark 1: 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him

“Smadditization”; do you know the word? I am almost sure you don’t. I didn’t either until I heard a well-known Jamaican lady use it. It means to make somebody (“smaddy”, in Jamaican patois) who is insignificant into somebody important. So if someone is trying to impress others with his own importance, then “him a gwa’an like him a smaddy” (he is acting as if he is somebody of importance).

Every day we see prejudice around us. People dis” (disrespect) other people for all kinds of reasons. It can be because of their looks, their poverty, their religion or their politics. Very often the weak, the poor, sick and the disabled are most badly affected. They are frequently made to feel like “nobody”.

In the time of Jesus, lepers belonged to the category of “nobody”. Leprosy was a very deadly and painful disease that made the victim ugly, as his body would be pretty much rotting away while he lived. It was considered to be so contagious that nobody wanted a leper to be anywhere near. The leper had to leave family, home and society. He could not work, had no way to earn money, was uncertain of how he would eat or where he would sleep and knew that there was no cure for his disease. In addition, the Jews felt that leprosy was a curse from God on a person who was a really bad sinner. A leper was a *nobody*.

When the leper came to Jesus, I suppose the crowds of people around Him scattered. They didn’t want this nobody to come near or to touch them. They probably tried to chase him away. He wasn’t good enough to be among them. He shouldn’t come near somebody important like Jesus. But Jesus thought differently. To Him this leper was an important person. Everybody is important to Jesus. He could feel this guy’s loneliness, his pain and his shame as people scorned him; and He had compassion on Him. Jesus did not just say, “Be healed”. He touched him! Not only was the leper healed of his disease, but the nobody felt like somebody (smaddy) again, because somebody cared enough to touch him.

Do you have times when you too feel like a nobody? Are there persons who let you feel unimportant, cheap or worthless? Always remember that to God you are somebody, somebody so important that Jesus died for you. Now that is smaditization!

Lord, help never to forget how important I am to You. Thank you for giving value to me and to my life, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Wednesday January 22

You're a VIP

Matt. 19: 14 But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of Heaven"

I once heard a short poem that went something like this:

The father heard his children scream

And so he threw them in the stream

Saying as he drowned the third

"Children should be seen, not heard".

This corny little poem is not even amusing these days, when we realize that there are people who would actually do that. Every day we hear about children who are abused and mistreated. There are frightening stories in the news about children murdered, while others go missing, kidnapped by evil persons and are never seen alive again. Among those that are "safe" at home, many of them are made to feel unwanted and unimportant, especially when important people are around. Even at church, if something is to be left out of the programme it often is the children's story. Most sermons are prepared for adults while the children are ignored; and if a meeting is to be held on Sabbath it will usually be at AY time.

Jesus' disciples acted that way one day when some mothers brought their children to Jesus to be blessed. Jesus was very busy preaching, teaching and healing and there were a lot of important persons around, so the disciples said, "Jesus is too busy now to deal with children. Bring them back some other time." But Jesus didn't agree with that. He knew a real VIP (very important person) when He saw one, and for Him, children were VIPs. He let everyone else wait and He gave the children His full attention.

And you know something? Jesus still feels that way. He loves children and is very upset when people mistreat them. He is always ready to make time for them, to listen to them and to bless them. He loves when the children take time to talk to Him in prayer, to sing and to read His word. His greatest desire is that all His children will be saved and will live with Him forever. If you are a child never forget this. For older youth, remember that when you treat the younger ones well, it makes the Lord very happy.

Lord, I am so glad that the little children are important to you. Help me to remember that always and to share your special love with your children, in Jesus' name, amen.

Thursday January 23

Where were the Children?

Gen. 7: 23 So He destroyed all living things which were on the face of the ground...Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive.

The Bible has a lot of stories. True stories. And that is the problem. It doesn't always tell the story the way we would like it to go, because it's not made up. It is reality and you can't always get reality to turn out your way. For example, I have a problem with the story of the flood. God destroyed the earth because of the wickedness. Tough, but – ok. He knows best. In the ark, eight people were saved; equal numbers of male and female. Mr. and Mrs. Noah, Mr. and Mrs. Shem, Mr. and Mrs. Ham and Mr. and Mrs. Japhet. But here is my problem: Where are the children?

There were millions of people living on the earth at that time and a lot of them must have been children, but none were in the ark. God said that the people were so evil they had to be destroyed, but what about those innocent children? Surely, the children weren't wicked too! The sad truth is that not even the children and youth were living as they should. God held them also responsible for their sins.

Today, many youth are led to believe that giving their lives to Jesus is something to put off until they are older. They think they have to "live some life first". They sometimes do things that they know are wrong, but excuse themselves that they are young; and even older people smile and call it "youthful exuberance". Children are sometimes disobedient, disrespectful and stubborn, not realizing that God expects them to do the right things that they know and understand, because He does not tolerate sin, whether it's big or small.

Here is the good news. God has made it possible for anyone to be saved, old or young; adult or child. He says if we confess our sins, if we repent, if we try to avoid the wrong and to do the right we will be saved. Youth and children, let us take God's principles seriously. Let us walk away from sin, because it brings death to everyone; adult and children alike.

Lord, help me to remember always that I too will have to answer to God for everything I do. I promise to obey your will today and always, in Jesus' name, amen.

Friday January 24

God's Home Video

Gen.1: 31 And God saw everything that He had made and indeed it was very good

My mind wanders. It wanders when I am in church during boring readings and extra-long prayers. I am not proud of it, but it helped me recently to get an awesome vision.

Travelling through the countryside, I gazed at the winding river and lofty mountains, the green trees and curious rock formations. My mind wandered to Genesis 1 how wonderful it would be to see creation in action. I thought how much I enjoy sharing pictures with my friends and that since God is our friend He would probably like to share his memories with us in Heaven.

Imagine watching a physically interactive Creation movie with 3D video and surround sound with God!

Day one: Out of nowhere this bright, warm light appears, shining on a shapeless blob of rock and water.

Day two: God uses water to make the atmosphere! That's awesome. The clouds and the various layers of the atmosphere including the gasses that comprise air. They say water is just hydrogen and oxygen, but God defies modern science.

Day three: God separates the water from the rock and makes land and seas. Imagine seeing Jamaica rise out of the sea; mountains popping up all over the world: Mount Everest, the Himalayas, and the Andes Mountains. Later, trees laden with fruit, and all manner of plant life spring up out of nowhere.

Day four: God makes the sun, the moon and the stars. If sunsets today can be so beautiful, then that first sunset must have been beyond words.

Day five: The flapping of wings fills the air and the water churns as fish of all shapes and sizes appear.

Day six: Here a squawk, there a grunt, a ruff-ruff here and a moo-moo there. A cheetah appears racing across the plain and the ground quakes under elephants' feet. They all sing a chorus of praise: the lions singing bass, the elephants baritone, the birds soprano and tenor. God kneels down, forms the first man out of earth, breathes into his nostrils – giving him life – and calls him Adam. Before the day is over Adam names all the animals and realizes he is alone. God puts Adam to sleep, surgically removes one of his ribs and makes a woman. God marries them and instructs them on how to live in this new world.

Day seven: God rests and blesses this day as the Sabbath. Have you ever noticed how truly beautiful the sunset is? Isn't it fitting that God chose the sunset to announce the beginning and end of the most amazing day ever created: the Sabbath?

That was a cool show right? If that's not a reason to want to go to Heaven, then I don't know what is. Let's work towards it.

Lord, help me to get to Heaven so I can see and hear more about your greatness, in Jesus' name, amen.

David Dunk Jr.

Sabbath January 25

We Must Never Forget

Ex. 20: 11 For in six days the Lord made the Heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them...

Last Sabbath we said that God is eager for us to know Him. In the time of ancient Israel, the people worshipped idols false gods. God constantly had to be calling them back to true worship. In pointing out the difference between the true God and the false gods of the heathens, there was one special thing the prophets used, and God used it too. They identified Him as Creator God.

God is King, but there have been many kings. He is Father, but there are many fathers. He is Master, but people have served many masters. There have been other providers, protectors, healers, even saviours; but there is only one Creator; the One who made everything. All other masters, providers and healers – all other gods – were made by Him or from things that He has made. As Creator God, He has no competition.

To forget that He is Creator is become confused. If we lose sight of where we are coming from we will be lost. When Darwin and others developed their theories about the beginning of the world and about evolution, it was a serious attack by the devil on the most important truths about God. All across the world we can see the results of this folly. It is taught in the schools and so many respected educators and world leaders believe it. Those who believe in what the Bible teaches about creation are looked upon as being foolish and ignorant. But the Bible says that it is those who teach against the things of God who are foolish.

At creation, God saw the disaster that would result when people forget their Creator and young people especially are called to remember Him (Eccl. 12: 1). God gave us a special gift to always remind us of our Creator and that we are not the great grandchildren of apes. He gave us the Sabbath. Ex. 20: 11 gives us the reason for the Sabbath: “for (because) in six days God created...”. Every time we keep God’s 7th day Sabbath we are owning Him as our Creator. He gave us baptism and the communion service to always remind us of His death and resurrection, that He is our Saviour. But He does not want us to forget that He is Creator. To do so is to deny His highest identity.

Lord, help me to honour you always by remembering you as my Creator and my God, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sunday January 26 to February 8

Sunday January 26

Highly Recommended

Matt. 11:11 Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist...

One of the jobs that I have to do frequently as a pastor is to write recommendations. A recommendation is supposed to help you to get into school or to get that job you want. Sometimes I have to refuse to write a recommendation because I do not know the person well enough, or because if I write what I know it will not help him. The people who receive the recommendation are depending upon the writer to speak the truth and to tell important things about the person that may not be obvious so they can make wise decisions.

One guy in the Bible got the best recommendation ever, because his recommendation was given by Jesus Himself! Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and He always speaks the truth. Speaking about John the Baptist Jesus said, “John was the greatest”. Wow! What a recommendation! What was so special about John that Jesus could have recommended him so highly?

Well, John was called and chosen before he was born just like God planned for each of us before we were born. The angel told his parents that he would be special and would do a special work for God. He grew up knowing this and prepared himself to do God’s work. John lived a simple life, kept out of bad company; and, growing up in the country, he spent a lot of time with God in nature. He stuck to simple, healthy foods and had lots of fresh air and physical activity.

John took his mission seriously. As a preacher, he preached exactly what God wanted him to preach. He did not allow fear or friendship to get in his way. He spoke the truth. An excellent preacher with a lot of courage, many people were baptized because of his preaching. In the end, he did his duty as a preacher even though it would cost him his life.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding things about John was his humility. He was a very popular preacher, but when Jesus began His ministry, John pointed the people to Jesus saying, “He must increase, but I must decrease”. He was happy to let Jesus take the limelight while he walked away quietly. You know real greatness through humility and selflessness.

So, how about you? People see you and have their own opinions about you. But God who knows you best, what does He think about you? Can you be highly recommended?

Dear Lord, work on me I pray and make me the kind of person that you can highly recommend, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Monday January 27

Perjury

Acts 1: 8 But you shall receive power...and you shall be witnesses to Me

When they announce in church, “Today we are going out witnessing”, you can be sure there are some persons who won’t turn up. What do you think of when you hear the word witnessing? Going from door to door trying to get people to let you in and listen to what you have to say? Being rebuffed and insulted by those who do not want to hear? People asking you questions you can’t answer? Or are you just afraid people might ask, “How come you are coming to tell me about God when you are doing so and so?”

Witnessing is something that Christians do. All of us as human beings were going to die. Jesus loved us so much that He came and died for us, and if we believe in Him we will have eternal life instead. This is good news that so many people do not know. They ignore Jesus and are still heading for death. They need to know Jesus and believe in Him. If we have the love of Jesus in us we will not want them to die. We will want them to know the Jesus who is loving, kind and forgiving. We will want to share the news that will save them from death.

It is good to witness. But even more importantly, it is good to *be* a witness. To witness, you may have to learn how to do visits, to give Bible studies or to pray with others. It may take time for you learn how, or to overcome your shyness. However, to be a witness you simply need to ask God’s Spirit to guide you that you may be like Jesus in the way you live every day. People will hear what you say, but they will believe it more if they see it in your actions. Actions do speak louder than words. Every Christian *is* a witness.

In a court of law, a witness is one who tells of what he has seen, heard or experienced personally. If he never saw or heard, if he does not really know but he pretends, they say he has committed perjury (been a false witness) and he can go to prison for it. Are you a true witness? Does the way you live really tell others about Christ? Can they know Him better because they know you? Or are you committing spiritual perjury?

Today, let others see the good things of Jesus in your life and they will come to know Him because they see Him in you. Be a true witness.

Lord, help me today to be a true witness so that others will see Jesus in me, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Tuesday January 28

The Gospel According to Nature

Gen. 1: 31 Then God saw everything that He had made and indeed, it was very good

When was the last time you took notice of the NATURAL world around you? The sky, the trees, or those flowers in your garden, yeah, those chrysanthemums (Christian-the-what?!)? Maybe you don't even know what those are. It is quite easy for us to be extra caught up with our computers, tablets and mp4s in this techno driven world. However, today God is asking you to pause for a while and read the bible of nature.

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL

Take a lesson from the gospel according to the flower. Ever noticed how beautiful, yet unboastful the flowers are? They don't strut around showing off their beauty. They simply and so wonderfully show forth the praise of God and tell of His handiwork. (Psalm 19:1-5). Why not be like a flower today? Be humble, don't even draw attention to what a master-piece you are; draw attention to who your Master is today! For surely everything from nature has been wonderfully made (Psalms 139:14).

COUNTLESS LESSONS

I could never exhaust, how much nature shows me that my God is loving, tender and beautiful. But you can find out for yourself. Go on a nature walk, look at your garden, your lawn even and let the Holy Spirit teach you more of the Gospel according to nature.

Lord, teach me to appreciate the beautiful things that you have made and to learn from them the lessons they have to teach me, in Jesus' name, amen.

Charmaine Lindsay

Wednesday January 29

Professor Ant

Prov. 6: 6 Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways and be wise

Some people are wise. Some are otherwise. God wants us all to be wise and He spends a lot of time in the book of Proverbs teaching us how to be wise. In chapter 6 He speaks pretty strongly about how foolish it is to be lazy and He advises us to go to the ant to get a lesson in wisdom. I took His advice and, trust me, there is a lot to be learned from Professor Ant.

Ants are hard workers. Somehow, in their tiny brains, they have come to realize that laziness leads to poverty and loss. (If you haven't figured that out as yet then maybe you need to get a bigger brain). Ants also know that they must always put aside something for the future, so they store up food for "a rainy day". They are determined and not afraid to face challenges, so an ant will attempt to carry (and often will succeed) something several times his size. If he tries one way and it doesn't work he will keep on trying other ways until he gets it to work.

Ants have also learned the wisdom of sharing; thus an ant will find food, and before you know it, he will have his friends, family members and the guys from up the road happily eating and hauling food. What a wonderful lesson for us selfish human beings to learn! They are also great team players. Just watch them work together on a food-hauling project, each one doing his fair share of the work. There is no boss or supervisor present. Ants work without anyone having to threaten them. If you should put something in the way of an ant who is on the food trail, he will go over, under, around or through it, but he is a very determined little fellow when he sets his mind to do something. We too must learn not to give up easily.

Yes, ants can teach us a lot; but not only ants. All of God's creation can teach us important lessons that will help to make us wise, but these lessons are best learned when we realize that they come from God. Take the time to enjoy nature and learn God's lessons for us, even from Professor Ant.

Dear Lord, help me to take the time to study the things of nature so I can learn wisdom from your creation, in Jesus' name, amen.

Thursday January 30

Murphy is a Fraud!

Rom. 8: 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.

Murphy gives himself big ratings. In fact, he is so sure of himself that he doesn't have an opinion, a suggestion or even a theory. No sir; Murphy has a law. Simply put, it states: "If something can go wrong it will". Not satisfied with that he adds: "If nothing can go wrong it will go wrong anyway". There are many Murphyites around; people who are just waiting for the next disaster to happen. They say that a slice of bread will always fall with the buttered side to the ground; that rain will always fall on your laundry day; and "smile now, tomorrow will be worse".

But hey! I've got news for you. Murphy is a fraud. If you listen to him you will always be depressed, discouraged and distraught, because while you are looking out for the next disaster you will not have time to see the blessings you have right now. Yes, life has problems, but God is good, He loves us and good is always stronger than evil. Check this out.

Bad: I slipped and fell. Good: I was able to get up again.

Bad: I stepped in some mud. Good: It's mud, not...;

Bad: my fiancé (e) got involved with somebody else. Good: it was before the wedding.

Bad: I flunked an exam. Good: I only flunked one.

You see, while we are in this sinful world there will always be problems as Satan tries to frustrate God's children, but the good news is that for every curse there are a thousand blessings. Also, God has promised to help us through the bad times. He says His grace is sufficient to get us through every trial. In the long run He will make every bad thing work out for our good. I don't know how He will do that, but He doesn't tell lies. Finally, He has promised that one day He will give us a new world where there will be absolutely no problems. So, kick Murphy. I don't know about you, but my future is so bright I've got to wear shades. Life is Good!!!

Lord, thank you so much that all things in life may not be good but they will work out for my good and for my happiness because you are in control. I trust you, in Jesus' name, amen.

Friday January 31

God does not forget

2 Pet. 2: 9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise...but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish...

Did you know that every word spoken to God is heard? At an early age I was introduced to the "Sabbath Message". I went to church, but only because my father insisted that I should. As soon as I became an "adult" (i.e. age 18), I announced to my parents that as I was now an adult I would be making my own decisions. One of those decisions was to leave the church.

What a mess that turned out to be!!! During one of the parties a friend who knew my background asked if I would go back to church. I said, "Yes, I will when I have my own place and when I get to that certain age of 25".

Naturally, I forgot all about that promise. I got my own place, a good job and what I thought was a good time. Then one day I got up and lost my desire to smoke. A year later I lost the appetite to drink. Everyone, including me, thought it strange. Then one year later there was a crusade in Greater Portmore. The Bible workers invited me but I had too much to do. You see I was studying and had failed the exam so I needed to put in more work. In the first week of the crusade my neighbour who isn't a Christian decided to visit the evangelist who is a childhood friend and asked me to accompany her. Reluctantly, I relented and accompanied her.

I attended the crusade for the 4 weeks following that night, gave my life to the Lord andaced my exams. I was 25.

It was only afterwards that I remembered the conversation where I, in essence, promised God that I would return to him at age 25.

God hears our prayers even when they are spoken in jest. His desire is to save us. No matter how long it takes or how far from Him we have gone He reaches out loving hands to save us from ourselves. God does not forget us. What He does forget is our sins and remembers them no more.

2 Peter 2: 9 says "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (KJV).

Lord, thank you for always remembering me and for reaching out to save me even when I don't deserve it, in Jesus' name, amen.

Angela Curtis

Sabbath February 1

Your Special Gift

Ps. 118: 24` This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it

Did you say thanks for that special gift? And you are asking “What gift?” The gift of today. Today is your special gift from God. Have you ever thought about it? To be alive today is something to be grateful for. Your heart still beats. You can see and hear and feel! This is a privilege you have not earned, or paid for, that you do not deserve. It is God’s free gift.

But here is more. Today is all you have. Yesterday is gone. It won’t come back. You can’t change it. Tomorrow is not yet here. It may never come for you. Ah, but today! You have today. It is yours to use, to do, to accomplish, to LIVE! You have to live today *today*. It will not keep until tomorrow. When it ends it will become another yesterday and will never come back. Its only value will be that as you remember it, the memory can help to make you happy or sad.

So live today, love today, laugh today, sing today, be happy today. God wants you to enjoy His gift of today. That’s why He gave it to you. Your life is made up of many todays. Take them “one day at a time”. Ask God to live each today with you, helping you to spend each moment of this precious gift very well. Count your blessings. Be kind to others. Worship God. Share His love. Trust His leading. This is the day the Lord has made; be glad and rejoice in it. Have a wonderful day.

Lord, thank You for the gift of today. May You be pleased with the way I live today, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sunday February 2

Gifted to Serve

1 Cor. 12: 4-11 There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit...distributing to each one individually as He wills.

Most people are aware that they have a talent, but not necessarily a spiritual gift. You can have one or the other or both. Talents are natural abilities given to us by God through our parents and spiritual gifts are gifts, given to us by God, that we were not necessarily born with. Simply put, “natural gifts are given at birth, while spiritual gifts are given at our spiritual birth. Though God gives us both, only Christians receive spiritual gifts.” These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit.

Everyone, including you, has been given a gift so that they can serve. Talents and spiritual gifts should be used at all cost to do the work given to us by Christ in Matt. 28:19, 20: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations”. After you have identified your talents and spiritual gifts you should join with others to use those gifts to reach those who have not yet become members of God’s church.

If your talent is the ability to sing, or if you have double joints [hypermobility]; if you are bright academically or you were born with an excellent memory; if you have acting ability or know how to play an instrument without instruction; or if your spiritual gift is to prophesy, to heal, to speak in tongues, to pastor, to teach etc.; then you are equipped to prepare other people to be part of the Kingdom of God.

At home, at school, at play and at work you need to use your gift. This is why God has blessed you with it. Inspire, motivate, and encourage everyone with whom you come in contact by using your talents and/or your spiritual gifts. Do not hide it or it will be taken away (Matt. 25: 14-30). Use it so that someone can have access to eternal life. God is depending on you.

Lord, thank you for the gifts and talents you have given to me. Please help me to use them to bring others to you, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Pastor Romone Phoenix

Monday February 3

Old Dog, No New Tricks

Ps. 18: 34 He teaches my hands to make war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze

The children of Israel have made it to the Promised Land, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They have fought many wars, defeated many enemies and now they are sharing up the land among the tribes and families of Israel. Along comes a tough-looking guy, walking with a bounce in his steps. “Give me this mountain”, he asks Joshua, looking at the towering mountain in the distance. Joshua stares at him for a while then begins to smile. You see, there are two strange things about the request. First, that mountain has not yet been conquered and it is full of some of the toughest, meanest warriors including the Anakims – a set of giants. Second, the brother who is making the request is Caleb and he is eighty-five years old, some forty years older than all the other men!

Yesseree! This Caleb is one baaad boy! He is eager for a fight. He knows that the people in that mountain are the enemies of the Lord and that God told Israel to drive them out. He knows that with God on his side he can more than beat the Anakims.

But that leathery old fellow didn’t just become mean in his old age. Over forty years before, Moses had sent spies into the Promised Land to see how they could best conquer it. Ten of those spies came back and told frightening stories how strong and fierce the enemies were, especially the Anakims. The people became afraid and decided to go back to Egypt. But two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb spoke positively. “Let us go up at once”, Caleb said, “because with God we can defeat them”. Tough from the start.

Well, Israel didn’t go and God was so upset with them that they had to wander forty years in the wilderness till all those cowards died. Now, even as an old man, Caleb was like a dog on a leash, straining to go. (By the way, his name, Caleb, means “dog”!) He got permission to take the mountain and he did; driving out the giants in the name of the Lord. Today when evil is so strong in the world, God needs some men and women who are not afraid; who are eager to fight against evil because they know that with God they will surely win. If the right attitude is developed when you are young, when you get older it will only get better.

So, how about you? Will you take the challenge and fight the battles of the Lord? I hope you will.

Lord, help me to trust you so much that I will not be afraid to do the right and oppose the wrong at all times, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Tuesday February 4

Destined for Greatness!

Jer. 29: 11 “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you”, says the Lord, “thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope”.

Have you ever felt inadequate and unqualified to do something? Did you ever run from great opportunities because you were afraid of undesirable results? Stop! Recite Jeremiah 29:11. Greatness is about offering your good service in humility to those around you and to the world. You were created and placed in this world to make the best use of your life and to leave a memorable mark on the lives of others. God has great plans for you! Your Father, being the loving and compassionate Father He is, has already mapped out a road to riches, peace, success and worth for you! You now, just need to live out Proverbs 3:4-5.

You are a present to this world and your life can be whatever you want it to be. Therefore, don't belittle yourself; always give the best of your abilities. God wants you to be a great person for him.

Our Deepest Fear

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest,

The glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,

We unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

-Marianne Williamson

When you become your best and when you do your best your Father in Heaven is happy and satisfied because His plan is fulfilled in you.

Lord, fulfil your vision of greatness in me, beginning today, so that you may be glorified, in Jesus' name, amen.

Alshadane Wright

Wednesday February 5

Oooh! It's Going to be Great!

1 Cor. 2: 9 ...Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him

The imagination is a powerful gift. I remember as a child climbing the willow tree in front of my grandparents' house, swinging out on a limb, jumping down, then doing it again over and over. It was fun. One day I climbed up and swung out, but instead of letting go, I held on. Looking down I imagined that I was way up in the sky where airplanes fly and that the little creatures on the ground were people far below. After a while, I believed it so much that I cried for help and they had to come and take me down.

Imagination. We can make things up in our minds that can be so interesting and realistic. You see, God the Creator made us in His image. We are therefore creative and can see things in our imagination that don't really exist. So people are able to make up stories and draw pictures and do other creative things. God likes when we use our imagination in positive ways.

When God spoke to us about Heaven, He wanted us to know it is a wonderful place. He knew that we would hear about milk and honey and streets of gold and so on, but those were the things that people liked back in Bible times. Those things don't appeal to us now, but in Bible times they wouldn't have understood if He told them about SUV's and jacuzzis. So God simply said "It is better than you have seen, heard or imagined!" What have you imagined? God has given us the permission to let our imagination run wild when we think of Heaven.

I imagine living in my mansion, with a stove in my kitchen that will create new recipes by itself and a gungo-peas stew machine on the counter. Flowers outside will bloom a different colour every month and on my farm out back will be a pizza tree where the nicest pizzas will grow (without any cholesterol). I will fly without wings to visit my friends on various planets and pet the fish underwater in the river of life for an hour without coming up to breathe. My MP10 will show me 3D pictures of real things that happened in the times of Joshua and Daniel and I will be able to sing a quartet all by myself.

Now I hear you saying, "Stop! You're crazy!" Well, it's imagination, but Heaven is real. Think about it. Nothing is too hard for our Creator and He is going to do everything to make us riotously happy forever. Just imagine! By the way, I'm inviting you over to my mansion for dinner on our 1000th Sabbath after we arrive. We'll talk about what we imagined and compare it to what is really real. Is that a date? Thank you. See you there.

Lord, I know that Heaven will be better than the best things I can imagine. Thank you for making it possible that I can be there, in Jesus' name, amen.

Thursday February 6

Foot-in-Mouth Disease

Ps. 141: 3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips

Some of you might know that the party song for the Jamaica Labour Party is “Stand up Jamaica, When you Hear the Bell”. The party song for the People’s National Party is “The Trumpet has Sounded”. I was conducting the funeral of a well-known JLP supporter – let’s call him Peter. As we were about to leave the graveside, the JLP party supporters, according to their tradition, began to sing, “Stand up Peter, when you hear the bell”. I immediately announced loudly, “Peter will not stand up again until the trumpet sounds”. There was silence for a moment before I realized what I had said and hastily tried to correct things: ‘I mean Gabriel’s trumpet, the trumpet of the Lord...’ Fortunately, the folks knew me well enough to know it was a genuine mistake and everybody had a good laugh.

We all make such mistakes sometimes – as we like to say, “I put my foot in my mouth”. At friendly gatherings we often laugh over the verbal slips made by ourselves, our friends, our pastors, or our politicians. But verbal slips are not always amusing. Sometimes saying the wrong thing causes serious trouble. We sometimes talk matters that should have remained confidential, express thoughts that are biased and prejudicial, criticize too harshly or express opinions before we think something through. Our emotions also sometimes cause us to put “foot in mouth”. People who are very angry, excited, or maybe carried away with romantic “fever” sometimes say things they later regret and wish they could take back.

As a child with a bad case of “foot in mouth” disease, I was blessed to have a good mother who gave me a dose of medicine every morning until the complaint was cured. Each morning before I left for school she would have us (my cousin and me) repeat the words of today’s text: “Set a watch O Lord before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (KJV). The sin of speaking the wrong thing, or at the wrong time or in the wrong way is difficult to deal with. The Bible tells us how hard it is to handle; but thank God, He can give us the strength to overcome this weakness and heal us of that destructive “foot in mouth disease”.

Lord, help me today and each day to speak wisely, honestly and constructively, in Jesus’ name I pray, amen.

Friday February 7

He's Everything

Rev. 21: 6 And He said to me, "...I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Big Bird from Sesame Street sang the song "abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz, that's the longest word I've had ever seen". Of course, you realize that the song was just a fun way to teach the alphabet. Even serious things can be learned and considered in fun ways. In today's text, God declares Himself to be alpha and omega. Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet (the New Testament was written in Greek), and omega is the last letter. In our situation God would have said "I am A and Z". But what does that mean? It means He is the most important Person in life; He is at its beginning and at its end. We can be born only if God gives us life and when we die only He can make us live again. He is the Beginning and the End.

But you know, a better way to say it would probably be "I am A *to* Z", because God is not only at the beginning and end of our lives but at every moment throughout our lives. We, therefore, should not do like some people and wait until we think we are near the end of our lives to surrender to God. He's shouldn't just be A and Z, but all the other letters in between – the entire alphabet. So let's have some fun. If God is my alphabet what could each letter mean?

- A He's awesome (you knew that one was coming, right?)
- B Beautiful (Though we've never seen Him)
- C Constant (always there, never changing)
- D Dependable
- E Everlasting
- F Faithful
- G Gracious
- H Holy
- I Invincible
- J Just
- K Kind
- L Loving (you expected that as well)

M	Marvelous
N	Never-failing Friend
O	Omnipresent
P	Powerful
Q	Quick to answer our prayers
R	Righteous
S	Strong
T	Teacher
U	Unmoveable
V	Vigilant
W	Wise
X	‘Xceptional
Y	Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
Z	Zealous

Okay, so maybe I didn’t do so great on some of them, but as you go throughout the day and think about our wonderful God, maybe you can come up with some words that say more accurately who God is to you. Whatever your words are, I hope you will find Him to be what He really is: your A, Z and every letter in between!

Lord, help me today to remember that at every moment and in every situation you are with me, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sabbath February 8

Respect is Due

Hab. 2: 20 But the Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him

The people gathered at the foot of the mountain. Many were silent. Others talked softly as if they were afraid of disturbing somebody. They were nervous and restless as they looked up at the mountain. For days they had been preparing to meet here with God. They had been told, “Don’t go too close to the mountain. If you do you will die!”

Suddenly a strange cloud began descending, getting darker and darker until it covered the mountain. They jumped as there was a bright shaft of lightening followed by a mighty crash of thunder. For several minutes lightning and thunder continued, then came the sound of a trumpet growing louder and louder. The ground shook and rumbled as their hearts pounded with terror; men sweating in fear, women and children clutching each other. And then above all frightening sounds came the voice of God...

This happened at Mt. Sinai over three thousand years ago as God called Israel together to give them His laws. The people were so afraid in the presence of God that they said to Moses, “You go and talk to God on our behalf. We are afraid to stand before Him”. If we were there we probably would have said the same thing!

Aren’t you glad that God doesn’t come to us like that anymore? Today we just kneel and talk to our loving heavenly Father. Our God is a gentle God. Our God? But isn’t He the same God? He is! The Bible says He does not change. Our kind and gentle Father is the same awesome God of Mt. Sinai. At that time He had to show His awesomeness so that the children of Israel would appreciate His greatness and His holiness. But He was the same kind, patient, loving Father He is today. He has not changed.

Today God deserves the same respect that the Israelites learned to have. We often take God for granted because He is patient and forgiving when we treat Him with disrespect. We still need to respect His name and not use it carelessly (including OMG!). We often disrespect Him by talking excessively, chewing gum and playing electronic games in church; by the careless way we dress for church services; by failing to kneel when required and by looking around during prayer; by sprawling in our seats and sleeping in church. God is God. Respect is due.

We need to fear God, but we shouldn’t show Him respect because we are afraid. We should respect Him because we love Him and appreciate His goodness. He deserves our highest respect. Don’t you think so?

Dear Lord, forgive me for the times I have been disrespectful to you and help me to show reverence to you at all times, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sunday March 9

When Jesus Came Calling

Luke 19: 10 For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

As far back as he could remember that is what he wanted: MONEY! To be rich. He wasn't tall, dark and handsome. His only really good subject in school was Math. Not talented or good at sports, he didn't stand out in any way; but now, wow! The large white mansion, the really cool ride, the designer clothes, he was somebody! They couldn't ignore him now even if they wanted to. He had the government fully behind him. Yet, sometimes he felt empty. He wasn't happy. He wished they really liked him, that he had a genuine friend; that life had some greater meaning and deeper satisfaction.

Although Jesus was such big news, he hadn't gotten excited about Him like the others had. He was too busy making money. Now suddenly he began to feel the excitement that seemed to grip everybody in Jericho because Jesus was coming to town. He had always noticed how those who spent time with Jesus seemed to be happier and at peace. Could Jesus give him some happiness, some peace? If he could just get a glimpse of Him...

Remembering how as boys they would climb the trees to get a glimpse of Caesar, Herod and other dignitaries who came to town, he quickly climbed up into the old sycamore tree. Nobody would notice him here. As the crowds passed below the tree, he finally caught sight of Jesus. He saw the happy people around Him and he wished he could be included in this fellowship. He almost fell from the tree when Jesus stopped, looked directly up at him and called him by his name. There was a moment of silence while everyone stared at him and then the mocking laughter started from the crowd as they looked - down their noses - up at him.

But Jesus felt the pain of his lonely heart. He knew that Zaccheus needed a change which only he could give. He was not ashamed to identify with this unpopular rascal, even going home to eat with him. Others wondered why Jesus should choose to be in such awful company, but He had come to save the lost, to give worth to the worthless and joy to the heavy-hearted. He still does that today and wants to do it for you and me. Will you let him into your life?

Dear Lord, I need the joy, peace and hope that You bring to all. Come in and give me a new life I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Monday March 10

Who is Your Navigator?

Ez. 27: 8 Your wise men, O Tyre, were in you; they became your pilots.

On January 17, 2013, the United States Navy was awfully embarrassed when one of their ships, the USS Guardian, got stuck on a reef in the Philippines. This was a military ship, a minesweeper, with sophisticated equipment. The US navy has one of the best navigational systems in the world, but they got stuck because, according to their navigators, the reef that they got stuck on was supposed to be eight miles away! They had to scrap a multi-million dollar ship and pay a large fine for the damaged reef because the navigator had made a mistake.

In today's text, God speaks to the people of Tyre. Old Testament prophets constantly warned the people of Israel, God's chosen people, to turn from their sinful ways and avoid the punishment of God. But God was not only concerned about Israel. He was also concerned about the other nations around, even though they were heathens and idol worshippers. God chose Israel to do a special work for Him, and as His special servants they got some special privileges, but salvation was intended for everyone, not just the Jews.

Tyre had an excellent harbour and its people, the Phoenecians were perhaps the greatest sailors of ancient times. On the open sea, they knew how to find their destination even though they didn't have compass, GPS or any of the fancy equipment we have today. But Ezekiel, the prophet, told them that they had lost their way as a people. Spiritually, they were about to wind up on the rocks of destruction because they didn't follow the right directions. God had given His instructions but they preferred to follow the directions of their so-called wise men and ignore Gods instructions.

There are many people today, teachers and university professors, doctors, philosophers, technocrats, politicians and even church leaders who will advise and instruct us to go contrary to what God says in His word. They will tell you that God's instructions are not logical, that they are not relevant for these times, that that's not what God meant, or that God has changed His mind on some things. But only God knows how to guide us through the dangers of this life and lead us to eternal life. Any voice that speaks against the word or instruction of God is evil (no matter how good it sounds) and will only lead to destruction. Follow the real Navigator and His instructions in His Word.

Lord, thank You for the Bible, the only trustworthy guide as I face the challenges of life. I commit myself to obeying and following Your word. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

Tuesday March 11

Mr. Big Head

Rev. 4: 11 You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power.

Hezekiah was on cloud nine. Ooh, life was good. Just a few weeks ago he was so sick. In fact, he *knew* he was going to die because God had told him so. But now here he was, healed by a miracle from God. God had even turned back time to give him a sign. Was he special, or was he special? And now, sitting in his parlour, were some of the world's leading scientists and dignitaries from the greatest country in the world. They had come to see him, the one who was so honoured that time could be turned back just for him. They were beginning to understand that Israel, God's chosen people were not pyaah-pyaah, dibby-dibby people (meaning: unimportant or insignificant).

Dressed to impress and being most hospitable, Hezekiah gave them the royal treatment. They must respect Israel. They must know that God's people are the best. He had the royal chefs feed them the best food, let them stay at the palace and enjoy the royal five-star (make that ten-star) treatment and brought Israel's best musicians and entertainers. And my! They were impressed! They praised Israel and its king. Before they left, he gave them a personal tour of the temple and the palaces, the residential areas, the bank and the treasury, the resorts and parks – the best of Israel. They returned with a new impression of Israel, God's people.

But there was one Person who was not impressed: God. He sent the prophet Isaiah with a message to King Hezekiah: "Hey Hezekiah, you have been too proud and big-headed. Also, you have not been very smart with your showing off. These guys are Babylonians. Now that you have shown them all your riches they are going to come back one day and take them all away".

You see, the healing and the turning back of time was a chance for Hezekiah to glorify the God of miracles. All the gold, silver and cool stuff was a chance to glorify God who is kind and blesses his children. But Hezekiah chose to show off and to glorify himself. Isn't it just like us? We like to impress others with our brightness, money, fancy gadgets or good looks and forget that all these are gifts from a loving Heavenly Father; that He deserves the glory. When these things attract others to us, we should then point them to God.

Dear Lord, keep me humble, I pray, and help me to remember that you alone are worthy of our praise, in Jesus' name, amen.

Wednesday March 12

Ouch!

Matt. 25: 23 His Lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful...”

When he was a baby his mother had said, “I am lending him to the Lord for as long as he lives”. With this in mind, from childhood he spent his entire life in God’s service, as a prophet, a priest and a judge. He had carried messages to Israel from God; had spoken to God on behalf of the people; prayed for them, cried over them, served them; his whole life was wrapped up in Israel. He had brought up his sons to serve the Lord and, as was expected, they also became judges. The young men were not perfect, they made mistakes, but surely, those could be worked out. And Samuel himself had a few good working years left. That was why when the elders of Israel came to him with their request, he was so shocked. “You are old”, they said, “and your sons are not behaving right. We cannot work with the present leadership anymore. Get us a king”.

Samuel was deeply hurt. The words rang in his ears. “You are old”. Yes, surely he was, but not *that* old. Couldn’t they wait until he retired? He had given his best, his life to Israel. Is this the way they showed their appreciation? “Your sons are not behaving right”. In other words, “you have not been a good father and have not raised them right”. The accusation burned him. “Get us a king”. They wanted to be like the other nations. Hadn’t they learned anything? Had his whole lifework been in vain? He had failed as a pastor. He went home hurt and burdened.

But then the Lord spoke to Samuel and told him something that we each should remember. The people are not yours, they are Mine. The message is not yours, it is Mine. The work is not yours, it is Mine. They have not rejected you, they have rejected Me.

Sometimes as we serve God, we get discouraged by what looks like failure. Sometimes we are hurt by those who criticize and who fail to see the sacrifices we are making. Just remember when that happens, we are only representatives. It all belongs to God. He is the one who will judge our work and worth in the long run. Let us be satisfied that we did our best for him.

Dear Lord, sometimes it is hard to accept that working for you can be so hard and thankless, but you went through so much for me that I pledge to keep on doing my best, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Thursday March 13

Ina de Bus

Prov. 12: 22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.

It happened a couple years ago, but I still remember it clearly. When I approached the minibus downtown, the ‘ductor was shouting “Mandeville, Mandeville, highway-Mandeville”. “You going straight to Mandeville, “Ductor”, I asked. “Yeh man, straight to Mandeville”. “You not going to stop in May Pen?” “No. Non-stop highway-Mandeville”.

So I got into the bus. When it was full, we headed out at minibus speed (a little slower than the speed of sound so that you can hear the reggae music they are playing). Then the bus took a sudden swing and headed towards May Pen. “We never plan to go May Pen”, the ‘ductor explained. “we jus goin’ drop off this man”. But once in May Pen they parked, several passengers came off, we waited and waited for the bus to fill up again and then the ‘ductor announced that we would need to “tek that Coaster deh, because the bus going back to Town”. “Ductor”, I shouted angrily, “howcome you tell me that the bus going to Mandeville and now you turning back?” “So what”, he replied calmly, “nobody never tell you lie yet?”

That day “ina de bus”, I learned the truth that some people are so comfortable with lying that all they need is a good reason. “Good reason”, of course varies from person to person. It might mean that telling the lie will help the person to get a little extra money, or to avoid an embarrassing situation, or to get a job or a visa, or to impress somebody of importance. Unfortunately, many persons who feel that way are professing Christians! It’s true! Many “decent” church-going Christians will lie about all kinds of things and figure that if nobody is hurt, they’ve done nothing wrong. Some even tell lies that undermine church leadership or destroy people’s reputations.

Today’s text reminds us that lying is not an option for Christians. We can afford to tell the truth because God protects the truth and those who speak the truth. (More about that tomorrow.) God is so committed to truth, He says “I am the Truth”. In Rev. 21: 8, we are told that all liars will burn in the fires of Hell. Let us be true children of God and always be true to the truth.

Dear Lord, I know you hate lying lips. Help me to be honest and courageous enough to speak the truth at all times, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Friday March 14

More Valuable than Money

Prov. 23:23 Buy the truth and do not sell it

Recently, I watched a video recording of a respected church leader talking to a group of leaders from other denominations. “Let us unite and be as one” he said (I am paraphrasing). “Let’s forget about the differences in doctrine down here. God will sort it out when we get up there”. That sounded so good! It is a shame that Christians are so divided into many denominations. As believers in one God, we should just unite and love each other. After all, Jesus prayed that His followers would all be united as one.

However, even though unity is important to Christianity, there are other important things too. One of them is ***truth***. God wants us all to seek out the truth and when we find it, to hold on to it and not let it go. In 1Thess.5: 21, He commands that we “prove all things and hold fast to that which is good” (KJV). You see, sin all started when Eve was deceived; in other words, she believed a lie. Jesus calls Satan the father of lies and warns us over and over to be careful of deception. Deception is being fooled by a lie that looks like the truth. But God is so serious about truth He says He, Himself is the Truth! (Jn. 14: 6).

God wants us to know the truth and that is why He has given us the Bible. We need to constantly study it as we are guided by the Holy Spirit and to obey what we find in it. Satan does not want us to embrace God’s truth. He wants to get rid of it altogether and has always been fighting against those who hold to the truth. Jesus knew that. He said that the truth of the Gospel would turn many people against each other. It is not what He wanted, but what He knew would happen. Down through the ages, millions of persons have died defending the truth and protecting our right to have it and to live it. We are not free now to just forget the sacrifices that they made.

No, God’s truth is still essential today and we cannot ignore it even for the sake of unity. That unity is too expensive. To believe otherwise is to be deceived. Instead, buy the truth – at whatever price, and never lose it at any cost.

Lord, Your words to us, Your truth, is so important, it has been paid for with blood. Help us to be true and not to sell out what has been bought for us at such a high price, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sabbath March 15

In the River, On the Bank

1 Cor. 15: 58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, ...

We used to play this game at social. We would all stand side by side in front of a line on the ground. One person would shout “In the river!” and we would jump forward over the line. The caller would then shout, “On the bank!” and we would jump backward to the where we were before. We were supposed to respond as quickly as possible after the call. Of course, the catch was, we wouldn’t know what the call would be. Those who jumped into the river when he said “on the bank” would be out of the game, and those who jumped on the bank when he said “in the river” – same thing.

Many people approach their Christian life like they are playing that game. Sometimes they are in the river, sometimes on the bank. In other words, they are unsteady, unstable and constantly changing; this moment living victoriously, the next moment compromising and backsliding. God is patient and forgiving and He knows how hard we try sometimes, even when we fail. He tells us where we try and fail that His grace is sufficient.

But while God is willing to make up for our weaknesses, He is not honoured by those who take His grace for granted and are comfortable with their own weaknesses. To be a good Christian calls for discipline. We must not only pray for strength and ask God to keep us, we must also do our part. We must know and admit to our weaknesses and try to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again. If I have a weakness for watching the wrong movies or listening to the wrong type of music, instead of just praying for strength to overcome, I need to get rid of them from my MP4 and my I-pad. If I have a weakness with sexual behavior, while praying for victory I should also avoid going to places or putting myself in situations where I am more likely to face temptation.

A consistent devotional life: faithfully taking time out for prayer and Bible study, talking with friends about the things of God, regular church attendance and observing the laws of temperance will help to keep our Christian lives consistent and safe out of the river of sinful behaviour.

Dear Lord, I need You with me every moment so I can be a steady and consistent Christian. Help me to develop those habits that will keep me steady I pray, in Jesus’ name, amen

Sunday March 16

The Father's Love

John 16: 23 ...whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you.

"I hate my father", Jay said. His back was bleeding and he had bruises all over from the beating that his drunken father had given him. "You musn't hate him", his mother pleaded, "Pray for him. Ask God, your heavenly Father, to change him". I don't want to talk to Him either. He is a father and I hate Him too". "Jay, don't say that", Mother said. "God is good and kind". "No, He is not", Jay responded, "I will talk to Jesus. He is kind. Jesus will answer my prayers." Mother had quite a job to clear up Jay's mind.

There are people who believe as Jay did; that Jesus is their Friend, loving and kind and eager to save, while the Father is stern and quick to punish; and we escape His wrath only because Jesus intercedes for us. The truth is that God the Father loves us as much as His Son does. Jesus said, "My Father and I are one". He also said, He who has seen Me has seen my Father". If Jesus is loving, His Father is too. 1 Cor. 5: 19 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. In other words, when Jesus came and died for us, the sacrifice was not on Him alone. The Father was active in our salvation and He suffered deeply when His Son suffered. Everybody's favourite text says that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...". God so loved...!

So you see, God the Father loves you. Jesus said that we should pray to the Father in His (Jesus') name. This is not because the Father doesn't love us, but sin separated us from God. Because of sin, we lost the privilege of approaching God because He is so holy. This pained the heart of the Father and so the Godhead got together and made a plan to fix it. All of Heaven suffered with the pain of that sacrifice. But now, God is pleased to hear us when we come to Him and when we mention the name of His Son whom He gave for our salvation. Don't be afraid; Go to the Father in the name of Jesus and He will answer your prayer, because the Father loves you so much.

Dear Lord, thank you that you love me and that you gave your Son to save my soul. I now as you have told me to, I come to you in His name, amen.

Monday March 17

Counselor, help!

Matt. 6: 7 But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do...s

You be the counselor. Your friends Tallie and Mac ask for your help. They have been married for a year now, but are not enjoying it. Although they both swear undying love for each other, their relationship is dying. “Do you still love each other?” “Oh yes, we do”. “Is there somebody else in the picture?” “No, there is nobody else.” “Is there...?” “No”. “Do you...?” “No”. There seems to be no problem, but they have a problem.

When you spend a week with them you notice they are nice to each other. Every morning they greet each other, “Good morning, Sweetheart. Did you sleep well?” Good morning, Dear. Yes, I did. Did you?” “Yes thanks. Breakfast is ready”. While Mac eats, Tallie gets ready for work. By the time she is ready, he is going through the door. “Have a nice day, Sweetheart”. SMOOCH! “You too, Dear”. They are gone.

In the evening Tallie is home early. Dinner is ready when Mac comes home late. SMOOCH! “How was your day, Sweetheart?” Fine, thanks. How was yours?” “Great. Ready to eat?” “In a minute”. He goes to wash his hands. He watches the TV as he eats, yawning occasionally. When he gets up from the table, he sits before the TV. Tallie is in the bedroom doing...whatever. By the time he wakes up and goes to bed she is asleep. This happens routinely *every day*. Now, do you see a problem? What will you say to them?

They have at least one clear problem. There is no meaningful communication. First of all, apparently, they are both so busy, they do not spend enough time together to really communicate. Second, when they do communicate, they say the same things over and over until they hardly have any meaning any more. If they continue like that, the relationship will die.

Is your relationship with God what it should be? Do you feel dissatisfied and wonder why? Could the problem be the same as Tallie and Mac have? Do you spend enough quality time with Jesus, or do you squeeze Him in between school, work, TV, friendships...? When you speak with Him, do you find that your conversations are short, and that you repeat the same things over and over each time? That what you say is so boring that even you fall asleep? Maybe it's time to prioritize your time with God and talk to Him as to a friend. Try it. It works.

Dear Lord, I'm so sorry for not relating to you as I should. Help me now as I try to change the way I relate to you, in Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday March 18

Can You Reach My Friend?

James 5:16 Pray for one another that you may be healed

The centurion came to Jesus. “My servant is very sick”, he said, “I think he is going to die. Could you please heal him?” Now this was interesting. Generally, Romans were heathens, not believing in the true God. It was surprising that one should be coming to Jesus with such a request. But it gets more interesting. When Jesus offered to come and heal him the centurion said, “Lord, you do not have to come. Just speak the word of healing right where you are and I know he will be healed”. No wonder Jesus said afterwards to His disciples, “I haven’t seen this kind of faith anywhere in Israel”.

The centurion’s servant was healed. But that leads to some questions. The centurion was a heathen. Does God hear and answer the prayers of heathens? And what about prayers for healing; isn’t it important that the person who is sick exercise his faith? In this case the person who was sick wasn’t even the one who was asking. Can we pray successfully for people who are not even praying for themselves?

God is our Father and He is kind to all of us – good and bad alike. He respects our choices and does not force us to acknowledge Him. He is sending blessings to everyone every day: rain, food, fresh air, protection. Sometimes He answers prayers immediately so that we will learn to have faith. At other times, He delays His answer, stretching our faith as He tries to build a faith relationship with us. But anyone can call out to God at any time and He will answer.

We must also learn to pray for each other. Paul prayed always for his church members. Our prayers will bring blessings to the lives of others even if they have not yet learned to have faith. Intercessory prayer (praying on behalf of someone else) is something we are urged to do as Christians. The Bible asks us to pray for one another. Pray for the sick ones and those who have financial or relationship or employment problems. Pray for deliverance for friends who have spiritual problems. Pray for other youth who are slaves to bad habits and destructive relationships and who need guidance in life. Pray for others because God has promised He will answer and bless them when we pray.

Dear Lord, today I commit myself to pray for others as you have asked me to, so that they can be blessed, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Wednesday March 19

Ital Pot

2 Chron. 7: 14 If my people...pray...I will hear...and will forgive their sins and heal their land.

Have you ever been cooking and forgot to put salt in the pot? How did the food taste? Pretty yucky, right? There are people who choose to cook without salt – ital cooking, but they have special seasonings to substitute for the salt. Salt is important to the flavour of the pot. It is also a good preservative and a healing agent. That is what makes Jesus statement in Matt. 5:13, “You are the salt of the earth” so meaningful. (More attention is paid to this text in another devotional.) However, the idea is that the presence of Christians in any community or country should make a big difference.

One of the ways in which Christians make a difference in their society is when they pray. In our country we have problems of crime and violence, poverty, broken families, corruption, immorality, irresponsibility and godlessness. Christians, especially, should be concerned about these things because these are signs that Satan has taken a hold of our society. We know that no person, organization or government can fix those problems properly by themselves. We need God’s help. When Christians talk to God He hears and answers and He expects that we should be the ones to talk to Him about these things. Like salt in the pot, we will then seriously change the “flavour” of our society. Listen to the words of the Bible:

I urge you first of all to pray for all people. As you pray, plead for God’s mercy on them and give thanks. Pray this way for kings and all others who are in authority so that we can live in peace and quietness, in godliness and dignity. This is good and pleases God, our Saviour. (1 Tim. 2: 1-4 , NLT)

Today’s text gives us God’s promise that He will hear and answer our prayers. Doesn’t this give us hope as a people? Jamaica can be better. When we do our private devotions and when we have family worship we should pray for our country. We should never worship God in church on a Sabbath without praying for our country and our leaders. When that happens we are failing to be good salt, failing our country and failing our God. May God help us to be faithful in this duty.

Dear Lord, help never to forget to intercede for my country and my people because this is my duty to them and to you, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Thursday March 20

When God Says No

John 14: 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it

. One of the great promises of the Bible is the one that says “If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you can tell the mountain to move and it will. The story is told of the woman whose house was at the foot of a high mountain. She didn’t see the sun each day till it was fairly late in the morning. One day, she decided to move that mountain. Looking out through her window she commanded, “Move mountain!” The mountain did not move. “Move mountain” she shouted even louder. The mountain stood firm. “I knew it wouldn’t move”, she said in disgust as she walked away.

Don’t you just love the promise that is in today’s text? “Ask anything”. So what have you been asking God? Most likely nothing much. But maybe you have asked, and maybe you haven’t received what you ask for. Maybe, like the woman, you have got cynical, not expecting God to answer anyway. But that one text is not enough for you to use to understand how prayer works. There are good reasons your prayer is not answered sometimes. What are some conditions for answered prayer?

1. Ask in faith. The woman didn’t believe that her prayer would be answered. She said so herself. There was no faith to work with.
2. Have a clean heart. Ps. 66: 18 says that if I have iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.
3. Avoid self-centredness. James 4:3 says that sometimes we ask and do not receive because ask in order to satisfy your selfish desires.
4. Give God the glory. When we are self-centred, we also rob God of the glory of answered prayer
5. Trust God’s heart. Never demand what you want, but leave room that if God sees that what you’re asking for is not best for you He can be free to decide not to give it to you. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say, “Even if He chooses not to answer in the way I would like Him to, I still will trust Him”.

With this kind of attitude, you will tend to make the best requests and God will be delighted to answer, knowing that the answer will be for your good and for His glory.

“Dear Lord, help me to trust your wisdom and your love as I pray to you, knowing you will always give the best answer to my prayers, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Friday March 21

No Nenge-Nenge!

Rom. 12: 11, 12 **...fervent in spirit, serving the Lord...continuing steadfastly in prayer**

In St. Luke chapter 18, Jesus told the story. A widow had a serious problem because she was unjustly treated. She went to the judge to ask him to help her get justice, but the judge had no interest in the widow, or in justice, and just ignored the woman. But she kept coming back to him over and over again until he got tired of her and, just to get rid of her, dealt with her situation. So if an unjust judge is willing to respond to someone he doesn't care about, you don't have to worry about asking God several times for the same thing. Be persistent; keep coming because the Lord will not get tired of you. He will answer.

If there is one thing that I hate it is nenge-nenge; when someone keeps coming to me over and over with the same thing. Even the wise man Solomon speaks about how disgusting a nagging woman is! I hate to think that I am nagging God. A good friend of mine told me that she had stopped praying about an important matter. "God must be tired of me by now", she said. And I know exactly how she feels. But God says "'No feel no way'. I will never get tired of hearing you". Many times when we pray, we give up too easily. The Bible urges us to persevere in prayer.

But why do we have to keep on asking God when He could answer us from the first time we ask? Good question. There are many reasons God could choose not to answer immediately and the truth is, I don't know what reason He might have in your case. He knew before you prayed that you had a problem. He could have solved it without you even having to ask. But He wants us to ask Him because it helps to build a relationship in which we trust Him and we depend on Him. It also strengthens our will to fight as Christians when things don't come easily for us.

So keep praying even when the answer doesn't seem to be coming. He may not answer when you want Him to, but He will answer at the right time. Trust God and be patient. Your answer is on the way.

Dear Lord, thank you that you never get tired of us when we pray. Thank you also for the promise that the answer is on the way, in Jesus name we pray, amen.

Sabbath March 22

Let's Talk

1 Thess. 5: 17 Pray without ceasing

Some years ago we had a schoolmate from an eastern European country. He used to stop frequently as he walked on campus, clasp his hands, close his eyes and pray, then in a few minutes he would do it again. He said he was “praying without ceasing”. A little odd, right?

When my mother visits with her sister it is always a great time for them. They settle down to talk and they do that for hours. Oh, they do other things too. They cook, wash dishes and all those housey things, but in the meantime they talk. They are not very talkative persons, but together they just have a lot to share. Do you have anybody you really love to talk with? You don't have to try to find things to talk about. It just happens. You can be yourself and say your stuff. That is real friendship.

God wants to have a relationship like that with you. I was reading what Carrol Johnson Shewmake said about her devotional relationship with God. She said at first she couldn't find much to pray about and even fell asleep during prayer. One morning very early, she went to the office, pulled up two chairs, sat down in one and told the Lord that the other one was for Him. From then on she would sit and talk with God as if a good friend was sitting in that chair. After a while she was enjoying her time of prayer so much that she was always sorry when the prayer time was over and she had to go.

Now, listen to this. It came to her one day that she did not have to leave the Lord in the office, so she invited Him to go with her into the kitchen, talking to Him while she cooked; then she took Him into the washroom with her while she washed, and so on, right throughout the day. She wasn't always talking, as such, but she was conscious all through the day that He was there, saying this and that to Him every now and then. That's how she learned to pray without ceasing.

I believe that is how Enoch walked with God; constantly keeping Him near and talking to Him about every little thing as they went through the day. God enjoyed it so much He decided to take Enoch home that they could spend even more time together. Pray without ceasing. You'll enjoy it to the max.

Dear Lord, teach me to find joy in your presence and to love it as I pray without ceasing, in Jesus' name, amen.

Sunday March 23

Absolutely Dependable

1 Thess. 5: 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it

Jim Jones, founder and pastor of the People's Temple was an American religious leader who was popular in the States over forty years ago. At a time when black people were being oppressed in America, he was one white man who stood up for them and defended their rights. He and his wife adopted several children including Koreans and Blacks. His church was very popular and was growing fast because he promised to help create a better life for coloured people. When he moved to Guyana in the late 70's and started a community called Jonestown, many people followed him, believing in his promise. But in November 1978, Jones and 909 of his followers committed suicide together. 303 of them were children.

We haven't heard of anything like this in recent times, but still there are thousands, perhaps millions of people around the world who are disappointed, frustrated and hopeless, because they believed in persons who promised them better and the promises were not kept. Some of these promise-makers were politicians and community leaders who gained power with the help of the people, but when the time came were not able to help the people. Others were religious leaders, promising spiritual fulfilment and salvation, but who turned out to be either tricksters and ginnals, or to be just weak and powerless. Yet every day other folks are following new leaders and being disappointed, not learning their lessons.

Today's text tells of Someone we can safely follow. His name is Jesus. We can follow Jesus, because He is faithful. He keeps His promises and lives up to expectations. No true follower of Christ is ever disappointed. He understands all our problems and knows exactly what we need. He is loving and sincere and wants the best for all of us. But He doesn't just want it, He is able to give the best because He is all-powerful. There is nothing He cannot do. So choose to follow Him today and trust Him without fear, because He is faithful and He will do it.

Dear Lord, thank you that you have proven over and over that you are faithful and true. Today I choose to believe your promises and trust you with my life, because you are faithful, in Jesus' name, amen.

Monday March 24

Keep Sharp!

Judges 3: 1, 2 Now these are the nations which the Lord left...that the Children of Israel might be taught to know war

God is, well..., mysterious. So often we don't know what He is doing or why He is doing it. Take this morning's text for example. God had brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. He had told them to fight against the nations in Canaan and to drive them out and take possession of the land. At first the Israelites did well defeating large powerful armies and capturing the Promised Land, but they didn't follow those instructions fully. In some cases they were lazy and they were scared of their enemies. They did not have enough faith in God. God could have made it easier for them but He did not. Why not? This text tells us of one reason that He didn't. *He wanted them to know war.*

How about that, from a God who believes in peace? But it is true. God allowed some of their enemies to be around to give them trouble from time to time that they could remember how to fight. It was important that they did not forget. First of all, there is a constant war going on between good and evil and those who stop fighting will become Satan's prisoners of war and will be lost. Knowing an enemy is around will keep us sharp, alert and ready to resist evil. Israel needed to remember that they were at war spiritually.

The second thing is that these enemies were often greater in number and had powerful weapons. Surrounded by so many enemies Israel would not be able to survive without God's protection and care. This kept them close to God and depending on Him. Thirdly, they would remember that everything they had came to them because God protected and defended them. They shouldn't get too complacent with their possessions, or too proud and independent because the enemies were always waiting to reclaim their possessions.

Have you wondered sometimes why we have problems even when we serve God? Do you pray that He will take away some problems and they are still there. Maybe God has left them there to remind you that Satan, that powerful enemy is still around and you must be careful. Maybe He wants you to keep relying on Him because the challenges are too great. Maybe He wants to remind you that you are not yet home and that everyone and everything around you is not good. Maybe He wants to keep you sharp.

Dear Lord, thank you for the problems that you have not taken away, the ones you left to keep me fighting the good fight of faith and always relying on you, in Jesus' name, amen.

Tuesday March 25

Back-handed Compliments and Left-handed Gifts

Judges 3: 21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly

It's graphic, it's gory, it's real and it's Bible. The Moabites have joined forces with the Ammonites and the Amalekites and they are oppressing Israel. This has been going on for eighteen years and there are young adults born in Israel who have never known peace or freedom. Eglon, king of Moab is not just the big man; he's huge – triple chins, jowls, massive belly and all. Living in his heavily guarded palace, like the Godfather he directs his men to give Israel hell. The Israelite government decides to do something about it. They send in an agent; a trained assassin, tough, smart and committed. His name is Ehud ben Gera.

Ehud moves into action. Posing as a treasury agent bringing tribute to King Eglon, he gains entrance to the palace. Of course they search him for weapons but security does not find the slim, specially made double-edged dagger strapped to his right thigh. "I have a special message for you, your Majesty", he says, giving the king the recognition and honour he desires. "It is a message from God". Flattered to be so recognized, the king sends out everyone so he can get the special message. Though always alert and watchful, the king does not notice when Ehud slips the dagger out. Why? Ehud is left handed. Normally an attack comes from the right hand. Ehud strikes! The Bible gives us the real picture as Ehud rams his dagger into the belly of Eglon, the fat man, so hard that the handle of the knife disappears in Eglon's belly and his intestines spill out.

Slipping out of the king's private office, Ehud locks the door and escapes while the guards think the king is on the "un-royal throne". With the death of the "Godfather" the power of Moab is broken and the Israelites gain their freedom. Eglon, the king made two critical mistakes. Flattered and carried away with self importance, he failed to understand the meaning of the message he was to receive; and when the attack came he was looking in the wrong direction.

We too must be careful. The devil knows our weak points and seeks to exploit them. We must not get so complacent we don't see the danger. We must also expect that the devil will attack us in the most unexpected ways at times. Always be on guard. In fact, only God can protect us from the cunning and deadly devil. Let Him be your security today.

Dear Lord, keep me alert and watchful so that I may not fall to Satan's sneak attacks; and keep me safe from temptation today I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Wednesday March 26

Thief!

2 Pet. 3: 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night...

The man looked this way and that before going through the bedroom window and slipping quietly into the house. The couple on the bed lay fast asleep and snoring loudly. He crept into the study and quietly went through the drawers of the desk and the filing cabinet, putting valuable small items into his knapsack. Returning to the bedroom, he carefully searched through the drawers and on top of furniture picking up cell phones, cash, etc. Carrying the heavy knapsack to the window, he put it down, then returned, picked up a notepad from the bedside table and left a note. It said:

If the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Matthew 24: 43

What a feisty thief! Even the owner of the home laughed when they read that note in the morning. But there is a serious reminder in that message. We need to watch; not just for thieves at night. We need to watch for the coming of Jesus.

Jesus says He will come as a thief – unexpectedly; yet He tells us that we ought to know when He is near. You see, He gave us signs to let us know. You know some of them, don't you? Let me just remind you: war and political turmoil; rampant and deadly diseases; earthquakes and other natural disasters; people being proud, selfish, brutal and immoral; financial crises; many false prophets and false religions; hypocrisy in the church; and many backsliding. Are these things happening around us today? Remember that Jesus said, "When you see these things happening, know that my coming is near...".

There is one other sign I want to mention. Jesus said that just before He comes the Gospel will be preached in all the world. It is happening now and many people are coming to accept Jesus. The question is: with all these signs fulfilling around us, are you preparing for Jesus to come? Are you getting close to Jesus, confessing sins and seeking His help to drop bad habits? Do you spend more time in prayer and with the Word? Are you getting ready, or will He come (for you) like a thief in the night? If this happens, you will lose more than money and appliances. You will lose your life, for now and for eternity! Get ready now!

Dear Lord, help me to wake up to the seriousness of the times and the nearness of your coming. Help me to be ready I pray, in Jesus' name, amen.

Thursday March 27

Examination Day

2 Thess. 2:2 For that day will not come unless the falling away comes first

There are Geeks, there are geniuses and there are weirdos; but most of us normal people are a little bit afraid of examination days. Some persons worry, some panic, some even get sick and all breathe a sigh of relief when it is over. Recently, we were reminded that Jesus is coming soon. Signs of the end are being fulfilled all around us. But in today's text Paul prophesies that before the end there will be a final test and many will fail. Many people who claim to believe the truth about God will backslide and give up the faith (fall away). When you read the passage before and after the text you will see that this will happen because of deception and intimidation.

Howcome? The Bible predicts that a powerful religious movement will come up and that it will pretend to genuinely love God, but it will be against God's truth. It will deceive many people because the teachings will sound so good. Those persons who claim to love Christ but who have not spent time to know His teachings and understand the scriptures will be deceived and will backslide. Others will know the truth, but because they are afraid of physical harm or of losing their comfort, their relationships, or their possessions, they will fall away too. The Bible did not say it might happen, but that it *will*.

Are you ready for that great test? Are you so grounded in your love for the Lord and the knowledge of His word that you will be able to stand and not fall away? Determination alone will not be enough. The way to pass that test is to not wait until that time arrives but to prepare now. We should study God's word carefully and hide it in our hearts. If we know the truth we won't be deceived by a lie. All God's people should take time out to read and study the Bible every day. This is not the time to miss Sabbath School and Bible Class. Prepare now!

And here is some good news. God has promised that if we prepare, when the test comes we will not have to worry about what to say or how to respond because the Holy Spirit will tell us how to respond. Let's get to know God so well now that we will be able to recognize the voice of the Spirit when He speaks and we will successfully pass the final test.

Lord, we are sometimes we are frightened by the end time prophecies about the tests to come. Help us as we try to prepare and help us always remember that you will take us through, in Jesus' name, amen.

Friday March 28

Why Mary Will not Pray

Rom. 3: 23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

Some years ago, there was a popular song that said: “O Lord it’s hard to be humble, when you’re perfect in every way”. Wow! Talk about conceit! Yet there are many people who speak like that these days. The fact is, everybody ought to be humble ‘cause nobody is perfect in every way. The Bible is clear, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God”. “There is none righteous, no not one” (Rom.3: 10).

“But”, you ask, “What about young babies? Are they sinners too?” Yes they are. The Bible says we were conceived and born in sin. They are not personally guilty for things they don’t understand, but they are born into a sinful race and have inherited sin and death. All of us, with no exception, were born as sinners and all of us need a Saviour. I am glad that we have a Saviour, Someone who took our punishment and who intercedes for us. Jesus is our Intercessor, pleading for us as sinners. The Bible says that there is “one God and one Mediator between God and man – the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2: 5).

Jesus can intercede for us because he has no sin of His own. Although He was born into our race and inherited sin and death like the rest of us, He did not commit any sin of His own, so he is qualified to intercede for us. And, as Peter said, “there is no other name under Heaven by which we can be saved” (Acts 4: 12). He is the only perfect One and our only Intercessor.

Now listen. Some people believe that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an intercessor for us. I respectfully say, be careful of that idea. First, she wouldn’t be qualified to do that unless she was sinless. The Bible does not say that she was. Secondly, if she was sinless, then that means that Jesus was born with an advantage over other human beings. It means He did not conquer sin as one of us. It turns the whole mission of Jesus into a sham. That belief is denying Christ. So, don’t ask Mary to pray for us. She cannot. She is dead. Even if she could hear, she would have to depend like the rest of us on Jesus to intercede because she also is a sinner and Jesus is the one Mediator. We are saved by faith in the grace of God, given through Jesus alone.

Dear Lord, thank you for Jesus, our Intercessor. Help me to trust Him and not allow anyone to take His rightful place in my life, in Jesus’ name, amen.

Sabbath March 29

Short Legs? No Problem!

John 16: 12 I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now

Her face looked annoyed and she seemed handicapped as she walked quickly down the road. I soon saw why she was moving so clumsily. She was dragging a small boy behind her. The crying child was taking giant steps to keep up with her and the only reason he didn't fall flat on his face was that she was holding on to his hand. "Walk up no Bwoy!", she shouted at him as he stumbled along. The picture came back to me as I thought about today's text.

When you read John chapters 14 – 16, you see where Jesus had been saying a lot of things to His disciples. He told them that he was going away and would have to leave them, but that He would come back for them one day. He also explained that they would have to continue the work that He had started, but that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide and support them. He talked of challenges and persecutions that they would meet and of the great work that they would accomplish. All this must have sounded strange to these simple fishermen who had never travelled far from their hometown and had no great education to do a worldwide work. Then Jesus told them, "I have many other things that I need to tell you but you cannot bear them now".

I love how kind and patient Jesus is. He knew that his disciples were confused and disturbed that He was going away and they had to do so much without Him being around. They were also expecting Him to set up a great kingdom on Earth and restoring the Jews to being a powerful nation. They had so much to think about. To tell them more now would further confuse them and leave them deeply discouraged. God leads His children only as fast as they can walk.

Thank God for His patience. There is so much that we have to learn as we try to follow Him. We are told that we need to grow in His grace; that we must gain greater knowledge daily, but He knows that we are human. He knows our weaknesses, the baggage we carry, and how slowly we learn some things. But if we choose to walk with Him He will be patient with us and each of us can learn at our own pace as God leads us along.

Dear Lord, thank You for Your patience with me. Help me to learn what I need to know as I follow you today, in Jesus' name, amen.

Sunday March 30

Do You Have Any Food?

John 21: 5 Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” They answered Him “No”.

Open your Bible and read the brief story in John 21: 4 – 12. The disciples were now back in Galilee. They had left their fishing business to follow Jesus, but now He was no longer with them. Still close friends together, seven of them had gone back to their fishing. One night, they had worked all night and had not caught a single fish. They were just about to quit for the time being when the risen Lord appeared on the shore and greeted them with the question, “Children, do you have any food?”

What a kind, considerate Saviour we have! He was about to leave His disciples, but He was thinking not only of their spiritual, but also of their material welfare. They had worked all night and now there were no fish to sell or to feed their families. So Jesus gave them instructions and they caught a great draught of fishes. How happy that must have made them! And imagine their surprise and gratitude when they came ashore, tired and happy, to find that Jesus, with His own loving, nail-scarred hands, had fixed breakfast for them.

This same kind, considerate Jesus is the One we worship today. And He is asking, “Do you have any food?” Are you having a rough time getting the things you need? Do you have something to make breakfast? Are you looking forward to a lunch-less day? If you are a young parent, are you anxious about how you will feed your family? Student, do you have taxi fare? The money to buy stationery? Or material for that SBA?

Jesus knows. He sees your anxiety, your worry, your need. But He wants you to tell Him and to trust His promises. Read this assurance to us in Matthew 6: 25, 26 and Phil. 4: 19.

“Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about...what you will put on”. “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory”.

Believe His promise that He will supply all your needs. Remember He tells us, “Don’t worry. Don’t be anxious”.

Dear Lord, thank You for being our Provider and our Sustainer. Keep us being grateful and trusting in Your promises, in Jesus name we pray, amen

Rosalie Bromfield

Monday March 31

Spiritually Yours

Gal. 2: 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me

In the early days Christianity strange groups developed in the church believing all kinds of things. One group that gave problems believed that your soul was separate from your body and that only your soul can be saved. The conclusion? You can do anything with your body because it is going to be lost anyway. This led to some awful behaviour by those who professed to be followers of Christ.

At the start of this quarter, we saw that the Christian is a whole person having spiritual, mental/ intellectual, physical and social dimensions. We also saw that all of these areas cannot be separated. What happens in my spiritual life affects the social; what happens in the physical affects the intellectual, and so on. Luke 2: 52 told us that Jesus developed in all these areas and as we try follow His footsteps we should grow in these areas as well. This quarter we began with the spiritual dimension; seeing how God relates to us directly and how we can better understand His will for our lives. We did this because we believe that this dimension is important for understanding the other dimensions.

As we prepare to focus next quarter on the mental, intellectual and emotional dimension, what have we gained from this quarter? That:

- God is Number One in our lives and we must treat Him this way if we want to live successful lives.
- All of us are sinners, worthy of death, but the sacrifice of Jesus gives every person the opportunity of salvation.
- There is a spiritual war going on and we are at the centre of it. Each of us must take a side in it; and in the end, the decision we make will determine our eternal destiny.
- Our choices are important.
- God has a plan for the life of each person and that plan is for our greatest happiness.
- Our duty is to love God and worship Him and to love our fellowmen and serve them.

May God help us to live good spiritual lives.

Dear Lord, you have reminded me of the importance of the spiritual part of my life. I now dedicate this part of me to you, as I seek to be TOTALLY YOURS, in Jesus' name, amen.

