

Mar Thoma Sunday Schools

Diocese of North America & Europe



Curriculum

BEING GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S WORLD

Grade Ten

(Samajam Curriculum Senior Vol. I)

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MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

Diocesan Bishop
Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos

Foreword

Dearly beloved in Christ,

A new curriculum for our Sunday School has been a felt need in this Diocese. I am glad that the new curriculum is ready to be introduced in 2006. Here we are in the process of a transition from Cokesbury to the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam Curriculum. While retaining the essential elements and the frame work of the Samajam Curriculum, the lessons and stories are made more conducive to our situations and challenges.

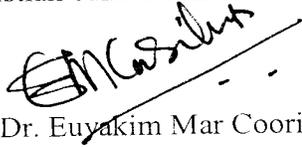
The overall theme is “Being God’s People in God’s World”

Summary of Work in Three Years: The work for the curriculum started in 2002 soon after the publication of the revised edition of the book, “The Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision (CSS Publication, 2001) and the special issue of Messenger in January 2002 which explained the development of Sunday Schools in North America. The Diocesan Sunday School Council in 2002 entrusted the task of the new curriculum with Dr. T. M. Thomas, who had been active for the growth of the Sunday schools even from the beginning of the Diocese. (He was the first convener of the Sunday school committee formed at the Zonal Assembly of 1982, Philadelphia, presided by our late Suffragan Bishop Rt. Rev. Thomas Mar Athanasius). Preliminary discussions were held at the Family Conference of Dallas, 2002. A plan of action and the Curriculum Format were approved by the Council at a special meeting of Sunday school teachers and officers at Regional and Diocesan levels at the Family Conference in Florida, 2003. Five lessons of all twelve classes were completed by the time of the Family Conference in New York 2004. These five lessons (Part III) were taught in the Spring of 2005. Necessary modifications were made and the new curriculum was released in the Summer of 2005. It is now being used in all Sunday schools of North America (nearly fifty) Sept. 2005 to June 2006 academic year. While teaching these lessons improvements are being made and a new CD will be distributed by the summer 2006. The target date for the completion of printing as a book is summer 2007. Though there are thirty lessons in each class we select 25 for each year. In addition to it, there are five lessons from the book, “Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision” for each class.

Unique Features of the New Curriculum: The manuscripts for the new curriculum were written by committees formed in all nine centers of our Diocese. All writers were expected to follow the same Format (Revised Format of 2004). Different from several other books, our curriculum includes a few values to be taught in each lesson. Today in most nations we can listen to the cry for values education, both secular and religious schools. Also, our curriculum includes two new items, one Bible Application (Bible Lesson for Our Times) and the other Life Response (Words for My Life). Here we can make the lesson appropriate for our times and relevant to the learner. Along with it there are the regular or usual items found in most lesson plans (aim, Bible reading, main ideas, memory verse etc.) There is a total of 14 items in all lessons.

I gratefully appreciate the hard work of the general convener of the New Curriculum, Dr. T. M. Thomas, Diocesan Sunday School secretaries, Mr. Thomas Koshy (2002-2005) and Mr. M. C. Varghese (2005-2008), Sunday School Council members, twelve committees each in charge of one book and others who helped for the creation of the new curriculum. Their names are mentioned in each book. Now it is our task to maximize the effectiveness of this curriculum. All Sunday School Superintendents and teachers are requested to follow the instructions of the convener in this regard.

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit , I commend this new curriculum for the Christian edification of the children in the Mar Thoma Diocese of North America and Europe.



Rt.Rev.Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos
Diocesan Bishop
July 4, 2006



MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

We remember with immense joy the great advancements we have made for The Mar Thoma Sunday School over the past three decades. The Indian immigrant community remained diligent in passing on the Christian faith and sustaining the spiritual growth for the second generation. In August 2000, Sunday School published “Order of Worship with Prayers & Hymns” with transliterated and translated versions of our traditional liturgy to bring our children to a deeper understanding. In June of 2001, our Sunday School published a Book ‘The Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision’ to share the faith and practices of our church to the young generation. After experimenting with several American Sunday School Curriculums for our needs, the Sunday School Teachers and the office bearers prayerfully made a leap of faith to develop a North American Mar Thoma Sunday School Curriculum with allegiance to the Sunday School Samajam Curriculum.

The collective product of the Mar Thoma heritage and the American Educational system was a Sunday School Student Book for every school grade at the appropriate vocabulary level and clearly articulated lesson with Values for Life, Words for Bible Times, Words for Our Times, Words for My Life, and Bible Learning Strategies and Activities. The first edition was released along with the Sunday School Centenary Celebrations by the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam President, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, at the 2005 Mar Thoma Family Conference. The year of our Lord 2005 will be remembered for ever in the history of the North American Sunday School for developing the curriculum. The leadership of Dr. T. M. Thomas for our Sunday School remains available from the time our activities began in this country. Dr. Thomas served as an inspiring leader, traveling the full length and width of this continent to organize the curriculum committees and to structure the final version. We are greatly indebted to him for the full time ministry that we receive from him to make all our publications a grand success. Moreover, the curriculum committee members, the clergy, staff and the office bearers deserve great appreciation for persevering to produce the first version and the revision of the full curriculum in a couple of years.

We have crossed a major milestone in the production of the curriculum. The next phase should be to bring excellence in teaching. We, teachers, should cultivate a habit of continuous learning so that we can serve in this ministry better more effectively and efficiently in these changing times. Please read the “Notes to Teachers on Teaching”. It is unique for each stage as we have divided twelve classes into five units. They are: 1. Preschool classes (Nursery and KG), 2. Primary (Grades 1, 2 &3), 3. Upper Primary (Gr.4, 5&6), 4. Junior High (Gr. 7, 8&9), and 5. Senior High (Grades 10, 11 & 12). A teacher in one grade of a stage is expected to read the “Notes” in other classes also because it deals with different stages of growth. A group effort, in the regional level, is encouraged for conducting teacher development workshops with expert assistance from professionals in the region. If there are geographical limitations as parish level workshop would be adequate. The “Teacher Manual” prepared by Samajam as booklet, was sent to all Sunday Schools last year. It is suitable for such workshops and seminars.

We, as secretaries of the current and the previous term, are greatly privileged and blessed to serve in Sunday School. It is a great joy to be the instruments of His Grace to participate in this blessed organization that continues to exhilarate techniques and technology to bring every child to Jesus. May the Lord Almighty continue to bless the challenges that we undertake in His Mighty Name.

Thomas Koshy
Secretary (2002-2005)

M.C.Varghese
Secretary (2005-2008)

July 5, 2006

Mar Thoma Sunday School
Diocese of North America & Europe

Notes to Teachers on Teaching Seniors in High School, Grades 10, 11 & 12

The young person completes studies in Grade 9 and moves to high school or higher secondary school, Grades 10, 11 and 12, when the age group is 15-18 years. Just as we have divided elementary schools into two age groups, we are separating secondary school students into two groups, one junior high school and the other senior high or secondary school. Here also we find the continuity of one stage to the other, each covering three classes. Now we discuss the last three.

Characteristic Features of this Age Group and the Process of Education

The physical growth which was fast during early adolescence now slows down in later adolescence. There is stability in growth. Both young men and women take pride in their physical appearance and give special attention in taking care of their body and its look. New hair styles are repeatedly tried for improving the appearance. The body is strong to do hard work, though sometimes they feel lazy. Both young men and women are attracted to the opposite sex. The guidelines for behavior toward members of the opposite sex are drawn, for the most part, by teenagers themselves rather than parents and teachers. Adults want to preserve their familiar social customs and practices. Hence, there is the possibility of conflicts between the two generations. It will be more serious with the new immigrant groups since the traditional practices are totally different. There is the need for greater understanding and adjustment between parents and children.

Abstract Thinking: We have already discussed the concept of abstract thinking as developed by the Swiss Psychologist Piaget. In this age of science and technology (high-tech), we cherish the contributions of this psychologist and a few others. Indeed, Modern Period began, in the estimate of some, with the statement of Descartes, the 17th century European philosopher, "I think, therefore I am." Human being is seen as a thinking being more than anything else. However, some of the existential philosophers of 19th and 20th century do not agree with the "overemphasis" on thinking. To them, human being is characterized by feelings and emotions (a passionate being) more than thinking. The Christian view which I support (already discussed in the previous section) assumes more unique qualities in the statement, "I am a child of God." In agreement with existential beliefs, we are more concerned with the "being" and "becoming" of human beings. We become better human beings by following the example of Jesus, a "becoming" that involves both personal and social dimensions. Here the "social" refers to people all over the world, not just some isolated groups. In other words, we are interested in the universal dimension of Christ's teaching and its acceptance everywhere.

Morality: When teen-agers develop the ability for conceptual thinking (already discussed), they are capable of moral reasoning and decisions on morality. Even from infancy parents and teachers teach moral lessons through stories and advise them. Children resort to good behavior in order to avoid punishment or receive rewards. However, a teen-ager makes decisions on right and wrong after a great deal of deliberation or weighing the consequences. Any moral education at this stage should encourage the young person to make one's own stand on moral

Grade 10

issues or questions. When a young person formulates his/her own identity, there is a great need for moral and religious education.

In our modern secular society, moral and religious education has become a controversial issue. Technical and procedural issues are raised for preventing such education. I do not enter into this question now. There are several ways of teaching morality even in a pluralistic society like ours. Our young people greatly need moral and religious precepts and principles to hold on. In order to build a stable and strong society, we need values education.

Goals of Curriculum: All lessons in the new Sunday school curriculum contain an item on values, mentioning a few specific values. Also, each lesson is made relevant to today's social conditions and trends. The goal of all lessons is to bring children to Jesus for their commitment to Christ. It is up to the teachers to make the lesson relevant to each student. At this senior high school level, teachers must encourage discussion and listen to the views of students. Study of Christian leaders who made great sacrifices for others can be included in the curriculum.

Though there are three senior classes we have selected the first one (Grade Ten) for modification. The other two (Grades 11 & 12) are supplied giving the option to each Sunday school as to how it is to be used. One idea for its use is to entrust lessons to each student for presentation by preparing a schedule. Other topics or programs, such as "Teacher Preparation" can also be included, if there is student interest and participation.

Acknowledgement: I would like to conclude this NOTES by expressing our gratitude to God Almighty, for His guidance, and say "thank you" to all those who worked closely with me. They include: first, our Diocesan Bishop, Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos, who entrusted a great responsibility on me and gave necessary guidance; second, the two secretaries, Mr. Thomas Koshy (2002-2005) and Mr. M.C.Varghese (2005-2008) and other Diocesan Sunday school Council Members for their whole-hearted support; third, the Curriculum Committee Members who actually wrote the lessons in 12 classes following my directions (their names are listed at the end of each book) and last, but not least, all teachers and students for making use of this curriculum.

Dr. T.M. Thomas, General Convener
Diocesan Curriculum Committee

Grade 10

Lesson Format (Revised)

1. **Class:** There are 12 classes (Nursery, K .G, Grades 1-10)
2. **Title:** Refers to the title of the chapter or lesson.
3. **Lesson Topic:** Same as Title. It is used in the “ Table of contents” of each class.
4. **Lesson Theme:** Each lesson comes under one theme which is the same in all classes on any specific Sunday. (So introduce the theme at the Assembly.)
5. **Aim:** Purpose Of the lesson shall guide teachers for the lesson planning and presentation
6. **Bible Reading:** Each lesson is based on a specific Bible passage. Use New International Version, NIV.
7. **Values for Life:** A few values are taught through each lesson.
8. **Preparation:** Other terms are used: Introduction and Motivation.
9. **Bible Learning:**
Main Ideas: This is the body of the lesson. A few ideas are presented, one in each paragraph.
10. **Bible Learning:**
Strategies & activities: The ‘how’ of teaching is covered here. The methods of teaching differ for each grade or age group.
11. **Bible Application**
or Bible Words
for Our Times: Lessons are related to the realities of our contemporary world.
12. **Life Response or**
Words for My Life: The lesson leads to personal commitment or life decisions.
13. **Memory Verse:** NIV is used for most lessons.
14. **Prayer:** Conclude the class with prayers given at the end of each lesson or extempore prayer.

Dr.T.M.Thomas

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Gods Chapter 1 Wonderful World



GOD'S SKILL IN CREATION

Theme: GOD'S CREATION

Aim: To learn about God's glory manifested through His creation

Bible Reading: Gen. 1: 1 – 25; Psalms 19

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. We must strive to enjoy the beauty of creation, which proclaims the glory of God.
2. We have a God-given responsibility to preserve His creation.

PREPARATION

The present day scientific theories relating to the origin of the universe and the inhabitants of our earth seem to be in conflict with the Biblical account of creation. Science is the human attempt to understand God's wisdom, without even acknowledging the existence of God. It explains that the origin of the universe transpired as a random event. Moreover, scientists argue that the molecules of the



various complex compounds, which are found in plants and animals, were first formed by the random collisions of atoms of different elements. However, the laws of thermodynamics do not defend the random creation of energy and matter from nothingness. The odds that a random event will occur are mathematically predicted by its probability. The probability of obtaining a head upon a coin toss is 1 in 2; the probability of being struck by lightning is 1 in 6×10^5 . As the probability gets progressively smaller, the occurrence of the event becomes less and less likely to materialize. Statisticians generally consider a probability of 1 in 1×10^{50} to be a statistical impossibility. Now, the probability of a simple molecule forming by random collision of atoms is 1 in 1×10^{450} ; the probability of one protein molecule forming is 1 in $1 \times 10^{24,351}$; the probability of a strand of DNA forming is 1 in $1 \times 10^{167,626}$, and the probability of a bacteria evolving is 1 in $1 \times 10^{100,000,000,000}$! The mathematical probability diminishes the theory of evolution and random formation to a total absurdity, as opposed to creation. The theory of "Young Earth" is becoming more and more credible (www.youngearth.org) where as the so called proofs supporting evolution, such as Radiometric Dating (^{14}C -dating, for example), are becoming less reliable. We know and believe that the scriptural account of creation is the truth.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. The Mighty Creator

God created the universe. He did not create it out of an existing master plan. It is through the moving words of God that the universe was created from nothingness and formlessness. We comprehend the magnitude of the beauty of creation when we observe the universe that consists of galaxies, stars, and planets, including our earth. The sun and the nine planets that revolve around it constitute our solar system. The sun which is at the center of the solar system is about a million times larger than the earth. The diameter of the sun is about 875,000 miles. The solar system is a part of the galaxy known as the Milky Way, and the sun is only one among the 250 billion stars which constitute the Milky Way. There are thousands of stars and planets, which are invisible with our naked eyes. Our comprehension about the universe is extremely limited.

2. The Universe – Witness of God's Greatness

The Psalmist describes God's Glory in Psalm 19:1-6, and he expresses the beauty of God's law in verses 7-14. Here, God's Glory is expressed through nature. The Psalm points to four thoughts.

1. The glory of the Almighty God is revealed through creation.
2. The utmost objective of the Universe and the entire humanity is to glorify God. Respecting and loving the creation is part of glorifying and worshipping God.
3. It is only through faith that one can understand the Glory of God and His creation.
4. God's creation is continued through the discoveries and innovations, developed by human beings..

3. View Creation with the Eye of Faith

Utilizing his gifted vision, the author of the book of Genesis views and narrates as to how God gave the entire creation the form, image, and life (Gen. 1:1-25). According to the scientists, the earth is about 4.6 billion years old. But the writer of the Book of Genesis does not illustrate the scientific version of the Earth's formation. The process of creation reveals God's love. Through the process of creation, God brought order to a chaotic situation (Gen. 1:1-2). The Creator placed all living creatures in the most appropriate places, with man at its prime place to exercise God-given stewardship. God created man in His own image. Faith is the basis for understanding the Universe. As we read in the Bible, "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:3). The universally accepted Nicene Creed begins with the proclamation of faith in God, "We believe in one true God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible."

4. God Controls and Sustains the Universe

God controls and sustains the Universe. God is concerned with even the minutest matters of His creation. He has decided the number of the stars and calls each one by name, (Psalms 147:4; Isa. 40:26). Unfortunately, many people are unable to visualize God's mighty hands behind the amazing set up of the Universe. Hence, they view the Universe and God in the same manner. They even worship the universe. Such people seek astrological guidance to ascertain

the most appropriate time (Muhurthams) to conduct a wedding, house warming, and other important ceremonies.

5. Universe Exhibits Silent Witness

The Psalmist David sang praises to God Almighty as he observed the mighty works of the sky. According to David, the celestial bodies acknowledge God and proclaim His glory. Similarly, we also should be inspired by the wonders of the universe and strengthened in spirit, to ascribe praises to the most High.

As we observe God's marvelous deeds in the nature, we are reminded of our helplessness and human limitations. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8: 3, 4).

The prayer that is compiled in our *Qurbana Thaksa* meaningfully articulates God's glory. "To sing praises and worship the creator of all things is good and right, who is adored by the heavenly host, sun, moon, and the stars and all that dwell there, angels and archangels, thrones and powers, cherubim and seraphim, ever proclaiming... Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, Heaven and earth are full of His Glory. Hosanna in the Highest".

God's Creation that Continues

The Scripture illustrates God not merely as the Creator of the past, but also as the Creator of the present. The creation is an ongoing process, both in regard to human experience and environmental context. In the book of Psalms, we read a personal declaration on creation, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Ps. 139:14).

We read in the scripture, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen: 1:1), and it is our hope that we will see a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 1:1, Is. 65:17, 66:22). God's people are expected to submit themselves to His will, so that they will be used as instruments, to fulfill the process of creation that is repeatedly carried over until it reaches the level of perfection that God has intended. God utilizes human beings by equipping them with sufficient grace and strength. All discoveries and innovations are, therefore, continuation of God's creation, thus revealing God's greatness.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

As we appreciate our awesome universe created by our mighty God, we must make an earnest effort not to worship creation and fear it as a powerful entity. We, as followers of Christ, must completely avoid superstitious practices of consulting with astrologers and mediums and referring to calendars to set up appropriate times for auspicious

occasions. Let us wholeheartedly commit our trust in God and continually worship our Creator in spirit and truth,

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

It is by faith we understand that the Universe was created by God’s Word so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen. Unlike the scientific version, the Biblical version of creation focuses on the Spiritual truth that reveals God’s love. God created man in His own image and entrusted him with the responsibilities and privileges of stewardship. Each day, God provides us with the sufficient strength and grace in sustaining and fulfilling His creation.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. A personal declaration on creation is made in chapter 39 from the Book of Psalms.
2. [True/False]
3. The Scriptures illustrate God as a creator of the past as well as of the present times. [True/False]
4. The Nicene Creed begins with the proclamation of faith in the Son of God. [True/False]
5. According to chapter 11 in the Book of Hebrews, it is Faith that enables us to understand that the Universe was created by God’s Word. [True/False]
6. God placed Man in the prime place of His creation to exercise God-given stewardship. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. List the four thoughts in Psalm 19 that express God’s Glory through creation.

2. “The unseen God is seen through the visible universe created by God.” Discuss.

3. God’s creation continues through us to the present day. Explain.

4. How does the Universe exhibit silent witness to God’s Glory?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "God created the universe form nothingness and formlessness." Discuss

Essay format:

- a. Introduction
- b. Explain how God's glory is witnessed through the universe per Psalm 19.
- c. Describe why creation should be viewed through the eye of faith.
- d. Examine the role of humanity in the sustenance of God's creation.
- e. Conclusion- Adverse effects of viewing universe as equally powerful as the Creator himself.

D. Explore: (*This section is optional*)

"All discoveries and innovations are continuation of God's creation, thus revealing God's greatness." Discuss our response as Christians to the act of human cloning.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 19:1

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, empower us with unwavering faith. Enable us to glorify and thank Thee in all circumstances along with Your entire creation. Amen.



God's Beautiful World

Theme: God's Earth

Aim: To realize that the world belongs to God and God has entrusted human beings to be stewards of His creation

Bible Reading: Psalm 104

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. To learn that all what we have on Earth is a gift from God.
2. We are called to be responsible stewards of creation by utilizing all the resources for the glory of God.

PREPARATION:

Florence Nightingale, better known as "The Lady with the Lamp," had a burning desire for the lives of God's people. Uninterested in her celebrity status, **she was a diligent steward, working tirelessly for the glory of God.** She introduced sanitary science to the nursing department and the



British Army. She established a nursing school at St. Thomas Hospital in England, laid out the principles of nursing in print, and revolutionized the Indian Public Health System by addressing issues related to rural hygiene, deaths in child birth, and general standards of sanitation.

Born in Florence, Italy on May 12, 1820, Florence heard the call of God to do His work. However, at her young age, she was unsure of her calling. Florence developed

an interest in the social issues of the day, made visits to the homes of the sick in the local villages, and began to consider nursing as a vocation. Her parents refused her to pursue nursing, since it was not considered a suitable profession for a well-educated woman in the mid-nineteenth century,

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Creation Belongs to God

God is the Creator of the universe. Part of this creation is the nature or environment that is around us. Air, water, light, rivers, oceans, forests, birds, animals, mountains, valleys are the handiwork of the creator. The whole world and its resources belong to God. "Heaven is yours, the earth also; you made the world and everything in it" (Ps. 89:11) .God had given the authority and responsibility to man, the crown of creation, to rule over the universe, which is under His ownership.

All elements of creation are interconnected, and therefore all elements must be protected to secure the earth's existence. For example, forests are essential in producing rain. The Amazon forest of South America partly strengthens our security blanket, the ozone layer. Moreover, all living creatures play a vital role in the existence of forests.

Psalm 104 is a beautiful hymn that describes the equilibrium of different factors of creation. The description of creation in the first chapter of Genesis dominates the thoughts of the Psalmist. He also follows the same order of creation, beginning with light and ending with the creation of man. The Book of Psalms ends with a prayer, 'Praise the Lord' as the Psalmist declares the decision that he will worship the Lord all his life.

A suggestion to maintain the equilibrium of nature is given within the law of Lord in Deuteronomy 20: 19, 20. "Do not destroy the tree by putting an axe to them because you can eat their fruit." In today's society, people have a greater scientific awareness that can help maintain this equilibrium of nature. We can think not only of the fruits and root, but the trees and the climbers that are also essential for the protection of the environment. God placed man to guard and utilize nature's resources according to his need and also to make it more beautiful. God entrusted man to continue the creation for achieving this purpose and to glorify the Creator

2. Nature for All

God made the world the habitat for all human beings as well as the rest of creation. God separated land and water to rear animals and grow plants. (Gen. 1:9, 10). Nature and environment play an important role in the plan of the Creator. All creations ceaselessly work to fulfill the task entrusted to them by the Creator. Earth and other planets move in their orbital order ensuring the stability of the universe. Man has the responsibility to control and protect all creatures on land and sea for his existence and growth (Gen. 1:26).

The richness and variety of life on earth bear witness to God's creativity. (Psalms 65:9-18) Sometimes humans feel they have the authority to kill and destroy all creatures. This false assumption leads to misuse of God's resources, frequently to the eventual detriment of man. Humans ignore the fact that all creatures have unique opportunities, rights, and responsibilities to enrich nature. Many species of animals and plants, which are essential for the existence of man, are disappearing from the earth. On many occasions, not only the air and water are polluted, but the entire ecological balance of earth is disturbed for the sake of industrial development.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

The task of humanity is not to act as owners, but as stewards and care takers of God's good creation. According to Genesis 2:15, the Lord God placed human beings in the Garden of Eden to tend and care for it. It was an honorable call to authority along

with responsibility to adore the Creator and to serve as God's laborers in maintaining the earth. The duty of man is to be a good steward of earth's natural resources.

Stewardship is also to be understood in the use of earth's available resources. Rich nations exploit the mineral resources of the weak countries. Also, the poor nations are forced to accept the waste of rich nations. On one side, umpteen deaths and diseases are caused by malnutrition and poverty, and on the other side rich nations are dumping their excess resources into oceans. Let us hope that human beings will relinquish the thought that they are the sole owners of the entire Universe enabling them to share their resources. One cannot experience the gracious love of the Creator without a just and equitable distribution of resources.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Man has no right or permission to mercilessly exploit nature or to destroy its balance by forgetting the responsibilities towards future generations. Each one of us should accept personal responsibility to conserve nature and curtail waste. Many environmental problems arise due to man's irresponsible dealing with God and his fellow beings. An undertaking by humanity must be viewed from the broader perspective of stewardship – a stewardship that is responsible for ALL creation.

Revival of our world, which faces many environmental challenges, is our responsibility. It is our duty to work under God in His endeavors, which leads to the maintenance, protection, and stewardship of His creation. It is our responsibility to modify and enrich the world in order to maintain the balance of nature according to God's will. By being stewards of the earth, we give all glory to God.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Being God's steward requires us to place the needs of man first. [True/False]
2. All of God's creation is interconnected. [True/False]
3. Each part of God's creation has intrinsic value. [True/False]
4. When acting as stewards of the earth, the needs of man should never be considered. [True/False]
5. Humans are the crown of creation. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. What does it mean to be a steward?

2. According to Genesis 2:15, the Lord God placed human beings in the Garden of Eden as its gardeners – to care for it as responsible stewards, not as owners. Explain this calling.

3. When using God's resources, what should we do when the **wants** of man and the responsibilities to God's creation collide?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. Think about one environmental problem the world faces today. Explain how a Christian should respond to the problem, remembering that we are stewards of the earth's resources.

Essay format:

- a. Introduction
- b. Briefly explain the environmental problem
- c. Explain possible solutions to this problem
- d. Explain what the results of these solutions might be, how it might impact humanity, and how the world might view our actions.
- e. Conclusion

D. Explore: (*This section is optional*)

Use the internet to learn about practical ways man can use the earth's resources responsibly, and still satisfy the needs of man.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalms 24:1, 2

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God, creator of this beautiful Universe, we come to you today praising and thanking you for this world in which we live. Open our eyes to the beauty around us and our minds to the knowledge that you have honored us to be stewards of your creation. Teach us to protect and care instead of exploiting and destroying. Amen.



GOD'S COVENANT WITH HIS CREATIONS

Theme: God's creatures

Aim: To learn about God's plan to care for His creations and our duty to conserve the natural resources of the environment

Bible Reading: Gen. 9: 1-17; 7:1-5; 8:1, 15-22

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. God is the creator and protector of His creation. The rainbow is a symbol of God's protection.
2. It is our responsibility to conserve nature, protect life, and sustain God's creations.

PREPARATION:

In the early morning of December 3, 1984 a Union Carbide pesticide producing plant leaked a highly toxic gas of methyl isocyanate onto the densely populated region of Bhopal, central India. Of the 800,000 people living in Bhopal at the time, 2,000 died immediately, 300,000 were injured, and as many as 8,000 have died since. The leak was caused by a series of mechanical and human errors.



A series of studies conducted five years later showed that many of the survivors were still suffering from several ailments such as partial or complete blindness, gastrointestinal disorders, and a rise in spontaneous abortions, stillbirths, and babies with genetic defects.

The Bhopal gas tragedy raised questions about the ethical practices of multinational companies operating in developing countries. Critics have accused Union Carbide of employing safety standards at its Bhopal plant that were more lax than at a similar plant it owned in West Virginia. However, Carbide officials insist they have always used "one worldwide safety standard". The Bhopal disaster prodded the US chemical industry to improve its safety and environmental standards. Over the past five years, the industry claims to have reduced toxic emissions by 38 percent. However, many environmental groups believe the industry has not gone far enough to improve its safety standards. Toxic wastes are constantly being dumped in our neighborhoods. Industries and factories contribute to polluting our atmosphere and waters by releasing toxic fumes and wastes into the environment. Global warming is a harsh reality today. What is our God-given responsibility towards sustaining our environment? The goal of this lesson is to understand that as God protects His creation, we need to be responsible stewards of our environment, conserving nature, protecting life, and sustaining God's creation.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

The core of the Book of Genesis describes God as the Creator and the protector of His Creation. As the Creator and Protector, He never annihilates life on earth. Before the great flood, God asked Noah to take into the ark, a male and female of all species of animals and birds. When the flood waters receded and the earth was dry, Noah sent the animals and birds out from the ark so that they could repopulate their species on earth. God blessed Noah and his sons, saying, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. He established an everlasting covenant between Noah and all living creatures on earth. The unique features of this covenant are:

- 1. The clauses in the covenant are completely God's wishes, and there are no terms and conditions.*
- 2. God's mercy and kindness is toward all living creatures irrespective of their species or usefulness to society.*
- 3. The punishments declared in the covenant may seem harsh; but if we are faithful and obedient, we are assured of God's love and protection.*

2. God, the Protector

God loves, protects, and sustains us. However, because of our mortally sinful nature, we often stray away from God's aim and teachings. Our immoral actions make God angry and unhappy, inviting serious consequences from God. From the Genesis narrative of the Flood, we understand that God punishes sinners, even to the point of death. This hand of God that strikes sinners may seem merciless. God said, "The end of all creations is in my hand. I will wipe them out along with the earth" (Gen 6:5-8). But God is love and because of His love, He made a plan to protect life on earth.

3. Noah's Ark - a Symbol of God's Protection

An era of mankind was washed away in the Flood. God blessed Adam and Eve and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen.1:28). The Malayalam translation for the phrase "to rule over" is '*Vazhuka*'. This means rule over animals and birds, offering protection. God placed man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and guard it. Because of man's sin, his fellowship with God was broken, and God decided to destroy mankind through the Flood. In the destruction process, God protected the people whom he loved and also those who obeyed his commands. Thus Noah and his family escaped from the Flood. God instructed Noah to take into the ark a male and female pair of every species of both clean and unclean animals and birds, in order to sustain the species.

4. Noah's Reaction

Noah did everything that God had commanded him to do. He built the ark despite the ridicule of his fellow citizens and entered the ark with his entire family. According to God's command, he took a male and female of every species of animal and bird into the

ark. He also took food and provisions, according to God's will. It rained for forty days and nights, and flood waters covered the earth, just as God had said. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out (Gen.6:23). After the waters gradually receded, Noah first sent out a raven and then a dove. Finally, he sent all the animals and birds out of the ark. Thus Noah, his family, animals, birds, and all living creatures were saved from the destruction through the Flood.

5. Rainbow -A Symbol of God's Protection

God blessed Noah and made a covenant with him about the protection of all living beings (Gen. 9:7-17). God's covenant with Noah was unconditional. It was a sign of God's love. This covenant was meant for all creations. This covenant was not just for Noah or that time in history, but this covenant continues into the future. God promised, "A flood will never again destroy the earth." A rainbow in the clouds is a symbol of God's covenant to Noah and mankind. God promises to protect not only mankind, but also all living things. In Matt.6:25-31, this protection for all living beings is again revealed through Christ's Sermon on the Mount.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Our Reaction

As individuals, we have a responsibility to continue to carry out God's plan to protect His creation. God has placed all the resources of this world under our authority. But, knowingly or unknowingly we contribute to the destruction of nature in various ways. The earth and its creatures should not be destroyed. We are equally responsible to protect our God-given natural resources, just as we protect and value human life. Against today's culture of greed and cheating, the rainbow represents a symbol of peace.

Preserving Harmony

God created human race and other living organisms to live in complete harmony with one other. But as time passed, humans began to depart from God's plans. In greed and selfishness, humans gradually destroyed other living organisms and damaged the sensitive equilibrium of nature. God, who is interested in conserving his creation, cleansed it through the Flood.

Man and other living organisms have an important role in the sustenance of His creations. For example, small organisms like earthworms play a role in making the soil fertile. Animals, birds, and reptiles that make up the biosphere are partakers in maintaining the equilibrium of the environment. But this relationship is being destroyed due to exploitation of resources, natural calamities, etc. Our responsibility is to cooperate with God by conserving nature, protecting life, and sustaining God's creations.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Frequently we ask, "*What difference can I make?*" or "*What should I do to responsibly carry out God's plan of loving and protecting His creation?*" When faced with these questions, we should recognize that both individually and collectively we can make a difference. Think back to the days before recycling became popular – when everyone

threw everything out in the trash. In less than 20 years, most households have gone from recycling little to nothing to recycling newspapers, plastics, glass, and metal. Many businesses recycle paper and purchase recycled products, and most of the industries practice source reduction in their packaging efforts. An entire mindset has changed in one generation!

Similarly, taking action on global warming requires a little change in lifestyle and behavior in order to contribute some major changes in greenhouse gas reductions. For other types of actions, the changes are more significant. When those actions are multiplied by the approximately 270 million people in the U.S. or the 6 billion people worldwide, the savings are significant. We can cut our utility bills by purchasing energy-efficient appliances, fixtures, and other home equipment and products. The average house is responsible for more air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions than is the average car. Everyone's contribution counts, so why not do your share? God loves His creation, let's cherish and sustain it!!

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The Malayalam word "Vazhuka" means to live a happy life. *[True/False]*
2. God's protection of all living beings is revealed through Jesus Christ's "Sermon on the Mount". *[True/False]*
3. The rainbow is not only a symbol of protection but also of peace. *[True/False]*
4. After the Flood, Noah sacrificed every clean animal and bird. *[True/False]*
5. God promised that while the earth remains, winter and summer will never cease. *[True/False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. What are the three unique features of God's covenant with Noah?

2. Then "God remembered Noah". Explain. (Read Gen. 8:1)

3. What is our role in protecting God's creation? How can we co-operate with God?

4. How is God's protection for all living things revealed in Jesus Christ's "Sermon on the Mount"?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. God established an everlasting covenant with Noah. What are the implications of this covenant for us today?

Essay format:

- a. Introduction
- b. What are the unique features of God's covenant with Noah?
- c. How is the rainbow a symbol of God's protection as well a symbol of peace?
- d. What is our responsibility to continue God's plan for protecting His every creation and sustaining its rhythm and harmony?
- e. Conclusion

D. Discuss: (*This section is optional*)

1. Cite three examples to show that God loves and protects his creations
2. All forms of life have their own values in God's planning. Discuss the role of earthworms, birds, animals, and sharks in maintaining the equilibrium of nature.
3. Discuss the effects of pollution or environmental destruction in your neighborhood. Suggest remedial measures.
4. How can you be a Noah in today's world?

MEMORY VERSE: Genesis 9:11

I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God Almighty, teach us to love and care for all living beings. Help us to be responsible stewards of your creation. Amen.



MAN - THE CROWN OF CREATION

Theme: HUMAN BEINGS – THE CROWN OF CREATION

Aim: To learn that man is superior to all other creations. God's love is not influenced by color, race, and caste.

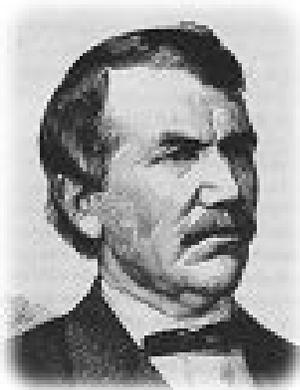
Bible Reading: Gen. 1: 26-31; Ps. 8:5-9;

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. God created human beings in God's likeness. When we refuse to reflect the image of God, we are denying the very purpose of our being.
2. Being created in God's own image, let us strive towards a life that is pleasing to God.

PREPARATION:

David Livingstone (1813-1873) was a Scottish doctor, explorer, and philanthropist who fervently served his fellow human beings. However, he is primarily remembered as a missionary hero, who sacrificed his life for Africa. He helped open the heart of Africa to missions and spread the Good News to them.



David was born in Scotland. His father, Neil Livingstone, was a traveling tea merchant, and his mother was a homemaker. Before he was ten, he received a prize for reciting Psalm 119, in its entirety, demonstrating his commitment in learning the Bible. He began early in life to be an explorer, and traveled all over Scotland. He loved to collect flowers and shells. At the age of twenty, he became an earnest Christian. He listened to the plea of missionaries to serve in Africa. He accepted this task as a challenge, fully cognizant that he was relocating to a dangerous part of the world. While in Africa, he moved to various places working as a doctor, minister, and reformer. He studied the plants, birds, and beasts and sent specimens to a college in London. When he wrote home, his letters were inundated with maps of the country. He had learned more about Africa than any other explorers of his time. He studied the deadly Tsetse fly that caused the African fever. He explored new fields, taught, healed, and helped others throughout his lifetime. He fought against the slave-trade, "the open sore of Africa," as he called it, and battled heroically against this unjust practice, enlisting others in the struggle. He was fully devoted to his work in Africa and eventually died there, but his body was sent to England. He was laid to rest at the Westminster Abbey, England. David Livingstone's unflinching love towards mankind and unparalleled passion to spread the Good News distinguished him as a unique human being. He treated everyone equally and helped the poor. God created humankind as the crown of His creation. David Livingstone is indeed a jewel in our creator's master plan.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Man – The Crown of Creation

The beginning of the Book of Genesis is about God's creation of the world (Gen.1, 2). God initially created the plants, sea animals, land animals and finally, man. Every animal goes through the same life cycle of birth, life, reproduction, and death. In this aspect, all animals are equal. But man is superior to all other living things described in the Bible. The well-known English poet, Tennyson wrote about man as "the crown and root of all creations". Another world renowned English Poet, John Milton wrote in "Paradise Lost" that man is the most important creation. Human beings are distinguished from the other creatures since they are created in God's own image (Gen.1:26-28). God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Then man became a living being (Gen. 2:7). God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that move on the ground" (Gen 1:28). Man has been entrusted with the responsibility of stewardship to look after the welfare of the animal and plant species. God has bestowed upon man the gift of His spirit of life. God sustains man as the crown of all creations.

How wonderful are creatures!
How blessed are the creatures!
We are the handiworks of God,
We are made in the image of God,
We are the Crown of His Glory.

2. Man, the image of God

Despite our differences in color, race, and physical stature, we are all created by God in His own image. God has granted different talents to the people who have been created in his own image. In contrast to the other animal species, God has empowered man with imagination, reasoning, creativity, and inventive capabilities. Man is a social being, depending on others for his social existence. The relationship of man with society is similar to the Trinitarian relationship which binds Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man is a spiritual being filled with divine power. God-centered individuals should lead a life that is pleasing to God.

3. Equality for All

Even though God had declared that what He had created was good, man's disobedience to God brought his own downfall. Morality decays with every succeeding generation. The earth is gradually being destroyed and defiled by its people who have disobeyed the laws, violated the status, and have broken the everlasting covenant. All are alike in the eyes of God, as stated by Paul in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

In Luke 16:19-23, we read the story of a rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus represents all the down-trodden of the earth. Yet, God looked upon both the rich man and Lazarus as equals. In James 2:1-8, we can see that the same point was made by the Apostles. People should not be perceived with different eyes. All must be treated

alike.

4. New Heaven and New Earth

We should realize that salvation is the restoration of mankind into the glorious state that is mentioned in the history of creation and in the vision of St. John (Rev. 21:1-13). A New Heaven and a New Earth exist where God lives along with man. The creation and the creator come together. Thus the equal status envisaged in God's intention is re-established.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

The concept of Original Sin suggests that sin is inherited. This does not mean that we become evil simply by being born. Rather, we share with Adam and Eve, a common desire to be Number One, to pretend to be all-wise, and to serve ourselves at the expense of all around us. Sin is not genetically inherited. Rather, human society passes on these tendencies through the manner in which children are raised, wrong choices are repeated, and pride, ambition, and selfishness are materially rewarded. Man, though the zenith of God's creation, plunged to a nadir in life because of his sinful nature. The story of Adam and Eve reveals the essence of human sin as a desire for unlimited freedom without responsibility. Similar to Adam and Eve, we want to do things our way and not trust God's guidance in our lives. Though marriage and children are part of God's divine plan, the reasons for the pain and struggles of parenthood and human disobedience are traceable to our first parents. Likewise, God intended for work to be pleasant and creative (Gen 1:28-29; 2:15), but selfishness has made life a burden and turned work into back-breaking toil, whether tilling the soil, running a monotonous machine, or experiencing the frustration and boredom of a routine job. Whenever we place our welfare, ahead of the well-being of others, the result is damage to others, ourselves, and God who shares the pain with all who suffer.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Do I judge a person by their economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decisions, and the fruit of hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness. The book of James warns us against honoring someone by his outward appearance. If we do so, are we focusing more on appearances than on character? Sometimes we do this because (1) poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do; (2) we also yearn to be wealthy and hope to exploit the rich

person as a means to that end; (3) we want the rich person to join our church strictly for his financial support. All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship. If we say that Christ is our Lord, we must then live as He requires, showing no favoritism and loving all people regardless of their economic status. We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly equate wealth as a sign of God's blessing and approval. Though God does promise earthly rewards to people who walk according to His ways, Christ also calls us to be ready to suffer for him and to relinquish anything that hinders us from following Him. Perhaps the sin of pride is one of the greatest barriers to salvation for the wealthy persons. For the poor, however, bitterness can often bar the way to acceptance of salvation.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

- A. Elaborate/Discuss:** Evolutionists have difficulty answering the following three questions.
1. Origin of life (where did that 1st amoeba come from?)
 2. Immutability of the species (Gods creation, each after their own kinds and note crossbreeding flowers will not produce a puppy—just a hyperbole to indicate that the occurrences of transitional forms are nil)???? Please clarify.
 3. Evolutionists say that things are moving upward, getting better from disorganization toward organization, while the Second Law of Thermodynamics states that it is “impossible”.

B. True or False:

1. Now the dwelling of man is with God according to Rev 21. *[True/False]*
2. God made man ruler over the earth to rule as he pleased. *[True/False]*
3. In Luke 16:19, the rich man went to hell because of his wealth. *[True/ False]*
4. Male and female were created in the image of God. *[True/ False]*

C. Short Answers

1. What is meant by the saying that man is the “crown of creation?”

2. State three verses from the scriptures that reflect that all men are equal before God?

3. What is Original sin? Why is it important?

4. Describe heaven per John 21:1-13?

D. Essay Question:

1. God made man in His Image. Discuss the following based on man's inherited attributes. (Paraphrase scriptures)

- a. Dissimilarity with animals
- b. The relationship of human beings with each other
- c. Marring of the attributes
- d. Renewing of the attributes through the perfect image bearer
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Ps 8: 5-6

You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet:

Closing Prayer:

Dear God help us to remember that heaven is our future home for all of eternity. Help us to realize that your work in our lives as Christians is to prepare us for heaven, and not acclimatize us to the life here on earth. Like Abraham, remind us that "here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Heb 13:14). As we have come to the city of the living God, help us to realize that we are in the presence of thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, the church of the firstborn, wherein our names are written in heaven because of Christ. Amen



The Rebuilding of our World

Theme: Science and Faith

Aim: To learn that religion (faith) and science coexist in our world, and they should be utilized with wisdom

Bible Reading: Nehemiah 2

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. The Bible is God's manuscript for mankind. It teaches us about God, how to care for His creation, and how to develop our faith in Him.
2. Science enables us to understand the mighty and awesome creation of God in a logical light. Hence, we need science and faith to rebuild our world and comprehend our Almighty God.

PREPARATION:

Johannes Kepler (1571 – 1630 A.D.), the famous German astronomer is primarily remembered for discovering the three laws of planetary motion which drastically altered the former ideas of the solar system.



His father, a mercenary soldier is believed to have died in the war, when Kepler was five. As the eldest child, he lived with his mother and worked in his grandfather's inn. His unusual competence in arithmetic amused the inn's customers. Kepler studied at a local school, and then attended a nearby seminary, with the intention of becoming ordained. He went on to enroll at the University to pursue his higher studies.

Kepler was a profoundly religious man. All of his works consisted of numerous references to God. He felt that he was fulfilling his Christian duty by studying and understanding the creation of God. He believed that man was made in the image of God, and hence was capable of understanding the Universe that He had created. Additionally, Kepler was convinced that God had created the Universe according to a mathematical plan. Although some have attempted to discredit him as being irrational, Kepler consistently thanked God for granting him insights, which were later proven to be highly rational. Kepler's Christianity was truly the most outstanding non-rational element of his work. His mastery and successful utilization of mathematics distinguished his findings. This Christian Natural Philosopher had a remarkable passion to comprehend the nature of the Universe through understanding the nature of its Creator.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

Is Science a Savior or Destroyer?

Today, we live in an era of rapid scientific developments. Science has enhanced the comforts and conveniences in our lives. It has resulted in astounding advances in the medical field and in the manufacturing of essential commodities that we use daily.

However, the new and state-of-the-art weapons, ammunition for war, and nuclear stockpiles threaten to destruct the world peace. Modern weapons, not only destroy countries, but also our environment.

By the end of the 19th century, a popular belief was established that the continuous development of science would make a 'heaven' on earth. But the castle of dreams built by man was demolished by man himself. The Second World War is a proof of this trend. The atom bombs dropped in 1945 over Hiroshima and Nagasaki turned the two areas into seas of fire. Millions of people died in the explosion and in the aftermath. The books 'Hiroshima', written by the famous journalist, John Horesy and "When the Atom Bomb Fell" written by Dr. Takashi Nagai, a physician at Nagasaki, depict the horrifying picture of the tragedies. Man's selfishness and love of war is constantly destroying our beautiful earth. Communal disharmony, racial prejudices, poverty, environmental pollution, infanticide, child abuse etc., are some of the growing pains of our era. Science is neither a savior nor a destroyer in all these problems. However, the man who uses science ultimately determines its destiny. It is also notable that the ruins of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were reconstructed with the help of science and technology. Life is a gift from God. All life-threatening activities are against the will of God. If we intend to preserve life and live it to its fullest potential, it is necessary to reconstruct our world on the basis of faith in God and co-operation with one another. The role of man in this process of reconstruction is inevitable. God requires man to reconstruct and showers His blessings on this process. Today, we shall meet a historical person named Nehemiah who captained a reconstruction project by unifying people with God.

1. Nehemiah – The Sculptor of Reconstruction

Nehemiah, the son of Hachaliah, was the cupbearer to the greatest King of the Persian Empire, King Artaxerxes. When Persia defeated Babylon in 538 B.C., a decree was pronounced by King Cyrus, enabling thousands of Jews to return to Jerusalem. They lived in great trouble and disgrace. Artaxerxes became the King of Persia in 486 B.C. During that period, a Jew named Nehemiah, reached the high post of being the cupbearer to the King (Neh.1:11). Some Jews who lived in Jerusalem visited Nehemiah in Persia and informed him of the troubles they had to face from their enemies.

2. Nehemiah – The Bearer of Society's Pains

They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire" (Neh. 1:3).

Walls and gates can be viewed as symbols of society. The wall was broken down, and the gates had been burned with fire. This situation depicts a state of insecurity. The reaction of Nehemiah is heart-rending. "When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (Neh. 1:4). His attitude of equating the troubles of the society as his own heartache is highly commendable.

3. In The Spirit of Prayer

There is a progressive nature in Nehemiah's reaction: 'heard', 'wept', 'mourned', 'fasted', 'prayed before the God of Heaven'. His reactions did not end in tears. Nehemiah presented the problem before God. After praying to God, he requested help from the King and the people. The King granted all his requests, and Nehemiah humbly gave all the glory to God. "... And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests" (Neh. 2:8).

4. The Call of Duty

After reaching Jerusalem and clearly understanding the state of affairs there, Nehemiah seeks the co-operation of the people. "... Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace" (Neh. 2:17).

5. Rebuilding – A Joint Effort

Nehemiah did not try to solve this problem on his own. But he sought help from God Almighty and the King, as well as from the people of Judah. The people imbibed the emotions and feelings of Nehemiah. "... They replied, "Let us start rebuilding." So they began this good work "(Neh. 2:18). They came into the spirit of revivalism from the idle-world of passiveness. They worked together and encouraged one another.

Each one of us has our own part to play in the rebuilding of our society. "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms." (1 Peter: 4:10).

Nehemiah played a vital part not only in the rebuilding of the walls, but also in rebuilding the outlook, life, and sanctity of the people of Judah.

6. Rebuilding the Modern World

God still selects numerous people to rebuild this broken or shattered world. God asks us to protect and preserve the world as faithful stewards. Science and scientists have an integral part to play in the rebuilding process. Spiritual values are the torches for utilizing the probabilities of science in a proper manner. Religion and faith also have a great share in this process. God is calling each one of us to be part of this rebuilding process. We have to react positively and use our talents for achieving this goal, thus transforming into active partners of God's plan.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

God works through His people to accomplish seemingly impossible tasks. God often shapes people with personality characteristics, experiences, and training that prepare them for His purpose. However, people have no idea what God has in store for them. God prepared and positioned Nehemiah to accomplish one of the most "impossible" tasks mentioned in the Bible.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Seemingly impossible tasks can be accomplished when God helps those who honor Him, and their efforts are unified. From the very beginning to the end of the reconstruction process, Nehemiah prayed for God’s help. We may not have Nehemiah’s unique abilities or feel that we are in a position to do anything great for God. However, there are two ways we can become useful to God. First, be a person who talks to God. Welcome Him into your thoughts and share yourself with Him - your concerns, feelings, and dreams. Second, be a person who walks with God. Put what you learn from His Word into action. God may have an “impossible” mission that He wants to accomplish through you.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Nehemiah though a Jew, became the cup -bearer to King Artaxerxes of Babylon. *[True/False]*.
2. Walls and gates can be viewed as symbols of society. *[True/False]*
3. Being a cupbearer, Nehemiah immediately sought the help of the King and the people. *[True/False]*
4. Science and scientists, but not religion and faith, play an integral part in the rebuilding process. *[True/False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. Explain when science becomes a destroyer of the world and our environment.

2. How is Nehemiah pictured as “The Bearer” of society’s pains?

3. Explain how Nehemiah became successful in achieving his tasks?

4. How was Nehemiah able to rebuild the outlook, life, and sanctity of the people of Judah?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

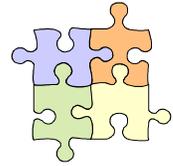
1. "The role of man in the process of reconstruction is inevitable." How would this best describe Nehemiah?
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Nehemiah- the Bearer of society's pains
 - c. The progressive nature in Nehemiah's reaction
 - d. Nehemiah's role in rebuilding and unifying people with God
 - e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Nehemiah 2:20.

I answered them by saying, "The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it."

CLOSING PRAYER:

"Take my life and let it be,
Consecrated, Lord to Thee;
Take my hands, and let them move,
At the impulse of Thy love." Amen.



PART II GOD'S WONDERFUL PEOPLE

CHAPTER 6 I TOO AM PART OF GOD'S FAMILY

Theme: Family

Aim: To understand that family is the basic unit of the society, and that each individual has an important role to carry out in the family

Bible Reading: Ex. 2:1-20; Gen 45:1-5; Luke 2:51

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. The concept of family was instituted by God, for the glory of God.
2. Each family member has specific responsibilities to other members of the family.
3. It is within the family that God mentors and nurtures us to be His instruments in the world.

PREPARATION:



The famous musical “Sound of Music” has made the Von Trapp family a household name. However, beneath the classic musical, is a true, heartwarming story of how one family defeated all odds, stayed together, and successfully created a new life for itself.

When the banks in Europe crashed in 1932, the Von Trapps suffered great financial loss. The children needed to take on jobs in order to contribute to the family income. Then in 1938, Hitler's Storm troopers marched across the Austrian border and claimed the land as Nazi territory. As troubles in Austria escalated, Adolph Hitler once asked the family to sing at his birthday party. Captain Von Trapp declined to perform for Hitler, just as the Israelites refused their captors' demand to sing during the exile in Babylon. “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for our captors asked us for songs” (Psalm 137:1-3). Soon, an offer to perform a series of concerts in America arrived, and the Von Trapp family viewed this opportunity as an avenue to escape the troubles in Austria. George Von Trapp gathered his family and devised a plan for sneaking past the Nazi border guards. Dressed as if they were going on a one-day hiking trip, with only small backpacks, they boarded the train to Salzburg. At the Salzburg station, they passed through a forest of red, white, and black Nazi swastika banners. Then they boarded a train to Italy and stepped into freedom!

As a father and a pioneer, Captain Von Trapp demonstrated remarkable courage by leading his family into a new land. He left behind all that he had worked for. He was a compassionate father who loved and nurtured his children. This family did not seek prestige from the political regime that was in power at the time. In spite of the crisis, the

family members stayed true to their values, enabling them to escape the Nazis and emerge into one of the most famous family of singers. Let us now examine further into the establishment of family, founded by God, where members of each home are expected to persevere, endure, and live with mutual interdependence and love as demonstrated by the Von Trapp family.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Family - God's Intention

God is the creator of the family unit. Finding that it is not good for the man to live alone, God made a suitable companion to help him (Gen. 2:18). In his divine providence, it is God, who unites one man and one woman through holy matrimony. So God has to be given the foremost place of honor in every family. He has to be accepted as the Lord, leader, and guide. It is God's presence that purifies, strengthens, and beautifies family life.

The principal purpose of marriage is to develop strong bonds of association, enabling the members of the family unit to attain mutual help and consolation in all walks of life. Family is an establishment where peace and happiness are enjoyed through inter-dependent love, care, and security. It is a stage to preserve and exchange values, heritage, and virtues. Another aim of the family is to bring forth children and to bring them up in the awareness of Jesus Christ. Faith is nurtured, and important values are imparted to the children through the family unit.

2. Family – In Today's Set Up

Changes have gradually transpired in the structure and relationships within families. Extended families are changing into nuclear families. Difficulties arise due to the peculiarities present both in the Eastern and Western cultures. In America, the difficulties are exasperated as we try to blend the cultures of the East and West. Moreover, the mass media promotes and encourages many practices as harmless, or even beneficial, but in reality are quite deadly to the family and the individual. Many times, the value of personal freedom is seen as the highest goal, preventing us from accepting the leadership of our Father in Heaven. This in turn, prevents us from learning from our parents and accepting their guidance. There are even some occasions where children try to take advantage of their parents, based upon the ill-conceived ideal that they (the children) are superior. Just as our Lord and Savior honored His parents on earth, and His Father in Heaven, we must learn to do the same. This is especially true as our parents get older and need our loving care and support. We have a duty to our parents.

The obsession to achieve material benefits should never be the focus of the family. As Christians, we must reject the influences of the mass media and other sources that divide the family. We ought to stand as living examples of the hope, peace, and love that are reflected through a God-centered family.

3. Family, The Foundation of the Society

Family is the basis of the society. A family should be perceived as a stage where a life-style centered in Christ is nurtured by parents and children. Parents have the greatest duty to educate their children in the responsibilities towards themselves, their parents, society, nation, and ultimately to God. Children who have been nurtured and educated in such a manner have indeed created numerous positive moments in history. "Whoever I am, whatever I do, for all those things I am indebted to my mother," said Abraham Lincoln.

The rupture of family relationships greatly impacts society. Family should be the bedrock of solid relationships. Though individuals differ, they are molded and refined by the bonds of love that knit the family members together. God's countenance is upon a family that adopts an attitude of submission before God and between the members of the household. A family should not be a collection of independent individuals, but a cohesive unit of mutual relationships. It is with this view that the first family, the family of Adam and Eve was established. Their number increased. When God blessed Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen.1:28), He actually meant that they should be bound by love.

4. Some Examples

Miriam Exodus 2:1-10 portrays a beautiful description of filial responsibility, exemplified by Miriam, sister of Moses.

Joseph In Joseph's history (Gen. 41:37-57; 45: 1-5), we witness another example of filial love. Joseph, who was sold by his brothers, reached Egypt as a slave. It was his dependence on God and faithfulness that enabled him to rise in power in Egypt. Joseph's affection compelled him to protect his father, his brothers, and their families.

Jesus As a son, Jesus went back with his parents to Nazareth, where he was obedient to them (Luke.2:51).

It is clearly evident from the above examples that our families play a pivotal role, particularly in the midst of crises. When anxiety and disappointment dominate our lives, strong family relationships ease the escalated level of stress experienced within a family unit. God expects each family member to live as faithful members of His family and witness for Him through his personal life.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Today there are many factors that threaten to disrupt and undermine the Godly institution of the family. These threats exist both inside the family, due to radical individualism and selfishness, and outside it, due to the secular influences of the world. Despite these negative influences, we must remember that ultimately God is the leader

of the family, and we have a responsibility to Him to uphold the family regardless of the cost.

1. What are the causes for the rupture of family relationships? Suggest remedies.
2. What is the role of individuals in reconstructing and rebuilding family relationships?
3. Do families view Christian discipline and Christian education with appropriate seriousness?

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Recognizing the obstacles families face today, we must remind ourselves continually of God’s vision of the family. We must also reflect upon the devotion Jesus showed to His family, and ultimately to His Father. It is this example that must dominate our hearts and minds as we strive to live out God’s vision. Whether it is through Christian education, discipline, or caring for loved ones in times of old age and need, the value of self sacrifice must be of paramount significance. There will be many occasions when we will struggle with the concept of self-sacrifice. However, we need only look to Our Savior who submitted His life to the will of the Father and said, “Yet not My will, but Yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Individual members of the family are not free to carry out their Christian witnessing by practicing the experiences of God’s Kingdom in his or her personal life. *[True/False]*
2. The submission before God and between the members of the family creates the opportunity for God to work. *[True/False]*
3. Each family shall be a source of mutual relationship. *[True/False]*
4. Due to the nuclear nature of families in the modern world, a self-centered lifestyle is encouraged. *[True/False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. Family is the basis of society. Give a biblical example to justify this statement.

2. Both Miriam and Joseph exhibited strong family ties. Give the similarities and dissimilarities in each situation

3. How did God reinforce His intention regarding the family to mankind?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

Think about the challenges families face today. Briefly describe God’s vision of the family and how circumstances today pervert this vision. Give examples of how this vision can be restored.

Essay format:

- a. Introduction
- b. Explain God’s vision of the family.
- c. Describe one or two problems that families face today.
- d. Describe how these problems can be overcome to restore God’s vision of the family
- e. Conclusion

D. Explore: (*This section is optional*)

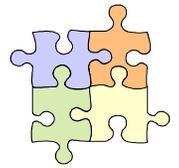
Talk with your parents about ways you and your family (together) can strengthen the relationships found within your home.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalms 133:1

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God we bow before you and ask for your grace and blessing on our families. Teach us to treasure the relationships that we have in our families and help us to strengthen the bonds of love. May each family be a strong pillar in the building of Your kingdom. Amen.



GOD WHO GUIDES INDIVIDUALS AND NATIONS

Theme: HUMANITY: ONE IN UNITY

Aim: To learn that God leads nations and individuals

Bible Reading: Micah 4:2-7; Jeremiah 31: 28-34

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. God transforms individuals and nations to prepare them for His mission, accomplishing great tasks for His glory.

PREPARATION:

“Doctors without Borders”, also known as *Medecins Sans Frontieres* (MSF), is an international relief organization. The membership of MSF consists of doctors, nurses, engineers, human rights specialists, and experts from multitude of other fields. MSF provides medical and logistical aid to people in distress, in different parts of the world. Each year, about 2500 volunteers travel to numerous countries where people suffer due to epidemics, wars, famine, natural calamities, *et cetera*. In addition to the volunteers, MSF recruits paid employees (15,000 in 2004) from the countries in which they provide relief assistance. MSF speaks out against abuses of human rights and violation of humanitarian laws that it witnesses, while providing medical relief. It also undertakes public education projects to enhance the awareness of medical and humanitarian issues. In recognition of the organization's pioneering humanitarian work on several continents, Médecins Sans Frontières was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999.



Although MSF is not a Christian organization, it is based on the belief that caring individuals can make a difference in the world. Members of MSF are, indeed, inspired and led by God for a noble mission. Today, we are going to explore about a few caring individuals who made a difference in the world during the Bible times.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

Throughout the Bible, God has empowered individuals by enabling them to make a difference in the lives of others. Even today, God continues to transform persons and nations for the glory of His kingdom.

1. Saul – A Miracle of God

In Acts 9: 1-10, we see how God transforms Saul, who was a persecutor of the Church and the Christians, into a builder of the Church. God's decision about Saul was, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts. 9:15). Acts chapter 9 describes how God's grace spreads in the life of Saul. The transformation of Saul was dramatic. God enabled Saul to repent of his actions in the past. When God intervenes, an awesome transition can be observed in an individual's life. Saul was changed into a suitable instrument in God's hands. God utilized Saul as an instrument for the all-round progress of the Christian Church.

2. Naaman

In 2 Kings Chapter 5, we read how God works through Naaman, who was a Gentile. He was the Commander of the army of the King of Syria and had emerged victorious in many wars. He was a mighty man, but a victim of a debilitating disease, leprosy. But God's grace enveloped Naaman through a young servant girl. Naaman was completely healed when he followed Prophet Elisha's instructions, by washing himself in the river Jordan seven times. He believed in the God of Israel with his entire heart and proclaimed, "...Your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other God but the Lord" (2 Kings 5: 17).

3. Treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia

In Acts 8:26-39, the Treasurer of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, was subjected to God's plan. He came to Jerusalem to worship. He was in search of the truth. Here Philip, the disciple of Christ, acted as God's instrument. When the Treasurer heard about the gospel of Christ, he took a new decision and requested Philip to baptize him. (Acts. 8:37)

4. God's Action at Nineveh

Due to their wickedness, God was angry with the City of Nineveh. The Prophet Jonah did not co-operate with God's plan to go to Nineveh. But God transformed him, compelling him to go to that city. On hearing Jonah's words, the people and the King of Nineveh repented and turned away from evil. "The people of Nineveh believed in God, they proclaimed a fast, and put on sack cloth" (Jonah 3:5). "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened" (Jonah 3:10).

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Current Events

Even today, God is acting among individuals and nations to transform them. After the Second World War, various nations came to an agreement under the leadership of the United Nations Organization (UNO) to establish world peace. The formation of Israel into a nation is an example of God's plan and action. Through out the course of time,

God has raised many leaders and utilized them as catalysts to defend the fight for freedom and other human rights in nations across the world. We praise God for the lives of Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and many other leaders who have tirelessly labored to transform our society by preserving justice for those who have been exploited.

Assurance of God

Today, situations are getting worse in the family, society, nation, and the church. Micah 3:9-10 says, "Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness." The Prophet Micah suggests the solution to this problem, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths" (Micah 4:2). Micah gives further assurance by stating that the Lord will gather those who have been driven away, and He will reign over them. (Micah 4:6,7)

The evils of the modern world have immensely affected us, and the adverse effects are reflected in the economic, social, and political fields. But God assures us that He will lead His children if we implore His help. "He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not take up sword against nation nor will they train for war anymore" (Micah 4:3). Instruments of destruction will be transformed to instruments of creation, and peace will be restored in this world. During his ascension into heaven, Jesus also promised us, "And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mathew 28:20). God seeks to secure world peace and unity, through various organizations and its leaders, by guiding and transforming the lives of individuals and nations.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

We must consistently seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for strength to accept the things we cannot change; courage to change the things we can; and wisdom to discern the difference. Our forbearing spirit, characterized by graciousness and humility, will enhance mutual love, harmony, and peace in our communities. God expects our lives to be intertwined, so that we may earnestly support and sustain one another at all times.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. Discuss:

What are some of the issues that hinder world peace? Explore ways in which we can realistically overcome these problems.

B. True or False:

1. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, was healed by the Prophet Elijah.
[True/False]

2. Philip transformed Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, to be a follower of Christ. *[True/False]*
3. Upon hearing Jonathan's words, the people of Nineveh turned away from their evil ways. *[True/ False]*
4. Micah prophesied that the swords will be transformed into pruning knives and the spears into plows. *[True/ False]*
5. God refers to Peter as His chosen instrument before the Gentiles, kings, and the sons of Israel. *[True/False]*

C. Short Answers:

1. Describe the new covenant of God mentioned in Jeremiah 31:28-34.

2. Explain God's promise that is described in Micah 4:2-7.

3. How did God mold Saul as a chosen instrument for the Christian Church?

4. How did Naaman become a believer of the one true God of Israel?

D. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "Right from the beginning of creation, we can see a God who changes persons and society." Explain

Essay format:

- a. Introduction – God leads us as well as transforms our minds.
- b. Describe God's new covenant with Israel and Judah that is mentioned in Jeremiah 31:28-34
- c. Explain God's transformation of Saul, Naaman, the Treasurer of Candace, and the people of Nineveh
- d. Describe God's assurance as depicted in Micah 4:2-7
- e. Conclusion

E. Explore: (This section is optional)

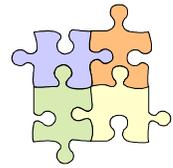
Research the Bible and Church history books to obtain more information about individuals who persevered to preserve peace and unity among God's people.

MEMORY VERSE: Jeremiah 31:33

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear Lord, we humbly beseech you to mold us into instruments of your peace. Enable us to gladly serve as agents of your love, so that unity may be restored in this world. Amen.



FAITH EXEMPLIFIED IN ACTION

Theme: GOD REVEALING IN HISTORY

Aim: To learn that God expects us to have unwavering faith. This *possession* of faith in Jesus should not stop with mere *profession*, but should *transform* into action.

Bible Reading: James 2:14-26; Heb. 11:7-12; Math. 25-31-46

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Faith is of utmost importance in every aspect of Christian life. It is the foundation of Christianity.
2. Actions are thus the necessary fruit of godly faith. Our faith without action is similar to a body without a soul.

PREPARATION:



John Bunyan, the author of “The Pilgrims Progress” was born in Bedford, England. He began to preach in the year 1660 and was arrested for spreading the Word of God. Because he refused to stop preaching, he was imprisoned for twelve years. In order to become free, all he had to do was to refuse to preach publicly. His response was, “If I was out of prison today, I would preach the gospel again tomorrow by the help of God.” He had every incentive to become free. He had four small children, one of them a blind daughter whom he dearly loved. To support his family, he made thousands of long shoelaces. His parishioners from Bedford helped him as well. Prison conditions in Bedford were not the worst in England. Nevertheless, the prisoners were deprived of some basic necessities such as lighting and bathing facilities. The cells stank of unwashed bodies. Prison fever or typhus was common and killed a number of prisoners. God used his imprisonment in a powerful way. While in prison, he published several books. The most famous one was “Pilgrims Progress”. An unforgettable image from this book is the heavy load that the ‘Pilgrim’ carried around on his back. This crushing load was his sin, which rolled off his back when he came to the cross. He had only two books to keep him company in prison, one was *the Bible*, and the other was *The Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* (this was a book that he read and reread). It is said that if the Pilgrims Progress was not written, then the other literary masterpiece would have been the *Holy War*. Let us now look at how faith and action played out in the lives of some men and women from the *Hebrews’ faith Hall of Fame*.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Noah

Noah *believed* God’s warning of destruction by rain and *obeyed* God. He was not detracted from constructing the ark despite the taunts of the people. “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Gen. 6:22). His actions were based on faith.

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God" (Gen. 6:9).

2. Abraham

Abraham is known as the "Father of Believers". Obeying God's command, he decided to offer his only son as a sacrifice, trusting that God could raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19). Abraham demonstrated the integrity of his faith through his action (James 2:22). "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend" (James 2:23).

3. Rahab

James presents Rahab, the Canaanite temple prostitute as a foreigner to Jewish religion. She demonstrated faith in the *purposes* intended by the God of the Israelites. Her faith prompted her to welcome the spies sent by Joshua and helped them to escape through a different route (Josh. 2:1-6). As a result, she and her family were saved during the destruction of Jericho. Her timely action proved that she was on God's side, and hence she became an ancestor of Christ (Matt. 1:5).

4. Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus, the tax collector, repented of his sins and came to faith in the Lord. This faith is reflected in his repentant response, "I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount" (Luke 19:8). This declaration by Zacchaeus is a notable example of faith in action. Jesus commended him as a son of Abraham.

5. Faith in Action – Christ the Model

Throughout Jesus' life, his convictions (what he said and believed) and actions were inseparable and indistinguishable. He revealed the principles of his life in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5, 6, 7). We witness Jesus' faith in God and his compassion for the hungry when he fed the five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish. He helped the needy (John 6:1-13).

The disciples of Jesus were arguing as to who was the greatest among them. "He took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet" (John 13:4-5). The example that Jesus set by washing his disciples' feet demonstrated that greatness is not achieved by seeking, but through service. He who subjected to the painful crucifixion was ready to forgive the crucifiers. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). His words were translated into action by granting forgiveness.

Jesus says concerning the last Judgment, "For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." (Matt. 25:42-43). Jesus loudly proclaims the importance of putting faith into action. He says, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in

prison and you came to visit me" (Matt. 25:35-36). Such persons are respected by God. "...You who are blessed by my Father..." (Matt.25:34). The Kingdom of God belongs to such people.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

The authenticity of faith is revealed in action, as repeatedly affirmed by James in his Letter. According to the Letter to the Hebrews, the brave men and women were commended for their faith in action that spanned beyond their knowledge. The Bible instructs us in knowledge, which the Holy Spirit transforms into actions characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

The life of Jesus Christ clearly demonstrates how faith is translated into action. Jesus identified himself completely with the poor, the suffering, and the lonely. He was not ashamed to interact with the indigent and the untouchables.

At present, we tend to regard Jesus as the perfect, spotless, saintly being who is the paragon of all virtues. On the other hand, we feel repulsed at the very thought of close association with murderers, rapists, prostitutes, and thieves. We even hesitate to be in association with people who are poverty-stricken. To perceive Jesus in each of these persons can be quite a challenge for some of us. However, Jesus clarifies a different perspective to us through his actions. What ever we do to the people who are least esteemed by our society equates to what we do to Jesus. And what we neglect in doing to such people, we neglect to do to Jesus. Therefore, our faith should be validated with our actions. Remember, that faith is a free gift graciously granted by God to be utilized for his glory, not bundled up and stored away in a hidden place.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Our faith should be reflected in our daily lives. "Authentic faith is not agreeing with truth and thinking someday we will do it. It is taking God at his word and doing what He says as soon as possible "(David Roper in *Growing Wise Slowly*). Paul's statement in Rom. 3:28 that "man is justified by faith apart from observing the law" concurs with James 2:18, "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." .While it is true that our faith and good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in transformed lives and good deeds. Sometimes we have to make difficult choices concerning our actions. Through observing our actions and the manner in which we conduct our lives, the unbelievers should perceive that we are indeed true followers of Jesus. We have to be selfless and expect nothing in return for our actions. Moreover, we must be constantly diligent that our actions are pleasing to God.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Abraham is known as the "father of worshipers". (True/ False)
2. John Bunyan went to India for his charitable missionary work. (True/ False)
3. Rahab was a prostitute who was from Israel. (True/ False.)
4. Zacchaeus declared that he will give all his belongings to the poor. (True/ False)

B. Short Answers:

1. Why was Abraham called the Friend of God?

2. How did Zacchaeus act according to his faith?

3. Describe two circumstances where Jesus demonstrated his faith in action.

C. Essay Question: 500 words

“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?” James 2:14. Discuss the importance of faith and actions in accordance with faith.

- a. Importance of faith and good deeds
- b. Individuals from the Bible who have portrayed faith through their actions
- c. Faith in action as modeled by Jesus Christ
- d. If salvation is achieved by works/action.
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Matt. 25:35-36

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.

CLOSING PRAYER Dear Lord, help us to act in accordance to our faith instead of merely preaching our faith.



GOD'S CALL IN EVERY DAY LIFE

Theme: Response to God's revelation

Aim: To learn that we become partakers in the work for God's kingdom through our response to His call.

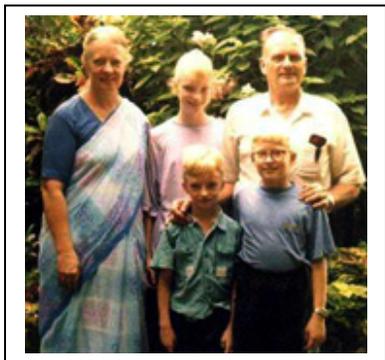
Bible Reading: Luke 5: 1 – 11; Acts 9: 1 - 6

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. When God calls us for a specific purpose, He also equips us for the task that He has called us for. Our duty is to respond to the calling with a sincere heart.
2. The Bible has many examples of men and women who thought they were incapable to lead. However, they were transformed and filled with courage when they responded positively to God's call. God looks at our sincerity, and not at our abilities.

PREPARATION:

The tragic plight of Graham Stuart Staines, who served the lepers in India, brings tears to all those who are familiar with the incident that ended his life and that of his two young sons. On January 22, 1999, Staines (a 58 year old Australian missionary) along with his sons, Philip (aged 7) and Timothy (aged 9), were burned alive by a violent mob.



The vehicle that they were sleeping in was set on fire by a crowd, opposed to Christian missionaries. Though Staines and his sons tried to escape from the burning vehicle, they were prevented from doing so, by their attackers. On that fateful day, Staines had picked up his sons from their boarding school for school vacation. He had decided to break their journey at Manoharpur village in Orissa, India. His wife, Gladys, had stayed back at their home in Baripada, Orissa and realized only in the morning that her husband and two sons were also inside the burning vehicle. Now she was left only with a daughter, Esther

(aged 13) and her Lord, for strength and consolation. Now, let us look at some individuals from the Bible, who were also transformed by God's calling.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. God's Call for Transformation

During the time of His public ministry, Christ invited many to become participants in the work of God's Kingdom. The Lord's disciples were called and chosen by Him. Even today, God calls each one of us for a specific purpose. When we sincerely respond to God's call, we, along with the society we live in, undergo a transformation. The life experiences of Peter and Paul inspire us to transform our lives for Christ.

2. The Big Fisherman Joins the Apostles

Peter, who heard and accepted the Lord's call, was a fisherman from Galilee. When he heard the Lord's call, he genuinely responded to it. It was while they were fishing that the Lord called Peter, his brother Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee. The Lord called those who were hard at work. How apt is the proverb which says, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop!" Jesus had appeared before them when Peter, who was an experienced fisherman, felt frustrated that they had not caught any fish all night. The Lord said, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered saying, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Luke 5:5). We should realize that it is fruitless to toil without God. However, Peter wasn't disappointed. We can see absolute obedience and compliance in Peter's response, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When he obeyed Christ, he succeeded in catching an abundant supply of fish. However, he wasn't conceited about his success. He fell down at the feet of Jesus and confessed that he was a sinner. Peter, who pleaded with the Lord to depart from him, was invited by Christ to form an everlasting relationship with him. "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (Luke 5: 10). The Lord called Peter for a very noble cause. The response from Peter and the sons of Zebedee is an example of absolute submission. "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything, and followed him" (Luke 5: 11). There had been failures and drawbacks in Peter's life. But the love of God, which seeks and finds, saved Peter and restored him. God not only calls us, but also strengthens and revives us to fulfill the purpose for which we are called.

3. Paul - Christ's Brave Soldier

Paul's life story is about a persecutor of the Church, who eventually turns into its protector and defender. Paul was born at Tarsus in Cilicia. Cilicia was famous because of its university and trade center. Paul, a Roman citizen, was brought up in a strong Jewish background. It was at the feet of Gamaliel, a Jewish scholar that Paul learned the Jewish laws. Paul, who started out with letters of permission from the high priest to persecute Christians in and around Jerusalem, heard the voice of God calling him, as he approached Damascus (Acts 9: 1-6). The astonishing revelation of God, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" transformed Paul into a new being in Christ. The persecutor of the church was thus transformed into the staunchest messenger of the church.

4. Mary of Magdalene

Mary Magdalene was a sinful woman. She understood clearly that Christ was the promised Messiah. While she was at Simon's house, she poured fragrant oil on Christ's feet. She then washed them with her tears of repentance and wiped them with her hair, which is the pride of every woman. Mary Magdalene resorted to these actions to publicly proclaim Christ, as she acknowledged her Savior (John 12:1-3; Matt. 26:6-13).

5. The Samaritan Woman

The Samaritan woman who stood near Jacob's well was sinful and lived without the fear of God (John 4:4-26). But when Christ revealed himself to her, she recognized Him

immediately. She testified, "He told me everything I ever did." She did not hesitate to proclaim that Christ was the Messiah (John 4:39).

6. God's Call in Daily Life

God continually calls us. What is our response to this call from God? God is calling us through worship, prayer, and various life experiences. St. Augustine, responded to God's calling and became a transformed man. In his book, "Confessions", he has recorded one of his prayers, "The soul which is my home is too cramped. Please renovate it and claim it." Let us submit ourselves sincerely into the hands of God who restored and transformed the lives of Peter, Paul, Mary Magdalene, and the Samaritan woman.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Apart from Jesus Himself, no other individual has shaped the history of Christianity as the Apostle Paul. His frenzied persecution of Christians, following Stephen's death, propelled the church to obey Christ's final command to take the gospel worldwide. Paul's personal encounter with Jesus changed his life. He never lost his fierce intensity, but from then on, his passion was channeled towards spreading the good news. Today also, God calls people who lead a sinful life. Some of them do respond to His call and change their evil ways of living. Let us accept fellow Christians into the Christian fellowship, irrespective of their shortcomings in the past.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

When Paul met Jesus, he found the One with the true reason for living and dying. He became totally *sold out for Christ*. God fully utilized every aspect of Paul's being – his background, his training, his citizenship, his mind, and even his weaknesses. Are we willing to let God do the same for us? We will never know all He can do with us until we submit to Him all that we have!

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Peter, who had heard and accepted the Lord's call, was a tax collector from Galilee. *[True/False]*
2. Paul learned the Jewish laws from Nicodemus, a Jewish scholar. *[True/False]*
3. While at Simon Peter's house, Mary Magdalene poured fragrant oil on the feet of Christ and wiped with her hair. *[True/False]*
4. Standing near Joseph's well, Jesus revealed himself to the Samaritan woman. *[True/False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. Explain what we learn from Peter when he implicitly followed Jesus.

2. How did Jesus influence the fishermen to leave everything and follow Him?

3. How did Paul become a brave soldier of Christ?

4. How did the Samaritan woman recognize Jesus as the Messiah?

C. Essay Question: 500 words.

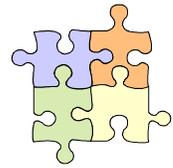
1. Jesus chooses ordinary people for extraordinary tasks. How is this true in the life of the disciples, Mary Magdalene, and the Samaritan woman?
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Jesus calls the fishermen.
 - c. Jesus' calls Paul.
 - d. Mary Magdalene and the Samaritan woman
 - e. Conclusion – God's call in our daily life

MEMORY VERSE: Acts9:5-6.

He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

CLOSING PRAYER:

"Jesus bids us shine, with a clear pure light,
Like a little candle burning in the night;
In this world of darkness we must shine,
You in your small corner, and I in mine." Amen.



LET US PLAN OUR LIFE

Theme: Modern Human Ventures

Aim: Our lives should be Christ-centered

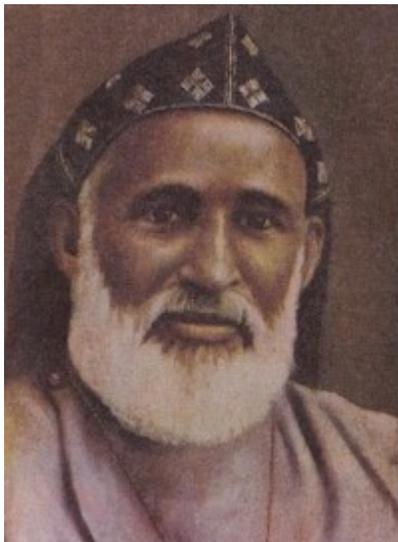
Bible Reading: Matthew 6: 24-33; Luke 16: 10-13

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. As Christians, the plans we make must be in accordance with God's purpose for our lives.
2. Our priorities in life must be to glorify our Master.

PREPARATION:

The late Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma, the former Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church during the forties, was a visionary with great evangelistic fervor. He passionately believed that the Mar Thoma Church should play a key role in evangelizing India. During his leadership of our church, several missionaries were sent to various parts of



India to preach the gospel of Christ to the poor and down-trodden people of India. He established the 'Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists Association', with the purpose of inspiring every member of the Mar Thoma Church to be a missionary. He frequently visited various parishes and led revival meetings, prayer fellowship, and youth meetings to energize the members to spread the gospel. He also held continuing education courses for the clergy of the church to prepare them for gospel work. Throughout his life as an ordained priest of the church, he zealously strived to mold our church, as a pioneer evangelistic church, among the churches of India. Recognizing his dedication and pioneering efforts, Dr. E. Stanley Jones, one of the most accomplished missionaries of the Methodist Church, referred to Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma as "The Great Indian Missionary". His was a life that was totally dedicated for

the glory of our Divine Master and Savior Jesus Christ. Throughout his life, Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan genuinely attempted to serve as a faithful steward of the talents that the Lord had bestowed upon him.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

Our relationship with God is of utmost importance. The very purpose of creation is to glorify the Almighty Lord. Our foremost duty is to attribute the highest priority in our lives to God. Adam and Eve failed in their priorities and disobeyed God. The entire human race became cursed because of their sin. On the other hand, Abraham succeeded in making the right choices through his obedience and trust in God. God not only blessed Abraham, but He also blessed the entire human race through this man, because of his unparalleled faith. Jesus says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). We must know

God's plan for our life, and this realization must have a bearing on all the decisions that we make in our life. When we trust in the Almighty and have faith in His goodness, we receive the strength and courage to face the adversities in our lives. The well known evangelist of our church Sadhu Kochu Kunju Upadeshi, a man of Christ-like humility with implicit trust in God, eloquently expressed his unwavering faith through his song, "*Nalaye kondan manassil lavalesham bharamilla. Oro naalum daivamenney pottunnu...*" (I have no worry at all about tomorrow. God provides for me each day).

In God's plan, each person is a steward of God's treasures. Our abilities are gifts from God. In the parable of the talents, each one was given talents according to his abilities. We should strive to enhance our God-given resources. Those who can successfully increase their resources will be rewarded with greater responsibilities, sharing his master's happiness and recognition. "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt. 25:21). Those who misuse or under utilize their talents will be punished. The characteristics of the lazy servant include idleness, prejudice, faithlessness, self-justification, and a complaining disposition.

In Matt. 18:21-35, we realize that God expects us to work as merciful stewards. Here, we can see that the one whose debt has been reduced is expected to lower the debts of those indebted to him. Our God surrendered His one and only Son for the salvation of mankind. Therefore, we should be able to pardon the sins committed against us, as exemplified in the Lord's Prayer.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

God has granted each one of us unique talents and gifts. How often do we use our God-given talents for the extension of His kingdom? Are we grateful to God for the generous gifts that He showers upon us? We often find ourselves devoting very little time for God and His people, since our energies are primarily consumed for increasing our material comforts on this earth. Our lives should pivot on Christ and His commission to us. Then, our priorities will be aligned correctly, equipping us to better serve the Lord. There are many others in the modern world like Bishop Abraham and Sadhu Kochu Kunju who have wholeheartedly served the Lord.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Let us make God the center of our priorities and strive to become faithful stewards of the gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon us. With Christ at the center, let us utilize our God-given talents to lead fruitful lives, by walking in love, joy, and peace. God will indeed bless and multiply our talents if we use His gifts for His glory. We must be eager to share our faith and edify one another.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. In the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the king forgave the servant who owed him ten thousand Denari. *[True/ False]*
2. In the Parable of the Ten Talents, the master distributed talents according to each servant's ability. *[True/ False]*

3. A Christ-centered life equips us to overcome obstacles and to live in accordance with the will of God. *[True/ False]*
4. One who believes in God should not be overly anxious about his life. *[True/ False]*
5. The servant who received the five talents from his master hid them in a hole in the ground. *[True/ False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. According to the passage in Matthew 6, we should not be overly anxious about our lives. Explain.

2. How can we attain a Christ-centered life?

3. You cannot serve both God and money, according to Matthew 6. Explain.

4. What do we learn from the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant? (Matthew 18:21-35)

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "In God's planning, every individual is appointed as a steward of God's treasures." Explain.

Essay format:

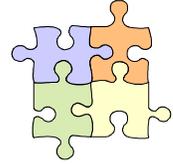
- a. Introduction – God's purpose for our lives
- b. Describe the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14-30).
- c. What do we learn from the parable of the Talents?
- d. How can a Christ-centered life help us become better stewards of God's treasures?
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Matthew 6: 33-34

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, please help us to rearrange our priorities so that Christ is truly at the center of our lives. Amen. Sthothram!



PART III GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GOD'S WORLD

CHAPTER 11 GOD'S PRESENCE REVEALED IN LONELINESS

Theme: Nature of God

Aim: To learn that God's help is available in despair and in loneliness

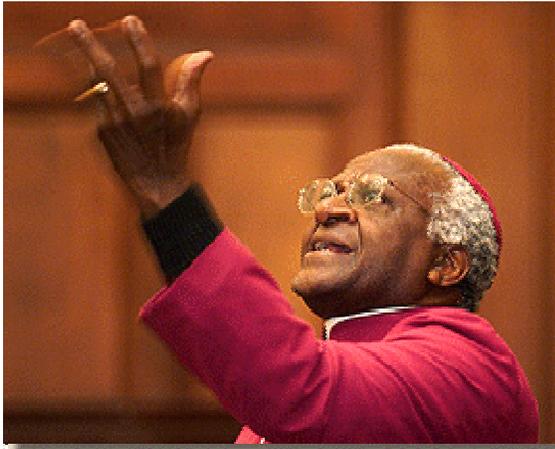
Bible Reading: Genesis 28:10-16

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. When difficulties come our way, we can cast our burdens upon our Lord and He shall sustain us.
2. In times of trouble, God will provide a helping hand.

PREPARATION:

What if you were told today that because of your color or race, you would not be allowed to get higher education? What if you were asked to relocate because of your ethnic background? This was the situation that **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** faced



as he was growing up in South Africa. The system of apartheid restricted Black South Africans to separate living areas and separate public facilities. They were legally barred from certain jobs.

Bishop Desmond Tutu was a man of prayer and faith. He had a vision for the people of South Africa. He denounced the apartheid system as "evil and unchristian." Bishop Tutu called for equal rights for all South Africans, a system of common education, and an end to forced relocation. Tutu encouraged nonviolent resistance to the apartheid regime. In 1984, Desmond Tutu

was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, "not only as a gesture of support to him, but to all individuals and groups in South Africa who, with their concern for human dignity, fraternity and democracy, incite the admiration of the world." Let us examine the lives of those children of God whose heavenly visions sustained them through life.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Heavenly Vision at the Cross-roads of Life

Jacob, who was born to Isaac and Rebecca, has a unique and unforgettable place in the history of the Israelites. The name 'Jacob' means supplanter. At his birth,

Jacob grasped his twin brother's heel with his hand. When they grew up Jacob became a shepherd, a man of the open country, and Esau, a skillful hunter. Back from hunting one day, Esau was extremely hungry and asked his brother Jacob for some red soup he had prepared. Esau got the soup only in exchange for his birthright (Gen.25:33). Because of this, Esau hated his brother Jacob who had wronged him (with his mother's support). Esau even thought of killing Jacob. So Jacob fled to Haran to stay with his uncle (Gen.27:41-46)

On his way to Haran, Jacob reached Luz at sunset, where he rested for the night. Using one of the stones there as a pillar, he lay down to sleep in that frightening silence, as he was tired. He was desperate, too. In his sleep "he saw a beautiful dream with a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it." This was indeed a comforting picture for Jacob. Don't we have similar experiences of dejection and disappointment in our lives? In times like these, it is the gentle voice of God that gives us the solace we need. God doesn't forsake us in our crises. Rather, He stands by us and carries us through our difficulties.

The stairway that Jacob saw depicts the divine plan of God. This stairway connects and relates man to God. The angels that climb up and down are the messengers of God. At the other end of the ladder, Jacob saw the Lord who said, "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac." Our Lord is a God who is active in history. When God blessed Jacob He didn't just bless him alone; through him the entire progeny were going to be blessed. God said that all the people of the earth would be blessed through him and his offering. When God blesses us He wants to bless our surroundings too. We should be a blessing to the society where we are placed. "I am with you and will watch over you" God said to Jacob. The greatest gift of God is in the continued protection He offers us.

When Jacob awoke from his sleep he recognized the presence of the Lord. Till then, he was ignorant and unaware of God's ever-enveloping presence. He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the House of God! This is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it and called that place Bethel. Like Jacob, we need to have this new vision which will steer us through the vicissitudes of life.

2. The Faithful Joseph

Another example of God's divine guidance is seen through the life of Joseph. The Bible says "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered" (Gen.39:2a). The Ishmaelites took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of the guard. Joseph was well-built and handsome. His master's wife often tempted him and coaxed him to have illicit relations with her. But Joseph refused her demand. His master Potiphar had put everything under the control of his faithful servant except his wife. So he could not do a wicked thing and sin against God. Consequently he had to face several problems in life, including imprisonment. But while Joseph was in prison the Lord was with him and was kind to him. He granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden (Gen.39:21-23).

Joseph is a role model for us in an age of licentiousness and permissiveness. Sometimes the pleasures of the world lure us away from our Christian walk and we fall

a prey to temptation. Jesus said “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the body is weak” (Matt.26:41). Joseph resisted temptation by placing God before everything else.

3. The women who turned to God in distress

Ruth (Ruth 13:9-13) and Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18) turned to God as they plunged into the abyss of despair. Ruth, a Moabite woman, married an Israelite who was not a member of her culture. Fate struck her in the prime of her life and she lost her husband. Still she continued to serve her mother-in-law, Naomi. She wanted to be of some help to her in her old age. She thought it a crime to leave her mother-in-law in the time of her need. She embraced Naomi’s religion and accepted her relatives as her own relatives. This epochal decision has earned her a unique position in Biblical history. Thus, a gentile woman became the grand old mother of the tribe of David.

Mary Magdalene has a covetable place in the Bible as she was one of the first women who saw the Risen Lord (Mark 16:1-11). It is the Lord who saves us from despair. He has just one condition; we need to approach him in faith.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Jacob did not feel the presence of the Lord after he woke up from his dream. [True/False]
2. Our faith in God will enable us to face difficulties and disappointments in life. [True/False]
3. We will not be tempted if we put God before everything. [True/False]
4. Ruth has an important place in Biblical history because of her disloyalty to Naomi’s family. [True/False]
5. Mary Magdalene was the first person to see the risen Lord. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. What is the vision that Jacob had at Bethel?

2. What promise did God give Jacob?

3. Why do we say that Jacob is faithful?

4. Why is Ruth called the grand old mother of the tribe of David?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "Trials and tribulations refine, purify, renew, and rekindle our Christian walk."

Essay format:

- a. Introduction – Life is a mix of joy and sorrow
- b. Explain how God saved Ruth and Mary Magdalene from their despair
- c. Write of a person whose heavenly vision at the cross-roads of life brought about a radical change in their own life and in the lives of other people
- d. How can the above statement be meaningfully applied in your life?
- e. Conclusion

D. Explore:

Use the internet to learn more of the life and struggle of the people of Africa against apartheid.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

- 1. What are some of the ways in which God calls us?
- 2. From Joseph's life what do we learn about resisting temptation and doing what is right?
- 3. Share with your friends the ways in which the Lord guided you in times of crises.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Jesus said "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt.28:20). When we face trials and tribulations, or when we are at the cross-roads of life, our Lord will bear our burdens and carry us through. We need to be strong and not be discouraged. God has promised that He will never leave us or forsake us. Will you trust God to lead you in the midst of difficulties, today?

"Guide me O Thou great Jehovah
Pilgrim through this barren land
I am weak but Thou art mighty
Hold me with Thy powerful hand..."

MEMORY VERSE: Genesis 28:15

I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Prayer:

O Lord, help us to be your witness in this world. Enable us to have the heavenly vision which will sustain us through the struggles in our lives. Amen.



GOD'S PRESENCE IN THE HOT FURNACE

Theme: GOD IN DIRECT FELLOWSHIP WITH HUMAN BEING

Aim: To recognize the presence of God in the midst of difficulties

Bible Reading: Daniel 3

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Christians today are called on to express commitment to the Lord by taking a stand for what is right.
2. Bible promises that God will be present with us during our times of affliction.

PREPARATION:

"I have a dream! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."



These were the words of **Martin Luther King Jr.**, a Baptist preacher, who made a stand for the rights of Blacks in America. He, along with other African American leaders, marched to Washington DC calling on his followers to conduct their struggle with dignity and discipline and to not use physical violence. His willingness to take a stand for justice resulted in several

imprisonments and finally his death in 1968. Let's look at some young Jews in Babylon, who overcame certain "fiery" situations in their lives.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

Daniel and his three Friends

When Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, overran Judah, he took Daniel and his

three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as prisoners from Israel. From among those who were captured, the King wanted the 'cream of the crop' - royal blood, able-bodied, and competent individuals to serve in the King's Palace. Since they fulfilled the King's criteria, he ordered his chief eunuch to inculcate the Chaldean culture in them. The indoctrination was to be completed in three years. The four young men were assigned a daily portion of the rich food from the King's table. However, Daniel resolved (Dan.1:8) not to partake of the food as it had been sacrificed to idols (Lev. 11, Deut. 14). He also influenced the other three men to do the same.

God blessed Daniel and others for their faithfulness, and they continued to grow in health and wisdom. "To these four young men, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Dan.1:17). As these four youths far excelled the other magicians and enchanterers in the Kingdom, the King appointed them as his courtiers.

Daniel and his friends relied on God through prayer to deliver them out of their perilous situation (Dan. 2:17-18). God thus helped Daniel to successfully interpret the dream the King had seen and prevented the execution of the other courtiers. Daniel did not seek personal glory, instead acknowledged God as the revealer of mysteries when questioned by the King (Dan. 2:26-28). The King was pleased with Daniel and presented him with great honors and gifts. He made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and Chief prefect over all wise men in the Kingdom. Upon Daniel's request, the King also appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as administrators of the country.

During this period of their administration, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not prepared to bow down before the golden image erected by Nebuchednezzar. It was the King's decree that if anyone refused to bow down before the image, they would be thrown into the burning furnace. The response of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the royal decree was as follows: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it; and he will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up." (Dan.3:17-18)

This is indeed a remarkable affirmation of faith. They serve not the King, but the King of Kings. Their ultimate loyalty is to God. They do believe that their God can deliver them from any eventuality, Their God, they knew, would offer fellowship even in the midst of adversities. This faith moves even the King, and he testifies, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angels and rescued his servants! (Dan. 3:28). In addition, he issued an order banning all people from speaking anything against their God. The three of them also received a job promotion. Look at the bounty of God! This powerful God is alive today. If we maintain purity in life and courageously fight for noble values with abiding faith in God, we can experience signs and miracles in our lives.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were brothers. [*True/False*]
2. God blessed Daniel and his friends because they were loyal to King Nebuchadnezzar [*True/False*]

B. Short Answers:

1. Why did Daniel and his friends refuse to take the royal food?

2. What was the reaction of Shadrach and others to the royal decree that they would be put in the burning furnace?

3. Describe how God blessed Shadrach and others for their loyalty?

4. What were the original names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? (Read Daniel 1)

5. At present, what 'idols' do we serve in our daily lives?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "Have faith and stand up for Christ without compromising principles."

Essay format:

- a. Introduction – Christian life is all about faith, and faith being tested by Satan in every aspect of our life
- b. Explain how God rewarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for standing up for Him.
- c. How can the above statement be meaningfully applied in your life?
- d. Conclusion

D. Explore:

Use the Internet to learn more about the life and struggle of the African Americans in U.S. who stood for civil rights.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

1. If we make a stand for Jesus, God will protect us from danger. However, if He does not deliver us, will we still obey the Lord?
2. Did you know that when we love Jesus, we don't have to live in fear? He is stronger than our worst enemy that would hurt us.
3. We should never 'play with fire', but trust Jesus in all our difficulties.
4. Quote from the Bible two or three examples of great warriors of God who had to endure pain and suffering.
5. What sort of answers should we expect from God when we face similar trials in our lives? If we react with panic when we face trying situations, what does it indicate about our faith?
6. Share with your friends the ways in which the Lord rewarded you because you stood for Him.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

We need to be resolute like Daniel, who decided not to partake of the King's food, recalling the injunction against eating unclean animals. God has assured us that those who believe and ask for His help will receive. Even when it appears that He is not responding, we can trust that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28). Though miracles don't always happen, we can be rest assured that our salvation is secure. As Paul says in Rom. 8:36-40, "Nothing can separate us from the Love of Christ, neither trouble nor hardship, neither persecution nor famine, neither nakedness nor danger, neither angels nor demons ... "

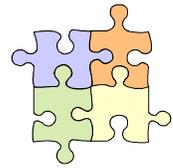
MEMORY VERSE: Daniel 3:17- 18

"If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it; and he will rescue us from your hand, O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O King that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up."

Prayer:

Loving God, help us not to yield to temptations and not to bow before other Gods.

Lord, it belongs not to my care
Whether I die or live;
To love and serve Thee is my share,
And this Thy grace must give.
If life be long, I will be glad, That I may obey;
If short - then why should I be sad to soar to endless day?



FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Theme: Broken Relationships

Aim: To learn about respecting parents and elders and maintaining good family relationships

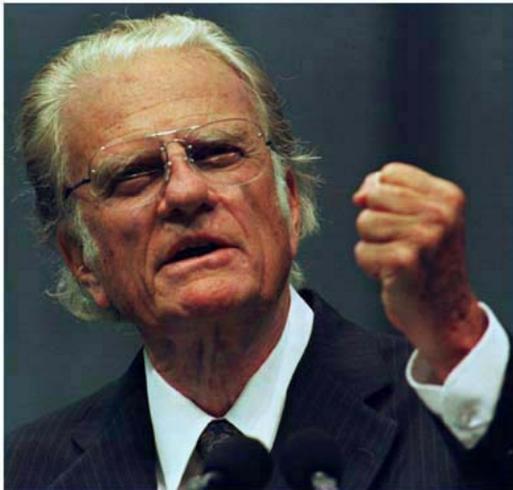
Bible Reading: 2 Samuel 15, Luke 15

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Our Lord expects us to be obedient to our parents.
2. We must strive to have a harmonious and blessed earthly family.

PREPARATION:

Dr. Billy Graham is, perhaps, the most successful evangelist of our times. He has brought the gospel of Christ to millions around the world. His message of faith has touched the hearts and souls of ordinary men and women of many nations. His parents and the other members of his family have played a key role in the formation of his unshakable faith in Christ.



Dr. Graham and Mrs. Graham had serious difficulties with their son, Franklin. Young Franklin was rebellious, and he was into drugs, alcohol, and other unwholesome ways of life. But the steadfast love of the Grahams and the redeeming grace of our Savior totally changed the life of Franklin. Today he leads two Christian charity organizations, the Samaritan's Purse and the World Medical Mission.

In this lesson, we come across two sons who rebel against their fathers and thereby inflict great pain on their families. We also study about a son who implicitly obeys his father, resulting in God's abundant blessings on his family and on the future generations.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. The Son Who Is a Source of Sorrow to His Father

Absalom was the third son of David, the greatest King of Israel. In the prescribed text, we see Absalom as a son who is prepared to do anything for the throne of his father. Absalom had a criminal mind. He had to flee from Israel, because he killed his half-brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:20-32)

King David was fond of his son Absalom. He yearned for his presence. So he ordered that Absalom be brought to him. But David discovered that his son was really hostile to him, and he found favor with the people of Israel. Absalom had promised to the people of Israel that he would bestow a better administration, which would be based on the principle of justice. Absalom's actions led to an open confrontation with his father. He

left for Hebron on the pretext that he was going to offer sacrifices to God. There he proclaimed himself as the new ruler. Absalom resorted to this vicious act of usurping power from his father. He cared little for the strong bond that existed between the father and the son. He was more interested in his power than his father's welfare. David could not tolerate the arrogance of his son, and he declared war against him. Absalom happened to meet the servants of David. He was riding upon his mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak. His head was caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth. Joab, David's servant who came to know about this, took three darts in his hand, pushed them into Absalom's heart, and killed him. What a deplorable end to an avaricious son! On knowing about the death of his son, King David went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. Even though David was affectionate, he failed to bring up his son under strict discipline. From this story we learn that parents need to bring up children 'in the fear of the Lord'.

2. The Obedient Son

In Gen. 22: 1-11, we see a son who submits to the will of his father. Isaac was the only son of Abraham. There was complete unanimity between Abraham and Isaac. Atop Mount Moriah, on the altar, Isaac lay bound like a lamb for offering. What a remarkable example of obedience and surrender! When his father raised the knife to kill him and offer him as a sacrifice to God Almighty, Isaac didn't protest or cry for help. As he had absolute faith in his father, he was prepared to obey him in everything. It is a universally acclaimed principle that the children should obey their parents. All cultures and religions exhort children to do so. Obedience to the parents is one of the Ten Commandments which Jehovah gave to the Israelites through Moses. In Ex. 20:12 we read, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you".

3. The Lost Son

In the story of the lost son in Luke 15: 11-20, we see a father full of love and forgiveness. The younger son of the parable is like Absalom. He too wanted to build up an empire of his own, where he alone is the master. Even though he lived with his father, he failed to enjoy his love and care. He thought he was just like a slave. So he decided to ask his father for his share of property. He decided to leave his home. He was not aware of the importance and meaning of love, proper relationship, and true freedom. He was interested only in himself. He cared only for his likes and preferences. Because of his selfishness, he broke away from his home, and met with total failure. He also 'died' spiritually. But when he "came to himself", he began to think about his lost home and the things he had lost. He decided to retrace his steps. He thought that his father, who treats even his servants with love, would never forsake him. He wanted to live in total submission to his father. When he returned to his father, his sonship was restored. He started enjoying his relationship with his father. He learned the vital lesson that only he who lives in an atmosphere of love can really feel the warmth of love.

4. Healthy Family Relationships

From the stories of Absalom and the 'lost' son, we learn that healthy and strong relationships can emanate from a similar relationship with God. If we obey our parents, we are obeying God. If we neglect and disobey our parents we are not faithful to God.

Absalom failed to understand the depth of his father's love and concern for him. The younger son left his home in search of better life, full of pleasure and adventure. But he discovered that he was safe only in the company of his father. In contrast to these two individuals, Isaac is the supreme example of a son who obeyed his father unconditionally.

Obedience to our parents is not only our duty but it is also a privilege. In return for the love and care of our parents, we must look after them, nurse them in their old age, and always respect and obey them. "The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice; he who begets a wise son will be glad in him." (Prov. 23:24).

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

1. All of us have experienced brokenness in our relationships with God, family members, and friends. How does God call us to mend our relationships?
2. In the story of the Prodigal Son, how is the father's love similar to the love of our heavenly father?
3. Discuss how obedience to our parents is not only our duty, but it is also a privilege.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Paul exhorts us to "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother - which is the first commandment with a promise- that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3). We are also warned that in the last days people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and unholy (2 Timothy 3:2). In spite of conflicts that might arise with our parents and elders, we must rely on God's grace to unconditionally trust and obey our elders even when the temptation to disobey is overpowering. We ought to earnestly seek God's presence to sustain healthy relationships with members of our family and community. In the event relationships are severed, we must constantly strive to restore peace and unity in our lives through reconciliation. We are called by God to be devoted to one another in brotherly love and to live in harmony (Romans12: 10, 16).

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Absalom, the second son of David left for Hebron on the pretext he was going there to offer sacrifices to God. [True/False]
2. Jonathan took three darts in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's heart. [True /False]
3. The prodigal son experienced a spiritual death when he broke away from his home due to his selfishness. [True/False]
4. Isaac, Absalom's only son lay bound like a lamb on Mount Moriah. [True/False]
5. Obedience to our parents is our duty as well as our privilege. [True/False]

B. Short Answers

1. What prompted the Prodigal Son to leave his home?

2. How is Isaac a supreme example of obedience?

3. How did Absalom evolve into a source of sorrow to his father?

4. How are healthy relationships within a family similar to a faithful relationship with God?

B. Essay Question:

1. "Selfishness produces spiritual death and broken relationships." Explain this statement based on the story of:

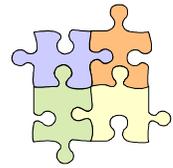
- a. Absalom
- b. Isaac
- c. The Prodigal Son
- d. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, grant us the grace and discernment to implicitly obey our parents even when it is difficult for us to do. Help us to remember that we honor you when we honor our elders. We pray that you also bless us with a spirit of forgiveness even when others wound us. Empower us to extend the same forgiveness to others that you grant us when we offend you.



RECONCILIATION

Theme: Reconciliation

Aim: To maintain a proper Christian attitude towards all, especially those less fortunate or privileged

Bible Reading: John 4:1-42

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. As Christians, or followers of Christ, we should treat all people with respect. We should not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, color, creed, race, language, nationality, or economic status.
2. We are "Ambassadors of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20), called to spread the good news of God's love, peace, and reconciliation.

PREPARATION:

The Navjeevan Center (*nav=new, jeevan=life*), started about 10 years ago by a team of Mar Thoma youths in the red-light areas of Mumbai, is an example of God's people reaching out with the redeeming love of Christ to those less fortunate and socially ostracized. The original idea was to constructively engage the children of



women in the commercial sex trade in Kamathipura, a ghetto of Mumbai. Over the years, the project has grown in scope, and today Navjeevan has assumed total responsibility for the education and upkeep of a number of children. The Rehabilitation Center at present has 8 houses for the children, a school for their education, and a primary health center. There are about 160 children between the ages 3-18 years living at the center. The

goals of Navjeevan Center are to "render justice to the victims of commercial sex trade in Mumbai" and to "restore them to a life of dignity and empower them to become honorable citizens". (www.navjeevan.org) Today's lesson illustrates as to how Jesus dealt with someone who was socially ostracized.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas**1. Samaritans**

The city of Samaria was founded by Omri, the King of Israel, on a hill, which he bought from Shemer for two talents of silver (1 Kings 16:24). Samaria was the capital of Israel, the northern kingdom. (This was after the nation of Israel divided into two during the reign of King Rehoboam). In 722 BC, Assyria invaded Israel, taking most of the Israelites as captives and settling the land with other peoples. The few Israelites who

were left behind intermarried with these groups. Over the years, they lost their distinct identity and began to worship the pagan gods. The southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Chaldeans in 597 BC, and most of the people were taken as captives to Babylon. However, these exiles returned later and rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple of God. These Jews did not look kindly upon the Samaritans, whom they considered not pure Israelites, but a mixed race. The Samaritans had also built a temple in Gerisim where they worshipped, which strained the relationship even further. During the New Testament period, this mutual hatred of Jews and Samaritans was very intense.

2. Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

At the time of Jesus, Palestine was divided into three regions with Galilee in the north, Judea in the south, and Samaria in the middle. The Jews had to go through Samaria to travel to Galilee from Judea and *vice versa*. The hatred of Jews for the Samaritans was such that many pious Jews took a circuitous route crossing the river Jordan rather than pass through the land of Samaria. However, we see that Jesus and his disciples chose to pass through Samaria. It was almost noon when they reached Jacob's well in the town of Sukhar (or Sychar). Jesus met the Samaritan woman at this well, which was over 150 feet deep. It was rather unusual for a woman to go to the well to fetch water at this hour. Perhaps, she thought at this hour she could draw water while no one else was around.

3. The Transforming Personality of Jesus

From this incident we can see three aspects of Jesus' personality.

1. The humane nature of Jesus is very evident. He sat at the well, tired and thirsty. He asked the Samaritan woman for some water to quench his thirst. The Gospel writer, St. John clearly depicts the humane nature of Jesus in this incident, whereas in other parts of the Gospel, he depicts the divine nature of our Master.
2. To Jesus all are equal, Jew or Samaritan. He is not only interested in the affairs of all people, but has a soft heart for the marginalized and ostracized. We can see the all-embracing love of God as Jesus reaches out to this woman. His desire to reach out to people with God's love is worth emulating.
3. Jesus transcends all unjust barriers set by society through his conversation with the Samaritan woman.
 - a) Jesus treats the Samaritan woman, ostracized by the Jewish society, with love and concern. He takes the Gospel across the Jewish fold to the outside world. It is worth noting that this incident comes after his encounter with Nicodemus. The parable of the Good Samaritan further sheds light into Jesus' attitude towards the Samaritans.
 - b) The incident is quite remarkable in other respects. A Jewish rabbi was not supposed to talk to a woman in public. It is in such a society that Jesus is talking to this Samaritan woman, who was of questionable repute. He courageously pulls down the traditions and barriers set up by society to reach out to a soul in need of His redeeming touch. He listens to her attentively, corrects her ways, and offers her redemption. He reveals to her that He is the Messiah foretold by the prophets and whom she was expecting.

4. The Response of the Woman

As a result of the encounter with Jesus, the Samaritan woman was able to see herself in the true light. She got transformed and started witnessing about Jesus in her town. "Come and see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). She became the first evangelist in Samaria, and many came to Jesus through her testimony. We, like this Samaritan woman, need to meet Jesus personally in our lives in order to be transformed. Then we will be able to spread the Gospel of salvation to others.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The Samaritan woman was the wife of the Good Samaritan. [*True/False*]
2. The Jews and Samaritans hated each other. [*True/False*]
3. The Samaritans worshipped God in the temple at Jerusalem. [*True/False*]
4. Jacob's well was in Jerusalem. [*True/False*]
5. Jesus revealed to the Samaritan woman that he was the Messiah. [*True/False*]

B. Short Answers:

1. What should be the Christian's attitude in a society bitterly divided on many issues such as abortion, euthanasia, sexual orientation, gay marriage, school prayer *et cetera*?

2. What were the reasons for the hatred between the Jews and the Samaritans?

3. What important aspects of Jesus' personality are revealed in His encounter with the Samaritan woman?

4. What was the response of the Samaritan woman?

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

1. Can you think of others in society (school or larger society) who are ostracized? As Christians, what ought to be our response towards them?
2. Does acceptance of people always translate into acceptance of their actions or behavior?
3. How does this approach differ from the world's perspective?

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Paul wrote to the Romans, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position." (Romans 12:16).

What are some of the challenges we may face as we try to reach across barriers set by society?

The recent mission projects of the Mar Thoma Church, started in Mexico and among Native Americans, are examples of how our church is trying to reach across racial and cultural barriers. Let us keep these mission projects in our prayers.

MEMORY VERSE: John 4:13-14

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Prayer:

Lord, give us the grace to act in compassion towards those who are less privileged, and to reach across unjust social barriers with your love. Amen.



WILL THESE BONES LIVE?

Theme: God's Eternal Purpose in Our Lives

Aim: To learn that God intervenes in the lives of his people to renew them and restore their hope in seemingly hopeless situations

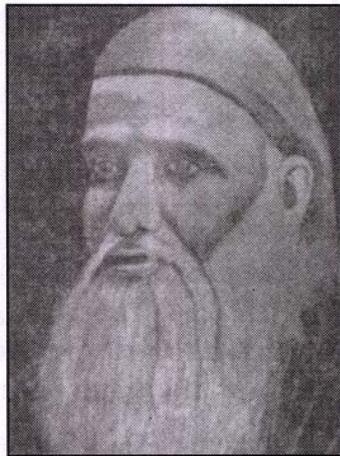
Bible Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. We believe in a God who works in history. Everything works out according to His eternal purpose. History is "His story."
2. We may face overwhelming situations, and all hope may be lost. But, if we repent of our sins and turn to the Lord, He will intervene and revive us.

PREPARATION:

In 1986, the Mar Thoma Church celebrated the 150th anniversary of its reformation. **Abraham Malpan** (*malpan* = "professor") was one of the pioneers of the reformation movement of the Malankara Church. In the years since the formation of the church by St. Thomas, many practices had crept into the Malankara Church. These needed to be eliminated and the church purified. In other words, a reformation was required. Recognizing this need, Abraham Malpan and eleven other priests submitted a memorandum known as the "The Trumpet Call of Reformation" suggesting some of the changes essential for the purification of the church.



Abraham Malpan

Prior to the reformation, the spiritual life of the church members consisted of participating in various rituals, festivals, and ceremonies. Little emphasis was placed on reading the Bible. Mediation through saints, adoration of the Virgin Mary, and Holy Communion for the departed were all common practices. People sought concessions with payment of money to the priests and forgiveness of sins through offering oil, incense, candles and bodily penance. In short, the church was in a spiritually dead state.

The pioneering work of reformation movement started by Abraham Malpan and others led to the birth of the Mar Thoma Church. The reformed church placed great emphasis on the study of the Word of God, and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. People were exhorted to study the Bible and lead a life in accordance to the Scriptures. The idea of personal evangelism was promoted with the theme, "Every Marthomite is an evangelist". The Church placed greater emphasis on purity and simplicity of apostolic faith and became resurrected from a spiritually dead state. The Mar Thoma Church was transformed into became a vibrant, worshipping community based on the Word of God, rather than on rituals and ceremonies.

Let us now examine how God called Ezekiel, a prophet of the Old Testament times, through a vision, to renew and transform the people by restoring worship of the one true and living God.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. The Prophet Ezekiel

The prophet Ezekiel lived and ministered during a very important period of Israel's history. He was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah but prophesied outside the land of Judah, whereas Jeremiah remained in the land. Ezekiel was one of the Jewish exiles taken as captives into the land of Babylon after the invasion of Jerusalem in 597 BC by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:10-14).

The name Ezekiel means '*God empowers*'. He was trained to become a priest, but God called him to become a prophet. Ezekiel says that the Lord set him as a watchman for the people. He reminded the people that the calamities that had befallen them as a nation were due to their sins and because they had turned their back on God (Ezek. 14:23). If they repented and turned back to God, He would bring about their national restoration.

In the book of Ezekiel, the prophet uses a literary style different from many of the other prophetic books such as Isaiah or Jeremiah. The book belongs to the same genre of apocalyptic literature as do parts of the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation. This genre of literature is distinguished by certain distinctive characteristics. It is usually full of symbolism and imagery. The author has dreams or visions, and the subject matter is often eschatological in nature (pertaining to the future or end times). However, one of the primary goals is to strengthen the believers facing severe trials and tribulations, to remind them that God is in absolute control of history and that His purpose prevails, no matter how bleak and hopeless the present situation may appear.

2. Vision

In Ezekiel 37:1-14, the prophet narrates a magnificent vision he had. The Spirit of the Lord carried the prophet to a valley full of dry bones. The dry bones represented the whole house of Israel (verse 11), with the people scattered as exiles, all their hopes lost, and dreams of nationhood utterly shattered. The exiled Jews were very dejected and spiritually dead. They had no hope of ever returning to Jerusalem, their homeland. God gives the prophet the vision at this juncture of utter despair and hopelessness among his people.

3. Can These Bones Live?

In the vision, the Lord poses this question to the prophet, "Son of man, can these bones live?", to which Ezekiel replies, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know". (Ezek. 37:3). The Lord then commands the prophet to prophesy to the dry bones and ask them to hear the word of the Lord. When Ezekiel prophesies as was commanded, the bones reunite, and sinews and flesh come upon them. They are then covered with skin and finally receive the breath of life. Behold, the valley was filled with a great army!

4. New Life

As a result of hearing God's word, the valley of despair was turned into a valley of hope. An utterly dejected and depressed people in exile were transformed by the power of God's Word. They were filled with new life and new hope. The text thus

illustrates how the Word of God infused the dry bones with new life and transformed them into renewed human beings.

Three insights can be gathered from this lesson:

1. God is able to save His people from absolutely hopeless situations.
2. Intimate contact with God is imperative for our renewal and revival from dead spirituality.
3. God will bless us abundantly if we face our problems with complete trust in Him.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Ezekiel was a priest by training. [*True/False*]
2. Ezekiel ministered to his people in Jerusalem. [*True/False*]
3. Ezekiel was a contemporary of the prophet Jeremiah. [*True/False*]
4. When Ezekiel had the vision he was by the river Jordan when he had the vision. [*True/False*]

B. Short Answers:

1. Write a brief summary about Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones.

2. What are some of the characteristics of the literary style that the prophet uses?

3. What lessons can we learn from Ezekiel's vision?

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

1. Can you think of at least one instance when you were completely dejected, but God intervened and restored hope?
2. In your life have you ever been in a spiritually dead state? If so, what does Ezekiel's vision teach us about how to be renewed?
3. Share with your friends the ways in which the Lord gave you strength and guided you through a seemingly hopeless situation.
4. In your opinion, what is the current spiritual state of our church? What is our role as individual members in making the church a vibrant community?

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

“Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. “

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40: 28,, 31).

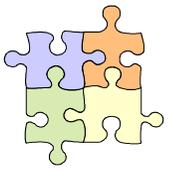
When we are tossed about by life’s tempests, we should not become dejected but should look up to the Lord. His Word will give us strength, and His Spirit will sustain us through the darkest of hours. Let us then call to remembrance the words of Jesus, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

MEMORY VERSE: Ezekiel 37:9

God said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'"

Prayer:

O Lord, deliver us from being spiritually deadened. Quicken us, O God, with your Spirit, and grant us continued renewal in our lives. Amen.



PART IV GOD WITH GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

CHAPTER 16 APPROACH TO OTHER RELIGIONS

Theme: HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Aim: To learn to be tolerant of other religions

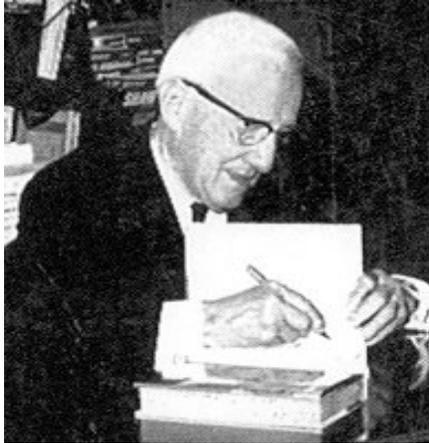
Bible Reading: Acts 10:1-48

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Plurality is not a curse, but a blessing. A peaceful coexistence is possible only by living harmoniously with these diversities.
2. We need a continued dialogical relationship with people of other religions. In this lesson, we learn how to cultivate a Christian approach to believers of other faiths.

PREPARATION:

For more than half a century, **Dr. E. Stanley Jones** proclaimed the Gospel of Christ applying it to personal, social, national, and international problems as they arose on every continent and among all cultures. He was probably the world's best-known and longest-tested Christian missionary and evangelist. Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1884, Stanley Jones was called to missionary service in India, where he worked among people of the very low castes. He never incited a verbal attack on Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or any Indian religion. But he presented the Gospel of Jesus Christ, disentangled from western systems and cultures. Dr. Jones conducted great mass meetings in leading Indian cities. At one such meeting, their leader said, "*We may not agree with what Dr. Jones is saying, but we can certainly all try to be like Jesus Christ.*" He held before men the example of God's reconciliation to mankind through Jesus on the cross. He made Jesus Christ visible as the Universal Son of Man who had come for all people. This opening up of nations to receive Christ within their own framework marked a new approach in missions. Dr. Stanley Jones was an invited speaker at the Maramon convention.



WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Peter's Gospel to the Gentiles

Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, was a Gentile who was a devout man. He, with his entire household, feared God and prayed constantly to God. On a particular day he saw, in a vision, an angel of God coming to him. When Peter reached

Cornelius' home, Cornelius lay prostrate at his feet as a mark of respect for him. Peter's response is noteworthy. He said to Cornelius, "*Stand up, I too am a man. You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of other nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean*" (Acts. 10: 26-28).

The gist of this sermon at the residence of Cornelius should be a model for us. "*Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him*" (Acts. 10: 34 -35). When the question arose at the Jerusalem Council as to whether the Gentiles had any right to enter the Church, Peter explained how the Spirit of God came and dwelt on Cornelius and the members of his family. Peter felt that one could not obtain salvation by his/her merit. It is absolutely the gift of God.

2. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles

Paul reminisces about his childhood. "Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the Church, as to righteousness under the law blameless" Phil. 3:5,6). In spite of the noble tradition and ancestry, Paul is known as the Apostle of the Gentiles. He was ever ready to mingle with them, to accept them, and to preach the good news to them. The central theme of his teachings is that we should not discriminate between people. "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ* (Gal. 3: 28). Paul teaches the Galatians that all are equal before God.

The setting for Paul's sermon is the Areopagus of ancient Athens, a court where prominent and educated citizens heard cases and discussed important issues of the day. He observed the objects of worship people used in that city. He quoted from their poets. He utilized the symbols, images, etc., of the people to present "The living God". The people of Areopagus worshipped "the unknown God". He told them that the real God did not live in shrines made by man. He did not need anything from man because he gave man life, breath, and everything. Paul convinced them that his God is the real, living God. He did not denounce and reject other religions; rather he taught them to accept the positive aspects of those religions. He proclaimed his God through his life-style.

WORDS FOR OUR TIME

Our Approach to other Religions

There are three main views held by Christians in the Church when it comes to discussing the relationship between Christianity and other religions. These are Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism. *Exclusivism* has been the traditional response of the church to other religions advocating the belief that people need to hear about and respond to Christ's message in order to be saved. Jesus' final words to the disciples underline this: '*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey*

everything I have commanded you' (Matthew 28:19-20). *Inclusivists* see a wideness in God's mercy based on God's love and believe that the grace of God, which is required for salvation, is already present within us as a 'Divine gift' (*'He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance'* 2 Peter 3:9). *Pluralists* recognize that people hold to the truth of their religion primarily because they presuppose their belief is true (and this is often decided by the country they were born in or family which they were born into (E.g. If born in India or in a Hindu family, one will most likely believe Hinduism is the true religion)). On the basis of this concept, Pluralists believe people in different religions are simply experiencing one God in a number of different ways through their individual religions.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Unlike Christianity, all other religions are 'self-effort' - people struggling to do the best they can with their own strength. Of course, there are true and commendable things in other religions such as their teachings on standards of human behavior. We can agree with these things and find common ground for our discussions. Other religions do not offer an inner power to fulfill such requirements. In this sense, the Gospel is the true fulfillment of the aspirations and hopes of other beliefs, and can be presented in this positive light, rather than "you are wrong, we are right". Our faith is rooted in the Godhead of Jesus, through the prophecies, His teachings and promises *"that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"* (Philippians 2:10,11).

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Cornelius was a commander of the army and also a God-fearing person. [True/False]
2. Paul, a Hebrew and circumcised on the eighth day, was of the tribe of Ephraim. [True/False]
3. Religious tolerance implies peaceful coexistence between people of different religions. [True/False]
4. All who are saved are restored through Jesus Christ. [True/False]

B. Discuss:

1. What is our attitude towards the followers of other religions? How can we strengthen our relationships with them?
2. Identify the areas in our society where we can work in unison with others?

C. Short Answers:

1. What insights do we gather from the meeting between Peter and Cornelius?

2. Why is Paul known as the Apostle of the Gentiles?

3. Define exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. Define religious tolerance. What lessons in evangelism can we glean from the life and missionary work of Stanley Jones? *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”* – Elaborate.
2. Define exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. As a Christian apologetic, how will you make a claim for Christianity and the Godhead of Jesus Christ? As one of the world’s best-known and longest-tested missionary and evangelist, how did Stanley Jones present the gospel of Christ to the people of India?

D. Memory Verse: Acts 10: 34-35

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Lord, enable us to be tolerant of others. Help us to love and respect people of all faith. Lord, teach us to do Thy will. Give us the grace to spread Thy word with love. May our actions be a testimony of our continued relationship with You. In all what we do, may your name be glorified. Amen



SALVATION THROUGH REPENTANCE

Theme: THE STORY OF SALVATION

Aim: To learn that pride and arrogance will lead us to fall. However, if we confess our sins with a repentant heart, we shall be saved.

Bible Reading: 2 Sam. 11, 12

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. We all have numerous shortcomings in our lives. Let us confess these shortcomings and receive God's pardon.
2. We want to be thankful to God for all the blessings. We should not let our pride conquer us. Instead, we should adopt an attitude of gratitude and forgiveness.

PREPARATION:

Franklin Graham is the president and CEO of Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA). He is leading one of the most successful crusade ministries of our times which



was started and led by his father. He didn't inherit this position, but he did obey God's calling to do so. He is the fourth son among five children of the famous evangelist Billy Graham and his wife Ruth Bell Graham. He also serves as the head of "Samaritan's Purse", a ministry much different than the well-known crusade ministry of his dad. When Graham accepted Jesus Christ as his savior, many commented, "The "prodigal son" returns!" At the age of 22, after a period of rebellion and traveling

around the world, Franklin committed his life to Jesus Christ while alone in a room in Jerusalem. In his autobiography, "Rebel with a Cause", we can discover how the son of the respected and world famous evangelist overcame his rebellious ways to claim his spiritual heritage. Even though Franklin was not an extremely rebellious child by today's standards, it is still refreshing to see that even the son of Billy Graham had his struggles. The greatest vices during his teen years were smoking, drinking, and defying authority. He describes his journey from a rebellious son of a minister to a servant of Jesus Christ. Franklin Graham's life enables us to acknowledge how God guides each of us to what He wants to do with our lives, and also how He forgives our sins when we genuinely repent.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. David, the Great King of Israel

David, the second King of Israel was a gifted poet, talented musician, brave warrior, and an able administrator. He excelled himself in all the above roles. He was chosen by God and as per His wish, he was anointed by Samuel. (1Sam 16:12, 13). He was capable of making wise political and religious decisions and executing them. His diplomatic skill was exemplified when he chose Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. He nourished the religious sentiments of the people by his historic act of bringing the Ark of Jehovah to Jerusalem. (1Sam 6:1-17). He also extended the boundaries of his empire by annexing the neighboring countries. Thus, his reign was the golden period in the history of Israel.

2. The Deplorable (Tragic) Fall of David

The 11th and 12th chapters of 2 Samuel depict the tragic fall of a great King. He was enamored by the beauty of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, the Hittite and he slept with her. Later, she informed David that she was pregnant. David knew he had committed adultery with Bathsheba. David recalled her husband Uriah from the battlefield and demanded him to stay with Bathsheba. He chose to disobey the royal order as his fellow-soldiers were out in the battlefield. His conscience didn't permit him to go to his wife as his soldiers were camping in the open field, guarding the nation. David got angry with Uriah and made secret plans to get him slain in the battlefield.

David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by hand. In the letter, he asked Joab to set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting and withdraw from him so that he may be killed. Joab did as he was ordered and sent word to David regarding Uriah's tragic death.

David had to suffer heavily for this diabolic act. He was totally oblivious of the fact that he was set apart by God for a nobler life. The Lord struck the child that Bathsheba bore to David, and it became sick. Even though David pleaded with God for the child's recovery, God didn't honor his request. David fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground on the floor (2 Sam. 12: 16). On the seventh day, the child died. This incident demonstrated to David the severity of the sin he committed.

3. Salvation through Repentance

God warned David of the sins he had committed through Prophet Nathan. "Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? (2 Sam. 12: 9). Nathan warned David of the impending misfortunes that would strike him. David became repentant and said, "I have sinned against the Lord." Psalm 51 is David's confession of his sins. "*Against You, You only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in Your sight. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquities*". God

acknowledged David's prayer of repentance and saved him from all his sins.

Through Prophet Nathan, David was informed of God's forgiveness. The Lord blessed him. "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam 12:13). Bathsheba bore David a second son, and he was called Solomon.

God accepts those who repent and confess their sins. Jesus accepted and saved Zacheus, the tax collector and the thief on the cross.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

When looking back at our lives, many of us might make a statement filled with remorse, such as, "If only I could have done things differently." Sin causes us not to experience the fullness of God's blessings. Our sins affect not only us, but also the whole community that we live in. The heinous killing that occurred on September 11, 2001 impacted the families of the victims as well as the entire world's freedom to travel. Look at the airports today!

God does forgive sins, yet he does not always expunge the natural consequences. Karla Faye Tucker, a murderer facing death penalty in Texas, was not spared the gallows even though she repented and converted to Christianity.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Sin is an inward response to an outward suggestion. When caught in sin, we should be like David, who did not rationalize or excuse himself. Instead, he threw himself at God's mercy and admitted his heart wrenching guilt. He felt guilty for not being caught, but instead for sinning against God.¹ John 1:9 states that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Nathan, the prophet told David a parable about the poor man stealing a lamb from the rich man. [True/False]
2. David was out fighting the Ammonites during Spring. [True /False]
3. David was personally responsible for Uriah's death [True/False]
4. Bathsheba tempted David to sin. [True/False]
5. When confronted by Nathan the prophet, David admitted that he had sinned against Bathsheba. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. How might have David's affair with Bathsheba ever not happened?

2. What kind of a person was Uriah, the Hittite?

3. Who held David accountable, and how did David respond to it?

C. Essay Question:

1. "Sin and its consequences, repentance and salvation" - Elaborate based on David's life.
 - a. His sin
 - b. On being confronted with the sin
 - c. His response and salvation
 - d. Consequences on his family

2. Elaborate on Psalm 51 based on David's
 - a. Plea for forgiveness (51:1-2)
 - b. Profession of confession (51:3-6))
 - c. Prayer for cleansing (51:7-12)
 - d. Promise of renewed service (51:13-17)
 - e. Petition for national restoration

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 51:9- 10

Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Closing Prayer:

Dear Father, I am a sinner. Convict me everyday about my sin and help me to repent. Lead me in the paths of righteousness for your namesake. Come into my life and cleanse me of the most shameful things that I have done. Wash me thoroughly and restore my life today. Amen.

JESUS CHRIST: THE CULMINATION OF LOVE

Theme: FULLNESS IN CHRIST

Aim: To learn that in Christ we see the fullness of things

Bible Reading: 1 John 4: 7-20, John. 15: 9-17

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. In Jesus, we witness the fullness of love. The essence of Christian teachings and service is indeed love.
2. We must become the messengers of this transforming love of Christ. The power of love will enable us to bring forth a meaningful difference in the lives of the less fortunate brothers and sisters in our society.

PREPARATION:

Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa (1888- 1960) is regarded as an outstanding Christian of his generation, and his life is sited as a vivid and compelling example of Christianity at its best. He was born out of wedlock and at the age of 5, he lost both his parents. He had to live with his stepmother in a Buddhist household. He was terribly mistreated by them



and was deprived of parental love and affection. Due to the miserable living conditions, he became afflicted with pulmonary tuberculosis by the time he was 13 years of age. Toyohiko heard that if he learned English, he could earn a decent living. So he went to a western missionary couple, Dr. & Mrs. Harry Myers. They accepted him and loved him as their own son. Kagawa never experienced such love. When he learned about the Savior who loved and sacrificed His life for him, Kagawa realized the real purpose of his life. He completed his school in Japan and theological training at the Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, U.S.

For Dr. Kagawa, “the law of love” was the essence of Christianity. He spent a decade of his life, working to uplift the poorest of the poor in the slums of the Japanese city of Kobe. He lived in a small hut, which he shared with beggars, prostitutes, and criminals who chose to stay with him. He shared everything he owned - food, clothing, and royalties from his writings. He was persecuted by the government for his social activism, beaten by others who disagreed with his views about anti- war, and exploited by even the poor and down trodden people he had helped to uplift. Nevertheless, he continued to extend to them his master’s love. Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa truly experienced the glory of the fullness of love in Christ. His life is a shining example of the transforming love of Christ.

C.S. Lewis speaks of four kinds of love:

Eros	Emotional Love
Storge	Physical Love
Philia	Brotherly Love
Agape	Divine Love

Of these four kinds of love, the most supreme and sublime is Agape, which involves sacrifice.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

In giving His only begotten Son as ransom to redeem sinners of the world, God has manifested His abundant love for the world. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John. 3:16). All the teachings of Christ were centered on love. He taught that God is love (1 John. 4: 8). We cannot measure or comprehend the extent of love revealed through Christ.

Jesus never limited His love to words. When He saw a big crowd following him, He had compassion on them and instructed His disciples to provide them with food (Matt. 14:16). We witness the climax of His love on the Cross. He laid down His life for the salvation of the entire creation. It is the Holy Spirit that leads us to His love.

2. High Priestly Prayer (Great Intercessory Prayer)

Jesus Christ prayed for the entire world in His High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26). His concern and love for the world is evident in this prayer. He prays not only for Himself, but also for the disciples and for the church as a whole.

3. Love and Obedience

The Father loves the Son. The Son, in turn, loves his disciples. When they abide in this love, they start loving the world and producing the fruits of love. We live in the love of the Father when we obey His commandments. Love and obedience are interconnected. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you," Jesus said to His disciples (John 15:12). Jesus gives us this commandment after He has given us His life as ransom for our sins. This is a noble demonstration of love. The essence of God's love is this care and concern for one another. When we partake in the sacrifice of Christ, we become partakers in this godly love.

4. Love for God and Love for Man

God wants us to love the entire humanity. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John. 4: 11). Love for God leads us to love of man. "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his

brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.” (1 John 4:20-21). Our love for man should transcend beyond the division of religion, caste, color, creed, language, and culture. The best way to express our love for God is to love the entire humanity, which is the foundation of our love. Love becomes a reality when it is translated into action. The decision of Ruth to serve Naomi is a superb example of self sacrificing love. In 1 Cor.13, St. Paul speaks about the importance of love. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES:

The Responsibility of the Church

The care and concern for one another, based on love, should manifest itself more powerfully in our Church. The Ashrams were started by our Church in keeping with this principle. But in today's world, we rarely see the true expression of love. Real and genuine love, which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's abiding presence, should become the cardinal motivating force in our Church.

Father Damien, who worked among the lepers in Molokai was expressing God's love for his brethren. He fervently served among the ostracized section of the society, even unto the very end of his life.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Jesus commanded his disciples, “Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command”(John 15:12-14). It is also stated in the first epistle of John that we cannot love God whom we cannot see, unless we love our sisters and brothers whom we can see. We often allege that we love God, when in reality we indeed hate many of our fellow men. We also manage to justify our hatred with “valid” reasons. We must be true to ourselves and mend our brokenness so that we can indeed restore the relationship with our loving God who created all of us. We, as Christians, are called to be living testimonies of His love through our actions and obedience.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. Storge, the most sublime type of love involves sacrifice. [True/False]
2. The Great Intercessory Prayer is also known as the High Priestly Prayer.[True /False]
3. The decision of Naomi to serve Ruth is an example of self-effacing love. [True/False]
4. Father Damien who worked among the lepers in Morocco expressed God's love for his brethren. [True/False]
5. Ashrams established by our Church exemplify care and concern for one another, based on love. [True/False]

C. Short Answers

1. Describe the four types of love described by C.S. Lewis?

2. How did Jesus become the supreme expression of God's love?

3. How does love for God translate into love for Man?

4. Love and obedience are interconnected. Explain .

C. Essay Question:

1. "Love becomes a reality when it is translated into action." Explain this statement based on

- a. Jesus Christ as an example of love (1 John 4 and John 15)
- b. 1 Corinthians 13
- c. Father Damien and Mother Teresa
- d. Responsibility of the Church
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: 1John 4:20

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, empower us to transcend beyond the religious, social, and economic barriers and to genuinely love others just as you have loved us despite our numerous imperfections. Help us to demonstrate our steadfast love for you through complete obedience to your commandments and unconditional love for others. Amen.



THE HOLY SPIRIT ABIDES IN BELIEVERS

Theme: Work of the Holy Spirit

Aim: To learn that the Holy Spirit leads believers to repentance and transforms their lives, enabling them to live a life pleasing unto the Lord.

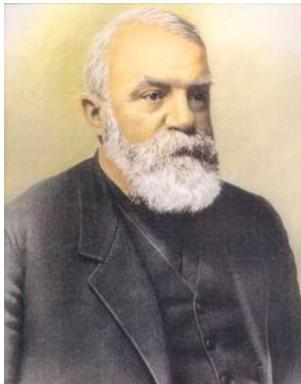
Bible Reading: 1 Cor. 12 & 13

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Jesus told His disciples that after He left them He would send the Counselor (the Holy Spirit), to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness, and judgment.
2. The Lord promised His disciples that when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide them into all truth (John 16:13).

PREPARATION:

Evangelist ***Dwight Lyman Moody*** (1837-1899) is perhaps one of the most renowned Christian leaders of this country. He evangelized widely in the US, Europe, and around the world. He is the founder of the Moody Bible Institute, the Moody Church, the Moody press, the Moody Radio Station in Chicago, and the Northfield Schools in Franklin, Massachusetts.



He was born of poor parents in Northfield, Massachusetts as the sixth child among nine children. Young Moody was converted as a result of his Sunday school teacher's efforts. God had used D. L. Moody in a mighty way to bring the hope of salvation to millions of people because this evangelist had unreservedly surrendered his life to God. Not only was he a great preacher, but he was also an exemplary prayer-warrior. When faced with difficulties that seemed insurmountable, he turned to God. Moody was also a deep and practical student of the Bible. Everyday he rose up very early in the morning and spent time intensely studying the Word of God. It was because of his thorough knowledge of the Bible that people flocked to hear him speak. However, Moody was a very humble man. He used to quote, "Faith gets the most; love works the most; but humility keeps the most." He loved to put others in the foreground and place himself in the background. Moreover, Moody was free from the love of money. Millions of dollars passed through his hands, but they did not stick to his fingers. Mr. Moody also had a consuming passion for the salvation of lost souls. He was a man on fire for the Lord. Most importantly, Moody earnestly prayed for being filled with the Holy Spirit. God answered his prayer, and he received God's outpouring of the Spirit upon him. It is this anointing of the Spirit that enabled Moody to transform into such an effective evangelist and earn so many souls for the kingdom of God. In this Chapter, we will learn about the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and how we can bear fruits for the extension of God's kingdom by glorifying God.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. The Holy Spirit

The third person of Trinity is the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit is not a mere force. The Bible shows that the Holy Spirit is a person and is God. The Scripture uses the pronoun, "He" and not "it", when referring to the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment..." (John 16:7, 8).

The Holy Spirit has all the salient features related to the personality of an individual. The Holy Spirit has **intellect** (Rom. 8:27), **emotions** (Galatians 5:22), and **will** (1 Cor. 2:10). We should not grieve the Holy Spirit.(Eph. 4:30).

The Holy Spirit

- Searches everything, even the hidden depths of God's purpose (1 Cor. 2:10)
- Speaks (Acts 13:2)
- Intercedes on behalf of the believers (Romans 8:26)
- Testifies (John 15:26)
- Guides (John 16:13)
- Commands (Acts 16:6,7)
- Appoints (Acts 13:2)
- Leads (Romans 8:14)
- Reproves and convicts us of sin (John 16:8)
- Seals God's promise in our hearts (Ephesians 1:13-14)
- Shapes our lives to Christ (Romans 8:1-17)

2. Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Why are they given?

1Cor. 12:1-11 tells us that the gifts of the Spirit are manifold. Even though the gifts are varied, the Spirit is one and the same. Ministry differs, but the Lord is one. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given to individuals for common good. Apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Corinthians, lists nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. They may be divided into three groups, (1) wisdom, knowledge, faith, (2) power to heal, power to work miracles, gift of prophecy (preaching), (3) ability to distinguish between spirits, ability to speak in diverse tongues, ability to interpret the tongues (1Cor. 12: 8-10). These gifts are given to each person as the Spirit determines, and they are meant for the common good of the Church. Paul points out that of all these gifts, the greatest is love (1 Cor.13). "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1Cor.13:2).

3. Glorification through Bearing Fruit

Jesus told his disciples, "This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit..."(John 15:8). Christians are expected to produce fruit for the glory of God. Now what is the fruit of the Spirit? Paul lists them in Galatians 5:22, "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control." The King James Version of the Bible reads "the fruit of the Spirit is..." The term "fruit" is used in the singular and not in

the plural as "fruits". This is because these virtues are not different fruits, but different indwelling of the same entity revealed through Christ. This fruit is a manifestation of the indwelling Holy Spirit in each believer. Just as the branches bear fruit by remaining in the vine, we bear much fruit by being one in Christ Jesus.

4. Early Church and the Holy Spirit

The risen Lord instructed his disciples to wait in the city until the power from above came down upon them (Luke 24:49). As the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples, on the day of Pentecost, they were transformed. Peter, who in his cowardice, had denied his master three times, became a fearless hero standing up and boldly proclaiming the Gospel. When he was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, he fearlessly asked them, "...judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Act 4:19). What a transformation!

The Early Church came together for worship and breaking of the bread. They also shared their possessions according to individual needs. It was the Holy Spirit that gave them this spirit of unity. The Holy Spirit continues to call, guide, and empower believers in spreading the Gospel

5. Spiritual Man and the Natural Man

Paul compares the spiritual man versus the natural man as follows: The spiritual man is one who accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior and whose life is controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit. Unlike the spiritual man, the natural man is not Christ-filled. He is drawn by the sinful pleasures of the world. He is unable to discern spiritual matters. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things..." (1Cor. 2:14-15). The famous theologian, Dr. M.M. Thomas refers to this passage as follows: "The sign of Spirituality is not some hidden knowledge and the Spiritual action related to it. But the real spirituality is to attain the ability to distinguish good from evil by the proper and deep learning of God's desire depicted by Christ through interaction and dialogue."

All men have two natures in them, one of the body and the other of the spirit. These two natures are at odds with each other. If we enrich the mortal nature by pursuing bodily pleasures, the spiritual nature weakens. On the other hand, if we strengthen the spiritual nature, the Holy Spirit works in us and enables us to overcome the pleasures of the body.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

When problems of this world overwhelm us, we often feel discouraged. If we then turn to the Lord, he will strengthen us with his Spirit. "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength..." (Isaiah 40:31). The Holy Spirit will guide us and uplift us from our despondence.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

The Holy Spirit is promised to all those who believe in Jesus and are baptized in his name. Without the indwelling of the Spirit, it is impossible to lead a life pleasing to the Lord. If we have not received the Spirit, such as the people of Samaria in Acts 8:14-17, we have to pray for the receiving of the Holy Spirit. God will then pour his Spirit upon us. "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:13)

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. Discuss:

1. Share instances of the Holy Spirit's guidance in your life.
2. How can we live a Spirit-controlled life?
3. Do you know someone that leads a Spirit-controlled life? What differentiates them from others?

B. True or False:

1. Mr. D.L. Moody was a famous politician who lived in the nineteenth century. [True/False]
2. The Holy Spirit equips the believers for the work of the Gospel. [True/False]
3. The spiritual nature and the mortal nature of the body are in conflict with each other. [True/False]
4. Of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the gift of healing is the greatest. [True/False]

C. Short Answers:

1. What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

2. Why do we say that the Holy Spirit is a person?

3. Describe the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

4. Compare and contrast the spiritual man versus the natural man.

D. Essay Question:

“The third person in the Godhead (the triune or the trinity) is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not a mere force.” Explain

- a. Characteristics of the Holy Spirit
- b. Gifts of the Holy Spirit and their purpose.
- c. Glorification through bearing fruit
- d. Impact of the Holy Spirit upon the early Church
- e. Spiritual man versus the natural man
- f. Conclusion.

MEMORY VERSE: Gal. 5:22-23a

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.”

Prayer:

O Lord, our God, fill us with Thy Holy Spirit so that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit for thy glory. We ask in Jesus name. Amen.



WORD BECAME FLESH

Theme: Commitment to Jesus Christ

Aim: To learn the Word of God who became human

Bible Reading: John 1

VALUES FOR LIFE:

Incarnation, meaning “enfleshing” or God becoming man, is the event that the Apostle John announced by saying “*the Word became flesh*” (John 1:14).

1. Incarnation of Jesus Christ, establishes God’s complete identity with man
2. Incarnation of Jesus Christ, reveals that God is not distant but at hand
3. This incarnation is eternal, one that remains for ever. We confirm this through Hebrews 13:8, “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday [when on earth] and today [now as we read] and forever*”

PREPARATION:

A few years ago, a secular singer named Joan Osborne wrote and sang a popular song, “One of Us,” which asked the question, “What if God were one of us?” Although the theology was way off, a plea was made, seeking to know why we exist. Where is

INCARNATION



God in all of this life, and what if He lived my life? The answer of course is yes, God became one of us. That is what the incarnation is all about. He was fully man while remaining fully God. That way He could identify with our plight in life. As He lived a normal human existence for over 30 years, He experienced all that we experienced, including all the emotions, relationships, and temptations. He drove nails as He worked with His earthly father. He obeyed His earthly mother when she asked Him to take out the trash. He played, He worked, and He lived the life of a human being. He

went to sleep at night and awoke to a normal life with all of the stresses and opportunities a human could have in the first century.

Therefore, we can never say to Him, *Hey, God, You do not understand my situation or me!* He does indeed understand. He has been where we are. He may not have gone to high school in Troy, Michigan, or driven a car, or programmed a VCR, or held a job in a cubicle with an annoying boss. However, He has experienced all that is important in life that we experience and wonder about! The incarnation of the Son of God is one of the most blessed truths in the Bible. It is an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. Without it we would not have a Christian faith.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

Man has learned about God as one who controls the history of mankind. The Israelites standing between the roaring Red Sea and the raging army of Pharaoh experienced the glory of God's protection. But in Jesus Christ, we see God who became man and who stands beside us, lives with us, laments and rejoices with us. In the gospel according to John, his writings do not make sense to the Greek Philosophers. They wondered if God would come down to material limitations. And since the Greek philosophers deemed materialism as evil, they wondered how God, who is Holy, could assume the evil, material state of mankind.

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe the historical facts about the birth of Jesus Christ. But John's portrayal of the incarnation of Jesus goes beyond the historical facts and tells about Jesus who was the Word. John begins from the eternal, "In the beginning was the Word." Jesus, the Word was with God (John 1: 1). The Word was the source of creation and at the fullness of time; the Word became flesh (John 1:3).

2. Incarnation: Complete Identity with Man

Incarnation is the event in which the one beyond time came down into the limitation of time; it is the event of the one who was the cause of creation coming down into the midst of creation, prompted by the boundless love of the creator for the created. It is through Jesus Christ that we learn about the invisible God. That is why Jesus came to be called "Immanuel" which means "God with us". In Jesus, we see the outward expression of God. Incarnation is the divine activity of God, completely identifying with man without giving up his divinity.

3. Incarnation: The Mystery

Although the word "Incarnation" does not appear in the Bible, it refers to God becoming flesh. The concept of God assuming human limitations is beyond comprehension and is hence a mystery. God created man in his own image. Man was created for constant fellowship with God. There was only one condition, and that was man must obey God. But man disobeyed, and the bond of fellowship was broken. Thus sin crept into the world. To re-establish the lost relationship with man, God became man. He took upon himself the sin of mankind, died on the Cross, and rose up on the third day. Our faith is entirely based on this resurrection of Christ. He grants atonement of sin to all who believe in him. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John. 3:16). "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me" (Rev. 3:20). The presence of Christ is available to us today in the form of the Holy Spirit.

4. Incarnation: God who is at hand

The word that appeared in flesh is the revealing of the invisible God. God was entering into the nature of mankind through the man, Jesus. As a result, the presence of

God in the world became an experience. Today, we are assured that God is no more a stranger who is away from us, but is one who is at hand.

5. Incarnation: The Greatness of the Word Appeared in Body

In incarnation, the nobility and integrity of the Word was revealed through humility and sacrifice. The disciples realized that being with Jesus was equivalent to being with God. The Word that took the shape of man was a store-house of grace. Its peculiarity is that it never runs out. It may be said that Moses and the Laws created a sense of servitude in man. Grace creates in us a heart that is open to God's love, bestowing upon us the privilege to be called the children of God.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Incarnation: An Eternal Event

The incarnation of Jesus Christ is not only a historical event, but it is eternal and one that remains for ever. When God begins to live in us, we are becoming more like Him. This calling back is a time of hope and rejoicing. God has shown mercy to us. God took a great challenge when He appeared in flesh. Will we, who live in flesh and blood, take up the challenge to imbibe God? The Holy Birth is the conversion of Word into Body (flesh). Is not such a holy birth necessary in all of us? Will we surrender ourselves to Him so that His Spirit may have full control over us? Discuss:

1. How do we experience incarnation in our day-to-day lives?
2. In what ways are we able to realize and associate with Jesus, the Son of God, in the midst of our everyday trials and troubles?

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Having this richer understanding of the incarnation of God the Son, deepens our devotion to Christ. Secondly, as we marvel and rejoice at the fact that the eternal Person of God-the-Son became man forever, this understanding greatly enhances our worship. Our recognition of Christ's worth is heightened, and our faith in Him is strengthened by having this deeper understanding of who He is.

As a man, He experienced the same things that we do. He can identify with us more intimately. He can come to our aid as our sympathetic High Priest when we reach the limits of our human weaknesses. We can relate to Him - He is not far off or uninvolved. Because He became man, we cannot complain that God does not know what we are going through. He experienced it first-hand. Let us look forward to the day when we see Him face to face, and until then may the joy of God's incarnation inspire in us a great diligence to serve and worship Him.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The Gospel of John describes the details of the birth of Christ instead of the Word that became flesh. [*True/False*]

2. God became man to re-establish the lost relationship between man and God. [True/False]
3. Incarnation of Jesus Christ is historical and lasting forever. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. What is the basis/focus of incarnation?

2. How is the greatness and glory of the word that became flesh revealed?

3. Describe Apostle John's view of "the Word that became flesh".

C. Essay Question: 500 words

Explain the meaning: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

- a. Introduction
- b. Define incarnation, its mystery and relevance.
- c. Through incarnation how does God identify with mankind?
- d. Explain how God's incarnation is an eternal event?
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: John 1:14

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

CLOSING PRAYER

Our loving Jesus, who, through your incarnation became human, we praise Thee for being with us always. Amen

PART V GOD'S WORK AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE**CHAPTER 21 GOD'S CALL****Theme: God's Work through History- Missionary People's Movement****Aim: To hear God's call and to dedicate ourselves to His call****Bible Reading: 1 Sam. 16; Isa. 6:1-8****VALUES FOR LIFE:**

1. God blesses those who respond to His call.
2. Those who dedicate themselves to God are chosen for His mission.

PREPARATION:

An eminent missionary was speaking in a Church in England. The church was almost full. He was illustrating the need for Gospel work in India. He felt sorry that there was no one to respond to God's call. But a boy, who was keenly listening in the vestry, responded to the call from the altar. He was William Carey, who later became a prominent missionary. He said, "Attempt great things for God; expect great things from God." William Carey heard the call of the Holy Spirit and made himself available for God's work. William Carey, the 'Father of modern missions' landed in Calcutta, India around 1790. He diligently supported the mission work in India.

He was responsible for the translation of the Bible into 40 Indian languages. For a man who was a cobbler with no formal schooling, this was indeed an amazing accomplishment. This book became the Magna Carta for the modern mission movement. Moreover, he was also responsible for establishing the university in Serampore, India. His accomplishments were the collective results of his faith and action. Now, let's look at the life of an Old Testament character, David.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas**1. God Chose David**

God chose a shepherd boy to be the successor to King Saul. God sent Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the King over Israel. Jesse had his sons pass in front of Samuel. The prophet picked the oldest son, who was tall and well built. But God reminded him that "Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Several of Jesse's sons were rejected, and David was finally anointed as

King in front of his family. "Immediately the Spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on (1Sam 16:13)".

David faced a lot of difficulties after his selection as king, even death. King Saul planned to kill him. But Jonathan, Saul's son, helped David escape from his Dad on many occasions. We read that "David was successful in all that he did because the Lord was with him" (1 Sam. 18:14). God protected David from all his enemies and afflictions. He blessed David's descendants. It is not an individual's glory, but of God that makes a person fit for His mission. With God, our mission attains new dimensions.

2. Call of Isaiah

Isaiah had a vision of God in the latter half of the 8th century B.C. The rule of King Uzziah was peaceful, and the people became wealthy. Naturally, the affluence in the society led them to forget God, their Creator and Savior. They had their own ways of life. Though the city of Jerusalem had given more importance to religious gatherings and costly offerings, they had turned away from God. "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy one of Israel and turned their backs on him. (Isa. 1:4). In Isa. 1:11-15, we read that God hated their multitude of sacrifices, burnt offerings, the fat of fattened animals, meaningless offerings, festivals, and prayers. Thus, the people appeared to be very religious, but their hearts were far from God. Isaiah, who lived in such a society, felt a vacuum in his life.

When King Uzziah died in the year 740 BC., Isaiah went to the Temple with an anxious heart. He had a vision of God, sitting on the high and exalted throne, surrounded by the Seraphs with six wings. The Seraphs were singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. 6:3).

3. Purification of Isaiah

Through this awesome, yet simple vision of God, Isaiah understood the purpose and realized the eternal presence of God. As the glory of God fills the world, (Isa.6:3) he realized that the anxiety about the future of his country was in vain. The awareness of purity, holiness, and omnipresence of God led Isaiah to repentance. He realized that he was a sinful man, living among sinful men. Then one of the Seraphs flew down to him with a burning charcoal taken from the altar and touched the coal on his lips. (Isa.6:7). Then he was purified, and his guilt was gone. Such a divine process of purification is necessary to enrich lives.

4. Response of Isaiah

After this process of purification, he heard God's call about a new messenger (Isa. 6:8). In spite of his limitations, he offered himself and requested God to send him as a messenger. He boldly spoke for God and became His ardent spokesperson for many years. He reminded the people to give up their evil doings and return to God.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

The social conditions of our present society have many characteristics that are common with the circumstances that prevailed during the time of Isaiah. Enormous wealth in the church and society leads to luxuries, construction of huge buildings, and dominance of a materialistic culture. The lesson is a reminder that we should willingly submit ourselves to God's call without any pre-requisites. He will then make us instruments of His purpose.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

There is a vast scope and urgent need for missionary work in various parts of the world. How will we respond if God calls us to such mission work? Are we willing to make ourselves available for the Lord? Let us ask God for help: 1. To fight against injustices in our society and our own sinful behaviors. 2. To give up our obsessions with material possessions, pageantry, and pride.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True of False:

1. When Samuel went to anoint David as king, he took with him a heifer. [True/False]
2. "Here am I! Send me," answered Hezekiah [True /False]
3. Jesse was the first to meet Samuel when he arrived in Bethlehem to anoint David. [True/False]
4. Samuel anointed Saul in Bethlehem as the King of Israel. [True/False]
5. David's father Jesse lived in Rama. [True /False]

D. Short Answers

1. What were the qualities that God had perceived in David?

2. Why was Isaiah anxious about the future of his country?

3. How did Isaiah respond to God's call?

Essay Question:

How do we understand and respond to God's divine call?

- a. Introduction
- b. Isaiah's response
- c. Mission activities of the Mar Thoma churches in North America.
- d. Personal commitments
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Isaiah 6:8

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said "Here am I. Send me!"

Closing Prayer:

Dear Lord, Thank you for your blessings and guidance. We are submitting ourselves to you as your instruments. Kindly empower us to fulfill your mission. Amen.



ECUMENISM (CHURCH TO BE ONE)

Theme: ECUMENISM IN A BROADER PERSPECTIVE

Aim: To study about wider unity of the Churches.

Bible Reading: John 17: 9-26; Acts. 1: 1-8

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Jesus has commanded us to love one another as he loved us.
2. Jesus wants us to have unity and harmony not only among his followers, but the whole creation as exemplified by the oneness that exists between Him and the Heavenly Father.

PREPARATION:

Charles Freer Andrews was born in New-Castle-on Tyne, England in 1871. His parents were committed Christians, and they molded a passion for God in his heart. He excelled in his academic career, and he began to teach Theology in Cambridge University by the age of 18. Andrews came to India in 1904 as a Methodist missionary and joined the faculty of St. Stephen's College, Delhi.



C. F. Andrews was shocked by the practice of untouchability and social injustice that existed in India. The love of Christ moved Andrews to work among the poor and oppressed. The devotion of C. F. Andrews towards the cause of the poorest in India was inspired by his love for Christ. In his book, "What I owe to Christ," Andrews has elegantly portrayed as to how his actions were inspired by the spirit of Jesus Christ.

His love and kindness were universal, extending to the entire humanity. He carried with him, Christ's message of love and compassion, and his faith was truly ecumenical.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

The English term 'Ecumenism' is derived from the Greek word 'Oikumene'. The Greek word 'Oikos' means house, shelter, habitual abode, dwelling place, and temple. The word ecumenism is currently used to denote the unity and relationships among various Christian Churches and their denominations.

2. Ecumenism – Biblical Basis

In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, 'Ecumenism' is used to denote the whole inhabited world and the geographical extension of the Roman Empire. In the New Testament, the term "whole world" is used 15 times (Matt. 24:14; Luke.2:1; 4:5; 21:26; Rev.30:10, 12:9, 16:14). In Heb.2:5, it is used to denote the whole world. John 17 is

referred to as the High Priestly Prayer. Before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ prayed to His father to keep his disciples united, just as He was one with the Father. He also prayed that those who believe in Him through the work of His disciples may also be one in the world. Hence it was the wish of Christ, as the head of the Church, that the Church be one in the world. The Holy Trinity (Unity of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit) is the foundation of the unity of the believers with God and with one another.

This unity is described on the basis of the mission (John.17: 22-23) and love (John 17: 24-26) of Jesus Christ. The Church has to reveal its unity as the expression of holiness in this divided society. We must also understand the danger of fragmentation. Though there are differences in administration, heredity, faith, and beliefs, the prime concern of unity is based on love. Those who love God and His only Son will overcome all types of barriers.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES:

History of Ecumenism

The twentieth century witnessed the marvelous growth of ecumenism. The two important incidents which led to the growth of this movement were the formation of missionary conferences and the birth of missionary society. The All World Missionary Conference, held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, was the beginning of ecumenical movement. Three organizations were formed as a result of this conference, which played a decisive role in the growth of ecumenical movement.

1. International Missionary Council

The International Missionary Council was formed in New York in 1921. The independent conferences of this organization were held at Oxford (1923), Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram (Chennai, India-1938), Vitbi (1947), Wellington (1952) and Ghana (1957). The activities of this organization led to the co-operation of Churches at the International level.

2. Faith and Order Commission

In 1927, the first world conference of Faith and Order Commission was held at Lausanne, Switzerland. The second world conference was held in Edinburgh in 1937. These two conferences made the Churches aware of the need for ecumenism.

3. Life and Work Committee

The first Universal Conference of Life and Work Committee was held at Stockholm in 1925. The activities of this organization made the Churches conscious of the responsibilities in the social and international domains. In 1938, the Faith and Order Commission and the Life and Work Committee met together in Utrecht, which resulted in the formation of World Council of Churches.

Ecumenical Movement - At Various Levels

1. World Council of Churches (WCC)

The World Council of Churches, with headquarters at Geneva, was inaugurated at Amsterdam in Netherlands in 1948. Over 350 representatives from 147 Churches participated in this conference. Several assemblies of WCC were held at Evanston, America (1954), New Delhi, India (1961), Uppsala, Sweden (1968), Nairobi, Kenya (1975), Canberra, Australia (1991), and Harare, Zimbabwe (1998), Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006).

Rt. Rev. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan was elected as one of the Chair Persons of the International Conference of WCC held at Evanston, 1954. In 1968, Dr. M.M. Thomas was elected Chairman of the Central Committee at Uppsala Assembly. Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilos Episcopa now serves as a member of the Central Committee (till 2006), and Dr. Mathew George Chunakara, as Secretary for Asia.

2. Christian Conference of Asia (CCA)

CCA was organized at Kuala Lumpur in 1959 as a result of the common effort of the Churches in Asia. Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Iranaeus Suffragan Metropolitan serves as the President of this organization.

3. National Council of Churches in India (NCCI)

This organization of Missionary groups in India was formed in 1914, with headquarters in Nagpur. In 1923, it was named as National Missionary Council of Churches, and then in 1979 it was renamed as National Council of Churches. Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Iranaeus Suffragan Metropolitan served as the President of this organization. Mr. P.O. Philip and Mr. Mathew Zachariah served as General Secretaries of this organization. The former General Secretary of Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam, Rev. Dr. Iype Joseph, served as the General Secretary until December 2004.

NCCI stood for increasing co-operation between Churches, fighting social evils, and resolving conflict among churches. Almost all Protestant Episcopal Churches are members of this council.

4. Kerala Christian Council (KCC)

The Kerala Christian Council, which is a common platform for Churches in Kerala, was formed in 1940.

5. CSI-CNI-Marthoma Joint Council

After the formation of the Church of South India (CSI) in 1947, negotiations were held between the CSI and Mar Thoma Churches regarding mutual recognition of the ministry and inter-communion relationship. Both Churches agreed on full communion relationship in 1972. At present, a Councilor Fellowship exists, consisting of CSI, CNI, and Mar Thoma Churches.

6. NCCC-USA

The National Council of Churches in Christ of USA, otherwise known as NCCC-USA represents 36 denominations, representing protestant and orthodox traditions. The primary goal of this organization is to embody the unity of Christ and to give common witness to our Lord's continuing mission in this world. Over the past 52 years the council has been effectively utilizing its resources towards promoting world peace, protecting God's earth, preserving the rights of children, and purging poverty. The Mar Thoma Church has been a member of this organization since 1998.

From Fellowship to Wider Ecumenism

The term ecumenism cannot be limited to the unity of Churches. The scope of ecumenism got enlarged to include the whole of humankind and later to embrace the whole creation. It also stands for a healthy interaction with the people of other faiths. It is a movement from confrontation to conciliation, from argument to dialogue, where one learns to respect people of other faiths as brothers and sisters of God's own creation.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

How can we promote the unity of Churches through our testimonies as individuals as well as the church as a whole?

1. As followers of Christ, do we truly practice the spirit of ecumenism?
2. What can we do in our area, as individuals and as a church to strengthen this spirit of ecumenism?
3. Analyze our attitude and approach toward people of other faith and cultural backgrounds.

The unity of the Churches is described on the basis of mission (Jn: 17:22-23) and love (John17:24-26). If we love God and His only Son, we are to overcome all barriers and establish reconciliation among fragmented Churches.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The English term 'Ecumenism' is derived from the Latin word 'Oikumene'. [True/False]
2. The concept of Ecumenism is referred in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. [True /False]
3. The All World Missionary Conference in London, in 1920, marks the beginning of the ecumenical movement. [True/False]
4. The Most Rev. Dr. Yuhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan was elected as one of the Chair Persons of the International Conference of WCC. [True/False]
5. The second Sunday of November is celebrated as the Ecumenical Sunday. [True /False]

E. Short Answers

1. Describe the three organizations formed as a result of the All World Missionary Conference in 1910.

2. Briefly describe the ecumenical movements in India.

3. Why cannot ecumenism be strictly limited to the unity of Churches?

4. Describe the term Ecumenism based on the word 'Oikumene'.

F. Essay Question:

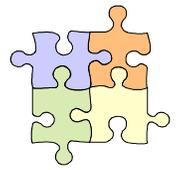
1. "The twentieth century witnessed marvelous growth in the Ecumenical movement. Describe the history of ecumenism as outlined:
 - a. Introduction
 - b. Ecumenism based from a Biblical perspective
 - c. Three organizations formed as a result of the All World Missionary Conference
 - d. Ecumenical movement at various levels
 - e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: John 17:23

I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Closing Prayer:

Dear God, help us to flourish in faith and live in unity with people of other religions, beliefs, and various denominations of Churches. Amen



CHAPTER 23 Christian Sacraments

Note: Students have learned about Christian sacrament in several classes, especially in Grade 8 while they studied the book “ The Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision”. Please study Chapter 10, pages 110 - 123.



Saul Persecutes the Christian Church

Theme: Hindrances to God's Work

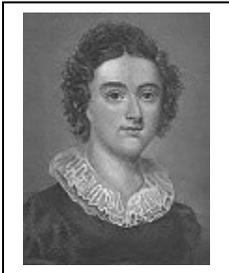
Aim: To learn that the lack of a personal relationship with God hinders us from knowing His will.

Bible Reading: Acts 8: 1-3; 9: 1-16; 22: 1-8; Gal. 1: 13-14; Phil. 3:5

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. God promises to reveal His will to His children. We must have a strong, personal relationship with God before we can determine His will and be used by God.
2. God is interested in the motives of our hearts, and not interested in our external customs and practices.

PREPARATION:



We often wonder and question God's will for our lives. He reveals it to us as we build a personal relationship with Him. When we are in compliance with His will, He will bless and enrich not only our own lives, but also the lives of those around us.

Ann Hasseltine Judson, the first American woman missionary to go overseas, had developed a strong relationship with Christ at a very young age. Born in Bradford, Massachusetts on December 22, 1789, she deeply desired to be used by God and prayed, "Direct me in Thy service and I ask no more. I would not choose my position of work, or place of labor. Only let me know Thy will, and I will readily comply." On February 5, 1812, she married Rev. Adoniram Judson. They both deeply desired to become missionaries to foreign lands. So, the next day after marriage, they sailed for Calcutta, India, with other missionaries. Shortly upon arrival, they found that the local Indian government and the East India Company were opposed to missions, and they were ordered to leave India. Hence, they arrived in Burma (Myanmar) and began their missionary work among the 15 million Burmese, who had never heard the gospel. They learned the Burmese language and translated the Scriptures. Ann met with the native women on Sundays, and they prayed and studied the Bible. In 1822, she was forced to return to America due to a severe liver problem. In 1823, she traveled back to Burma and faced numerous hardships due to the war that broke out between Britain and Burma. Adoniram was thrown in death prison, suspected of being a spy. Ann was two months pregnant. Yet, she continued to serve him and managed to secretly deliver food for him and the fellow prisoners. Finally, when peace was declared between Britain and Burma, Adoniram was released and reunited with his wife and infant daughter. Ann, however had been greatly weakened physically by the hardships and trials, and she died of a fever on October 24, 1826. Her infant daughter also died within six months. Ann Hasseltine Judson was the first woman missionary to leave the American soil. She inspired many other women to serve Christ in the mission fields of foreign lands. Her passionate love for the lost souls in Burma and her steadfast love for Christ closely parallel to those of the transformed Paul.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Saul

Saul was born in Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (Acts 21:39). He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Tarsus was a center of knowledge and commerce. He studied the Jewish Law from Gamaliel, an eminent Doctor of the Law, in Jerusalem. (Acts 22:3). He had mastery over the Greek and Hebrew languages. Saul earned his living by making tents (Acts 18:3). He was a Jew by birth with great pride in his heritage. Saul was a staunch Pharisee who was later called Paul, after an encounter with Christ during a journey to Damascus.

2. Pharisees

The Syrian ruler, Antiochus Eppipanus attempted to destroy Judaism in order to spread Greek customs. But the people of Judea opposed him. Since they were not ready to relinquish their religion, they came to be known as Pharisees (separated ones, separatists) from 150 B.C. The Pharisees expected a Messiah who would build His Kingdom on earth. They considered themselves to be in the forefront of purity and kept aloof from others. They strictly followed the Ten Commandments and their ancestral traditions.

3. Saul – A Staunch Pharisee

Saul was a Pharisee who rigidly followed and propagated Moses' laws and the Ten Commandments. He claimed that he practiced the Jewish customs and laws more rigorously than the other Jews by stating, ".....that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee"(Acts. 26:4-5). Saul, who had an in-depth knowledge of the Scriptures and the Jewish customs, did not initially believe or recognize that Jesus, born of Virgin Mary, was the son of God and the expected Messiah.

4. Saul – Persecutes Christians

The disciples of Christ were earnest and passionate in spreading Christianity. When Saul found that the early Christians were breaking the laws of the Old Testament, he tried to relentlessly pursue and destroy them. His steadfastness in adhering to the laws made him a fanatic. He highlights his loyalty and religiosity by claiming, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14).

In the first century, the early followers of Christ were working earnestly, to attract the Jews to Christianity. They appointed others, including Stephen, to work for the extension of His Kingdom. Hence, a large number of Jews were converted to Christianity. His staunch belief in the Jewish religion prompted Saul to torture Christians, in an attempt to destroy this new religion. Stephen's authority and actions agitated the High Priest and the leaders of the Jewish Church, and they consented to stone him to death. Saul also approved of his murder (Acts. 8:1). Thus, he worked vigorously to send the Christians to jail and to torture them.

5. Saul's Conversion

Saul obtained letters of authority from the High Priest and proceeded to Damascus to persecute and arrest the Christians there. But on the way, at the gate of Damascus, Jesus encountered Saul with a blinding light. Saul cried out, "Who are you Lord?" Jesus told him that He was the same Jesus that Saul was seeking to persecute. This life-changing experience fully convinced and transformed Saul, and he surrendered himself to the mercy and will of God. Thus, he was transformed from a persecutor of Christianity into a propagator. Luke writes about this incident, three times in the Acts of Apostles (Acts. 9:1-19, 22:4-16; 26:9-18)

Saul, who was a theologian, cannot be expected to be ignorant in his understanding of God. Yet, we find that he was totally ignorant of Jesus, who was the long-awaited Messiah. Though he was a scholar of the Laws, he had no personal relationship with Jesus. The encounter at the gates of Damascus enabled Saul to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus. He received enlightenment out of his ignorance. When he surrendered himself to God, he transformed into the greatest exponent of God's Word and became the most ardent spokesman and widely-traveled missionary for Jesus Christ. He led many to the saving knowledge of God while enduring the harshest sufferings (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

6. Purpose of God

In this lesson, we have witnessed that ignorance of God's ways and His will, hinders a person from accomplishing the will of God. Such ignorance serves as a hindrance in the extension of God's kingdom. When a Christian waits upon the Lord, God will reveal his plan to him/ her, and thus the Christian has a clearer direction enabling him/her to follow His ways. (*I wait for you, O LORD ; you will answer, O Lord my God. Psalm 38:15*)

The early Church persevered, because of their awareness of God's ways, the teachings of the Apostles, and the fellowship among the believers. They constantly met together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with each other. They listened to the words of the Apostles and devoted themselves to prayer (Acts 2:44-45). To understand the way of God, one has to enter into a personal relationship with Him. Today there are thousands of men and women who are convinced that God has called them for His work in other countries.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Ann Judson's devotion to Christ never wavered in the midst of her sufferings. She knew God had called her to be a missionary to the Burmese. God's will was clear in her life, and she did not deter from being used by God to carry out His will. Her strong relationship with Christ enabled her to endure intense sufferings. Similarly, when God's will is clear in our lives, we will receive strength to accomplish His will, provided we have taken time to build our personal relationship with God. Today there are thousands of men and women who are convinced that God has called them for his work in other countries, like Paul and Judson.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

Saul's former zeal for the Jewish Laws and customs are truly commendable. However, these were mere human acts, through which he attempted to achieve salvation and righteousness before God. But God is not interested in the external practices and traditions. God will reveal His will; as we spend time in His presence and study His Word. However as in Saul's early life, if we miss God's will, we will become a stumbling block to ourselves and in the lives of other Christians. As we draw close to God, He grows closer to us. The key to finding God's will is through building a personal relationship with Him.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem because of Saul's conversion. [True/False]
2. Saul went to Damascus with authority from the chief priests, to arrest all men who belonged to the 'Way'. [True/False]
3. Paul was a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but studied Jewish law in the city of Jerusalem. [True/False]
4. Paul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee, who was advanced in Judaism beyond many Jews of his age. [True/False]
5. In Damascus, Saul remained blind for two days, and did not eat or drink anything. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. Describe Saul's activities before his conversion.

2. Describe Saul's "On the road to Damascus" experience.

3. How did Saul regain his sight?

4. How did Paul's past help him win many toward the kingdom of God?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. Paul's change from persecutor of Christianity to propagator makes for one of the most dramatic conversion stories in the New Testament. Explain.

- a. Introduction
- b. Describe Saul as a staunch Pharisee and a persecutor of Christians
- c. Describe Saul's personal encounter with the risen Christ.
- d. Describe Saul's zeal for Christ and the spreading of the gospel.
- e. Conclusion – Purpose of God

D. Explore:

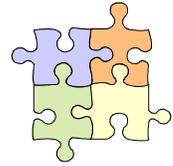
On the basis of Paul's true life story, what difference would it make to personally experience Jesus Christ in one's own life?

MEMORY VERSE: Acts 9: 5-6

"Who are you Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord, I surrender my life to be fully revealed as to who I am in Christ. Amen.



JOB UNDAUNTED BY CALAMITIES

Theme: RESPONSE TO HINDRANCES

Aim: To understand the value of sufferings and to develop a positive attitude to it

Bible Reading: Job 1: 1-22; 2: 1-13

VALUES FOR LIFE:

Suffering may be for punishment or purification. The significance of faith is that it helps to accept suffering and trust God to bring good out of it even when the possibility seems remote.

PREPARATION:



Girls at Piano. Auguste

Auguste Renoir (rĕn'wār': 1841-1919) was a famous French impressionist painter, whose paintings include *Girls at Piano*, *Girl with Watering Can*, and *Dancers at Bouvival*. However, painting was not easy for Renoir because of his ill health. For more than two decades, he suffered from paralysis. In the extreme stages of his disease, he strapped the paint-brush to his wrists since he was unable to move his fingers. While he was painting once, a disciple asked him, "Why are you torturing yourself?" He replied, "My pain will be over; but the beauty of this picture will last for ever."

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

In the Old Testament, Job is the epitome of the beauty that blossoms in misery. His testimony, in the midst of his undeserved suffering, is a silver lining in the dark clouds of trials and tribulations of everyday life.

1. Job, a Man Blessed by God

Job was the owner of immense spiritual and material wealth. "...This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1: 1). As the head of the household, Job had inimitable qualities: noble, pious, upright, and faithful. "He had seven sons and three daughters and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and he had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East" (Job 1:2,3, 3). Job accepted these privileges as blessings showered on him by God. The seven sons and three daughters of Job lived in separate homes with their families. They loved and cared for one another and eagerly participated in all festivities. The morning after every feast, Job would get up early and offer sacrifices for each of his children, to purify them. He did this because he thought that one of them may have sinned by

unintentionally insulting God. Hence, Job was a father who was interested in the continued spiritual purity of his sons and daughters.

2. God Allows Satan to Test Job

Satan challenges God to take away all of Job's sources of happiness (Job 1:11). God is confident that Job will remain faithful in any trial and permits this testing. First, Job's wealth, and then, his children were destroyed. The news of these calamities arrive suddenly, one following the other. Job is so upset by these disasters that he tears his robe, shaves his head, falls to the ground, and prays, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; May the name of the Lord be praised" (Job 1:21). Job's wife mocks and asks him to curse God and die (*Job.2:9*). But Job remains faithful and refrains from complaining against God (Job. 2:10).

3. The Fellowship of Job's Friends

Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad, three of Job's friends, come to comfort and console him. But their discussions were of no solace to Job, and they could not find any reason for the sufferings of such a just person. It is our duty to offer friendship and comfort in the midst of grief. "Then they sat on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was" (Job 2:13). The three friends assert that Job must have sinned because they believed that suffering is punishment for wrongdoing. But Job protests his innocence.

4. From Suffering to Hope

The Book of Job does not feature a tragic end. God endorses Job's faithfulness calling him, "my servant Job" (*Job 42:7*) and answers his prayers (*Job 42:9*). God blesses the latter part of Job's life much more than he had blessed the first (*Job 42:12*). Sometimes, our sufferings or limitations can lead us to despair. But, with God's help and in accordance to His divine plan, we can enter into a revival of hope and an abundance of transformation. Suffering may happen as punishment or for purification. Whenever we feel that we suffer unjustly, the model of Job should be an ongoing source of great strength for us.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Suffering and Formation of Faith

1. The question that puzzles us is why the just should suffer. Ancient Jews believed that suffering was the result of sin, and that it was a punishment from God. But Jesus Christ showed us through His suffering and humiliation on the cross that suffering need not be always out of sin. The early Church modified its belief in sufferings (which was originally based on the Old Testament) in the light of the Passion and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The sinless Christ took upon him the calamities of the sinful world. Because Jesus died for us while we were sinners (Rom. 5:6-8), his sufferings became a source for our redemption. The early Christian Church viewed the sufferings they faced in a similar sense.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

A story in “Our Daily Bread” (*a RBC Ministries publication*) talks of a brilliant young woman who had been crippled by polio. When asked how she remained cheerful, she said: “It is my experience that suffering and pain are, unfortunately, great character builders – not that suffering is good in itself but because it often helps to shift our expectation of happiness from without to a search for it from within”. True happiness can only be found by knowing God personally and walking the path of trust and obedience. Though there is no concrete or fully satisfactory explanation as to why innocent or just people suffer, the perspectives mentioned here offer only limited insight and understanding. However, as Job, though we cannot fathom the reasons for trials, we can still trust that God is present in our struggle to face and overcome suffering. “*All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*” (*Romans 8:28*).

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. Discuss:

1. We furnish and decorate our houses with modern gadgets, the latest TV sets etc., but, are we trying to sustain love, care, contentment, happiness, and purity?
2. Prepare a list of sufferings. Think about your response towards each of them.
3. Why should the just suffer, and what is the response to such sufferings of the just?

B. Things to Do:

Think of people around you who suffer. Plan a fellowship visit. Think of ways to alleviate their sufferings.

C. True of False:

3. Job’s three friends were Elihu, Zophar, and Bildad. [True/False]
4. Job had three sons and seven daughters. [True /False]
5. The Malayalam translation of Billy Graham’s book “Till Armageddon” is titled, “*Kashtathayilum Paaduvan.*” [True /False]
6. Elihu was the son of Zophar, the Buzite. [True/False]
7. Our sin and unrighteousness are the only reasons why we suffer. [True/False]

D. Short Answers

1. What was Job’s response when all his worldly wealth was lost?

2. What did Eliphaz, Zophar, and Bildad do when they witnessed Job’s grief?

3. Why did the early Christian Church modify its views on suffering?

4. Who was Elihu? What role did he play in correcting Job's outlook?

E. Essay Question:

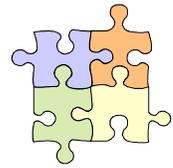
1. In the Old Testament, Job is the epitome of the beauty that blossoms in misery.
 - a. Explain the circumstances that led to Job's misery and how he responded.
 - b. What was the response of the three friends to Job's sufferings?
 - c. Why is it that the just suffer? How can our suffering be transformed into hope?
 - d. List five valuable lessons that we can learn about suffering from the story of Job
 - e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Job 1: 21

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Closing Prayer:

God of mystery, power and love, we come to you perplexed by the pain and suffering in the world and in our lives. O Lord, give us the grace to patiently endure suffering instead of rebelling against Thee. Bless our efforts to relieve suffering around us; In Jesus' name, Amen.



PART VI Our Mission in God's World

CHAPTER 26 PETER AND CORNELIUS

Theme: PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY VALUES

Aim: To learn that personal piety leads to righteous living and communal harmony

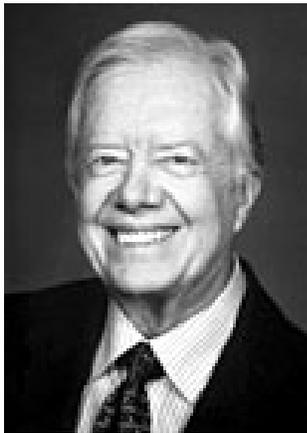
Bible Reading: Acts 10

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Let us apply what we learn from the Bible to our daily lives. Our lives must be an example to others, so they can understand the true meaning of Christianity.
2. To surrender ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

PREPARATION:

Jimmy Carter (James Earl Carter, Jr.), the thirty-ninth president (1977- 1981) of the United States, was born in 1924, in the small farming town of Plains, Georgia. Significant foreign policy and domestic accomplishments were made during his term of office. Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his relentless efforts to foster peace over many decades. He was deeply committed to social justice and basic human rights. After his term as President, Carter, along with his wife Rosalyn Carter, dedicated their lives to continue their contributions in these areas. In addition to promoting peace and human rights through the nonprofit Carter Center in Atlanta, they led the Jimmy Carter Work Project (JCWP) on Habitat for Humanity International (HFHI). He regularly teaches Sunday school and also serves as a deacon in the Maranatha Baptist Church of Plains.



WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

The tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles narrates an event, which was a pivotal point in the history of the Church. The Church faced new social, religious, and cultural problems when it extended its activities outside Judea. The Jewish Christians, who strictly followed the laws, felt that they were the only people chosen by God. They were not allowed to associate with the Gentiles (Acts. 10:28). Peter was the representative of the 'conservative' Jewish Christians, whereas Cornelius represented the Greek Christians (In Malayalam, *Yavananmar*), who had a more liberal approach.

2. Cornelius and His Vision

Cornelius was a Roman Centurion serving in "The Italian Regiment." He lived at Caesarea with his family. In the Roman military structure, a force of six thousand soldiers was known as a legion. In each legion, there were ten battalions. Each battalion

was divided into centuries, and over each century was a Centurion equivalent to a Sergeant Major. The centuries were the backbone of the Roman Army. Though Cornelius did not belong to the Jewish religion, he was favored by all, as an upright and religious individual. He and his whole family worshipped God (Acts 10: 2), gave alms, and prayed regularly.

One day, at about three in the afternoon, Cornelius had a vision, in which an angel appeared to him. The angel told him, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter" (Acts 10: 5). When the angel who spoke to him had gone, Cornelius called two of his servants and a devout soldier. He told them everything that had happened and sent them off to Joppa.

3. Peter's Response

The next day, as the men sent by Cornelius approached Joppa, Peter had a vision that directed him to go with the messenger (Acts, 10:10-16). Peter considered it deplorable for a Jew to be associated with Gentiles. However, God spoke to Peter to act differently.

Read Acts 10:9-20. Through the vision, God had enabled Peter to change his attitude and adopt a different approach. Peter who reached the house of Cornelius had a new insight. He said, "... God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean" (Acts 10: 28) and also "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34, 35). Neither Peter nor the Church at Jerusalem held this outlook prior to this vision.

The leading figures in the story are Peter and Cornelius – Cornelius was a high ranking officer while Peter was a hard working laborer. Though they held different beliefs, divine intervention brought them together. It was difficult for Peter to think differently, apart from the practices of Jewish religion. Cornelius, though not a Jew, believed in prayer and desired to be saved. Interestingly, they both responded to their visions. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit of the Lord said to him, "Go downstairs, and do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them" (Acts. 10:20). Peter went downstairs and received them. When Peter came to know of the vision that Cornelius had "He will speak words to you by which you and all your family will be saved" (Acts 11:14), he invited the men into the house to be his guests. The next day, along with six believers of Joppa, Peter went to the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had assembled his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up and said, "I am only a man myself." Cornelius and his friends were waiting to hear anything that the Lord had instructed Peter to say. They listened to him, and then the Holy Spirit came down on all of them. They praised God's greatness. Peter ordered all those who had received the Holy Spirit to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter and the Jewish believers who had come from Joppa were amazed that God had poured out his gift of Holy Spirit on the Gentiles. Peter who returned to Jerusalem described the change in his attitude in this manner: "So if God gave them the

same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts. 11: 17).

4. Precept and Practice

In this incident we can see that a life of piety leads to truthfulness and basic moral values. Here we are challenged to practice what we preach. Christians should be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. God accepted the virtue in the life of Cornelius even though he was not a Jew. His personal piety, devoutness, and generosity won favor in the eyes of God and made him acceptable to others. From this it is clear that God, who looks into the hearts, discriminates no one based on religion, caste, and creed. This incident enabled Peter to mend his personal views. It also provided an opportunity for the early Church to reevaluate its teachings and practices.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Cornelius' sincere faith and his generous giving were a sacrificial offering to God. God does answer people who seek Him sincerely. He does this by sending people or information to attain salvation. Whether it is Mother Teresa, Billy Graham, or others, all are saved only by accepting the Gospel message "...everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10: 43). Thus, Cornelius was saved only after Peter preached the gospel of Christ to him.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

We should not allow any barriers such as language, culture, prejudice, geography, economic level, or educational level – to keep us from telling others about Christ. In every nation, there are hearts restless for God, ready to receive the Gospel- but someone must take it to them. Seeking God is not enough – people must find him. How then shall seekers find God without someone to point the way? The *harvest* is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Is God asking you to show someone the way to Him?

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. God told Peter in a vision that he must eat only certain clean animals. *[True/False]*
2. Cornelius lived in Joppa. *[True/False]*
3. Led by the Spirit, Peter left the same day to Cornelius' house. *[True/False]*
4. Peter initially stated to Cornelius: "It is against Jewish laws to associate with a Gentile or visit them." *[True/False]*

B. Short Answers:

1. What kind of value system did Peter initially hold towards the Gentiles and why?

2. What moral values are exhibited by Cornelius?

3. Summarize Peter's sermon to Cornelius and his household.

C. Essay Question: 500 words

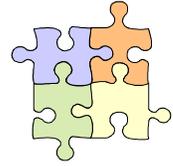
“There is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, we are all one in Christ Jesus. Discuss how God worked this out in the lives of Cornelius and Peter, based on the points below:

- a. Character exemplified by Cornelius
- b. Peter's struggle:
- c. People's apathy/struggle with “class” distinctions
- d. God's role in enabling Peter and the early Church to overcome prejudices
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Acts 10: 34-35

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Lord, Help us to overcome barriers of race, class distinctions, multigenerational distinctions, subtle economic favoritism, and the like. Shake us out of our inertia and give us new perspectives. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen



MISSION OF PAUL

Topic	COMMISSION TO REACH OUT
Aim	To imbibe universal form of testimony and preaching of Gospel
Let us Read	Acts 17: 16-31

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. We live in a world of religious plurality. To preach the gospel effectively, it is necessary to understand the local cultural forces.
2. Jesus Christ is the focus of Christianity. Paul's preaching of the gospel is a model for conveying the gospel on a universal basis.

PREPARATION:

Sadhu Sundar Singh is considered, by many, as the most eminent disciple among the native born Christians of India. Sundar Singh was born in a rich Sikh family of Punjab in the year 1889. His mother was a very religious person and had tremendous influence on young Sundar. She passed away when Sundar was fourteen, and this loss left a deep emotional scar in Sundar. In a search for peace and tranquility, Sundar started reading the sacred books of Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam. But he hated Christianity, and he and his young friends called themselves "enemies of Christianity". They threw stones at missionaries and burned Christian books including copies of the Bible. But Sundar did not find what he was searching for in his religious pursuit. He became so despondent and desperate that he decided to end his life. During the night that he had planned to end his life in front of a running train, a very bright light shone in his room. At the center of this light, he saw the face of a Man. The face he saw emanated love, peace, and tranquility. He heard a voice saying "Why do you persecute me? Remember, I gave my life for you upon the cross". Sunder noticed the scars of Jesus whom he had hated so passionately. Shocked and stunned, he fell at His feet and started worshipping him. Sunder was completely transformed by this dramatic experience. Similar to Paul, Sundar Singh traveled over land and sea, proclaiming the love, grace, and redeeming power of his Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. Just as Paul endured hardships, Sadhu Sundar Singh also immensely suffered for his Master.



WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Paul in Athens

The incident in Areopagus (Acts. 17:16-31) shows Paul's open mindedness, his ability to preach the Gospel of Christ to all those who belonged to different cultures. Athens, a city in Greece, with a long history, was considered to be the world's intellectual center. It had been the arena of Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato,

and Aristotle. Athens was a city of idol worship, and Areopagus was the main center of culture. This center provided a platform for those who wanted to propagate their new ideas.

2. Stoics and Epicureans

In Athens, Paul entered into debate with the Stoics and Epicureans. After the death of great philosophers of Greece, there arose two forms of philosophy, Stoicism and Epicureanism (341-270 B.C). Epicurus, the founder of Epicurean Philosophy established his school at Athens in 306 B.C. According to the Epicureans, pleasure was the prime focus of human beings. Everything happened by chance. Their gods were distant and uncaring, and death was the end of all. Their aim in life was to eat, drink, and be merry.

Stoic Religion was founded by Zeno of Cyprus (336-260 B.C). In Greek language, the place where Zeno taught his philosophy was known as 'Stoa', from which originated the term 'Stoic'. The Stoics advocated conduct 'according to nature'. The word 'Stoic' refers to one who controls his/her emotions. They believed that everything was of God. Everything that happened was the will of God, and therefore must be accepted without resentment.

3. Paul's Address

Paul was taken to Areopagus. He started his address by referring to an altar on which was written, 'To an Unknown God'. He then told them he was going to proclaim about that unknown God. The main points of his address are the following (Acts 17:22-31):

1. This God is different from their gods whom they worshipped.
2. He is Omnipotent, the Maker and Master of the universe. This God, who is the creator does not confine Himself in temples made by man and limit Himself to space and time.
3. He is not served by human hands since he does not need anything. He gives life, breath, and everything else to all mankind.
4. He predetermines the exact times and places where they would live. He did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him
5. God is not far from anyone of us.

Paul then quotes the lines of two Greek poets. One of them, "we live, move, and have our being" was from Epimythidis of Crete. The other quote was from Arenuns of Cilicia who was a contemporary of Paul, which reads, "Are we not His children". Thus Paul linked his speech with the tradition of Greek thinking and then emphasized the following characteristics which reveal the uniqueness of the Gospel:

- a. God had overlooked the times when people did not know Him (that is the stage when they indulged in their sins without knowing God). But now, He revealed Himself and

commanded all of them, everywhere, to turn away from their evil ways, repenting their sins.

b. God will judge the whole world with justice through the Man he had sent. Here Paul mentioned about Jesus Christ, the judge and the deliverer from sins.

Paul was making every effort to meet the intellectuals at their level of understanding, to use their language, and to lead them from their presumptions of the Christian Gospel. Paul did not establish a Church in Athens, as he did in the other cities he visited. However, Paul's scholarly abilities may have humbled their intellectual pride. His sermon left an indelible influence upon the Greek culture and learning.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

As faithful followers of Jesus, we must constantly attempt to fulfill the Great Commission by sharing the Gospel in a powerful manner. In our zealous attempt to convert others to Christianity, we must be careful not to permanently alienate others belonging to different faith and cultural backgrounds. We must continuously analyze and improve the effectiveness in preaching the Gospel in our pluralistic world. In our world of knowledge explosion, Christians encounter numerous philosophies and teachings.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

As Paul demonstrated an open outlook at Athens, we also should show respect towards people of other faith. We must share our beliefs with not only persons from different religions, but also with individuals with the same faith background. We must adopt an attitude of faithful reconciliation rather than confrontation as we carry out our mission, as disciples of Jesus Christ.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. At Areopagus, Paul addressed the followers of Epicureanism and Stoicism. [True/False]
2. The followers of Zeno were known as Epicureans. [True/False]
3. The Stoics believed that everything that happened was the will of God. [True/False]
4. Paul was broadminded, yet made little effort to relate to the intellectuals at their own level of understanding. [True/False]
5. In Paul's speech at Areopagus, Paul refers to an altar addressed to an Unknown God. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. Describe the two major forms of philosophy prevalent at the time Paul had spoken at Areopagus?

2. Describe the two unique characteristics of the Gospel that Paul emphasized at Areopagus?

3. How did Paul link his speech with the tradition of Greek thinking?

4. What is our mission in spreading the Gospel?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. Paul's ability to preach the Gospel of Christ to persons of various cultural backgrounds is evident in his address at Areopagus.

Essay format:

- a. Introduction – Athens at the time of Paul's address
- b. Describe the two prominent philosophies during this period.
- c. Explain in detail the major components of Paul's address at Areopagus.
- d. How did Paul relate to the intellectuals while emphasizing the uniqueness of the Gospel?
- e. Conclusion - Our mission

D. Explore:

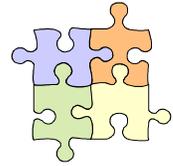
Use the internet to learn more about Stoicism and Epicureanism.

MEMORY VERSE: Mathew 28:19-20

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Lord, please grant us a wider outlook and greater maturity to live out the Great Commission you have entrusted to us.



THE FIRST FAMILY

Theme: ROLE OF FAMILY

Aim: To help us realize that the family unit is ordained by God for the fulfillment of God's purpose

Bible Reading: Gen.1:26-30; 2:18-24

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. Strong and healthy family relationships are essential to fulfilling God's purpose of a family unit.
2. To create a strong family bond, we need a deep sense of understanding, an attitude of sharing, and a commitment to respect all family members.

PREPARATION:

Astronaut Rick Husband, commander of the Space Shuttle Columbia, was among the seven astronauts killed Feb. 1, 2003, when their spacecraft broke apart and disintegrated over North Texas, just minutes before landing in Florida. As commander, Husband was responsible for the overall conduct of the mission.



What Rick prized more than anything, was time with his family. Because he couldn't spend time with the kids while he was in space, he wanted to make that time worthwhile for them. Rick couldn't think of anything better than telling them about the God he loved. Weeks before the mission, Rick videotaped 34 personal devotions for his children. There were 17 for his daughter, Laura, and 17 for his son, Matthew—one for each day he was to be away. So each day his daughter and son had their own "devotion with Dad" by video. From "High Calling", a memoir of her husband's life, Evelyn Husband writes: Rick wanted both Laura and Matthew to have a daily relationship with God. It's

what had changed Rick's life, and he knew it would sustain Laura and Matthew for the rest of their lives. This was Rick's highest calling.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. The First Family

In the Garden of Eden, God noticed that man was alone and created a helper suitable for him. Thus Adam and Eve became the first family established by God. From the Scripture passage we understand that, like Adam and Eve, every individual is formed in the image and likeness of God. The word 'image' means *a close copy of something or similar*. Since God is love (1 John 4:8) and His image is mirrored in humans, this image of God is revealed through us by our ability to love one another. Through disobedience sin was born, creating a chasm between man and God. When Eve sinned, she hid herself from God. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the snake to

escape from this sin. Thus sin plays a critical role in keeping one away from God and from others (Gen.3:9-13).

2. God's Purpose of Family

Dr. M.M. Thomas was a well-known theologian and Governor of Nagaland, India. In his book, "God in Adam", he interprets the verses of Gen. 1:26-27, as follows: Man was created in the image of the God of love in Trinity. God, the Father having seen the shining face of God the Son, created man in the earnest desire to have "so many children" who adorn the same sonship. Other creations are neither able to enter into the privilege of sonship, nor are they entitled to attain this sonship. But man can and that is God's intention of man. There is a collective responsibility in the family to realize the will of God. "It is not good that Adam should be alone. I will make a helper..." and so Eve was created in every way an equal human being. So in a family, there is no difference between man and woman. The woman is given the same honor in the family as the man (Gen.1:27, 2:24, Gal.3:28). A family that is blessed by God is meant to fulfill the purpose of God.

3. Procreation

God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen.1:28). When God blessed Abraham, a similar blessing was given. The Lord took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars – if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be" (Gen.15:4). Through procreation, we continue the act of creation, God had started on earth. Sexuality is a blessing from God, aiding procreation. However, infidelity or sexual unfaithfulness will devastate both family and society and turn aside families from God's purpose.

4. Family Stability

One of the fundamental bases of Indian culture has been the stability of the family. However, today, the family structure is being constantly challenged, and relationships are deteriorating. Family should be a focal point for worshipping God. In this context, the testimony of Joshua before the Israelites merits attention: "But as for me and my household (family), we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). Thus, our families should provide an atmosphere conducive to worship and fellowship, as this encourages mutual love, care, and respect for one another. Prayer and meditation must be primal in families. "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3: 14,15). Faith in Jesus needs to be handed down from parents and from their examples to their future generations. "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5).

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Family – A Blessing to Society

Family is the basic unit of society, and society is a broader version of the family. Today, our society faces a rapid degeneration of values. What was considered as taboo a few years ago has now become an acceptable norm. The values of today may be challenged by tomorrow's culture. However, as Christians, our values are based on the teachings of the Bible. Thus, the role of the family in nurturing Christian principles is of utmost importance. The question arises as to who are members of God's family? According to the Gospel of Mark, all who obey God are members of God's family - "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35).

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

As a member of a family, our primary goal is to be a blessing to our family. As fathers and mothers, we need to transform our homes into ideal nurturing grounds for both spiritual and physical growth of our children. As children, we need to love, care, and respect our parents and elders. Every family member needs to uplift and honor one another by his thoughts, words, and actions. Let's pray for one another and be channels of blessings to our families.

*Channels only, blessed Master
But with all Thy wondrous power
Flowing thro us, Thou canst use us
Every day and every hour...*

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. Discuss:

1. Analyze the problems of the first family.
2. Give reasons for the degeneration of relationships in the modern world. What are the solutions for it?

B. Things to Do:

1. Identify model families from the Bible. Analyze and understand the features of their families.

C. True or False:

1. Astronaut Rick Husband was a fervent Christian and the commander of the Space Shuttle Skylab. [True/False]
2. God created man in His own image, and the privilege of sonship was given to man. [True /False]
3. God asked Abraham to look at the heavens and count the planets and said, "So shall your offspring be." [True /False]
4. Sin distances us from God and others. [True/False]
5. The story of creation shows that woman is given equal honor in a family as the man. [True/False]

D. Short Answers

1. Adam and Eve was the first family created in the image of God. What caused them to sin, and how has this affected all families, in general?

2. How is God's purpose fulfilled in and through families?

What was Dr. M.M. Thomas' interpretation of man being created in the image of God?

3. Based on the lesson, "The First Family" list the Bible verses that address family values.

E. Essay Question:

1. God created man in His own image. Having God in the center of our lives brings stability in our family. Discuss.

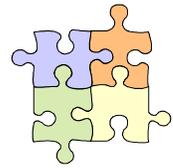
- a. Introduction
- b. What was God's purpose in the creation of mankind?
- c. How did the relationship in the first family break down?
- d. What points need to be considered to mold a model family?
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Closing Prayer:

O Lord, help us to do your will and mold a family where you dwell. Amen.



EARLY CHURCH

Theme: LIFESTYLE – SELF EMPTYING SERVICE

Aim: To learn from the example of the early church.

Bible Reading: Acts 2:42-47

VALUES FOR LIFE:

To inculcate the ideals of Christian community that reflects the apostles' teachings, fellowship, prayer, sharing, and praise

PREPARATION:

Salvation Army was founded in 1865 by William Booth with the aim of feeding and housing the poor of London. Its stated mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination. *Salvation Army* is active in every major city in the United States and Britain. This organization also provides its services in many other countries. Near Christmas, *Salvation Army* bells tinkle for donations. Their work helps the poor and suffering, wherever they are found.



Booth recognized that to reach the “lost” he had to first attract them, and music was the primary means of achieving this goal. He is remembered for his rhetorical question, “Why should the Devil have all the best tunes?” During these early days, *Salvation Army* bands sprung up all over Britain and eventually became the model for the organization worldwide. Since that time, *Salvation Army* has produced some of the very finest Christian hymns and music available. Songsters and singing companies (choirs) have also become standard components of *Salvation Army*

worship and warfare. Be it a flood or a tornado, one could count on the *Salvation Army* to serve the victims. Soup kitchens were the first, in a long line of widely varied projects, designed to provide physical assistance to the destitute. Since its inception, the organization sought to minister to the physical as well as spiritual human needs. Let us now look at how the believers of the early Church praised God and fulfilled their spiritual and physical needs.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Introduction

Though the Early Church was minute in size, it set an excellent example. Even today, its features are pillars of strength, guiding the modern-day Churches. Church is an assembly of believers representing the body of Christ and the bride of Christ, with the believers of Church representing the branches of the vine (Matt. 15:5).

2. Early Church

The Early Christian Church was a growing Church. Growth symbolizes life, and the Early Church grew both in quantity and quality. From the Day of Pentecost, the Church manifested the vital force given by the Holy Spirit, by beginning to expand. Christian lifestyle has always been modeled after the self-emptying art of loving relationship as characterized between the bride (body of believers – Church, 1 Cor. 12:27) and the bridegroom (Christ) (Matt. 25: 1-6; John 3:29; Rev. 21:2; Rom. 12:5).

3. Church – A Fellowship

In the Early Church, all believers were bound by a fellowship (Koinonia-Greek) with God, individuals, and society. Four characteristic features of the Early Church are emphasized:

a. Foundation of the Church

The Church was built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as its cornerstone. In the early days, the apostles were the advisers of the Church. They preached about Christ. The Apostles were eyewitnesses of Christ, who heard and experienced the effects of the Word from the beginning. The believers learned from the Apostles and accepted their teachings.

b. The Church That Grew in Mutual Relationship

The Early Church was a Church which enjoyed fellowship by helping and encouraging one another. “All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Acts. 2:44, 45). Believers were always of the same spirit and were the members of the same body. Those who were lonely found friendship in that fellowship, and sinners experienced redemption. Those who had different views were brought to unity.

c. Church that Memorialized the Death of Christ through Breaking the Bread

The assembling to Break Bread is a means to take part in the Holy Communion. Through this partaking, we become part of the body of Christ. Though we are all different, yet all of us are partakers of the same bread. The bread that Christ shared at the “Last Supper” was representative of His body that was to be sacrificed. It is through Christ's action of submitting Himself to be broken that salvation became a reality for mankind. This observance helped the unity and spiritual growth of the early Church.

d. A Praying Church

The believers in the early Church had the Spirit of prayer. As Jesus, the Head of the Church gave primacy to prayer in His life, so did the believers of the Early Church. Prayer helps to reform ourselves and to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

Church – A Christ Centered Society

The Church is the body of Christ with Christ as its head. The Church has to grow to be like Christ. Its mission is to build the Kingdom of God on this vision. The Church

should reform the society by transforming into the salt of the earth and light of the world. It should set an example for the world to follow, and not the other way around. We should be able to love and care for everyone in the society.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

This lesson clearly shows that the believers are focused first on their relationship with Jesus Christ. Salvation is only by God’s grace, not personal merit. No one is more holy or more righteous than the other. There is no room for self-centered pride. Fellowship is not competition and doesn’t focus on us, rather it focuses on God. It is a celebration of God’s grace and a renewing of our relationship together in Jesus Christ - a joyful coming together to experience life as the Body of Christ. As Christians, we are called to spread the Good News and reach out to others. As "practice makes it perfect", why not try practicing first with fellow Christians? We will be better able then to reach out to those whom God wants to save.

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The two places early believers met were temple courts and homes. [True/False]
2. The Early Church did not listen to the teachings of Apostles. [True/False]
3. The Early Church enjoyed fellowship by helping and encouraging one another [True/False]
4. The Early Church did not recognize the death of Christ through Breaking the Bread. [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. What were the notable features of Early Church?

2. Church is said to be a Christ-centered society. Why?

3. What unusual actions did the apostles perform?

4. What was the attitude of these early believers?

C. Essay Question: 500 words

What can the church do today to mirror what happened in the Early Church?

Essay format:

- a. Introduction – Church and its need
- b. Notable features of the early Church
- c. State of the present Church
- d. What are some ways the present Church can better serve society?
- e. Conclusion

MEMORY VERSE: Acts 2:44-47

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O Lord, enable us to truly apply Your word in our personal lives. Help us to unite in fellowship, regularly attend worship service, and earnestly pray every day. Heavenly Father, make us a united community of believers so you may use us to make a difference in others. Amen.



ASHRAMS

Theme: Sacrificial Service- Altruism

Aim: To partake in Christ's mission by serving others

Bible Reading: 2 Timothy 2

VALUES FOR LIFE:

1. God entrusts His chosen servants to inspire and challenge others to respond to His call.
2. We must be loyal to our Master, willing to endure hardships like a good soldier of Jesus Christ and remain steadfast in our faith.

PREPARATION:

Rev. P.Chacko, one of the first missionaries of the Mar Thoma Church, had devoted his life to Christ as a young high school graduate. On April 7, 1930, Achen was born as the eighth child to his highly devoted Christian parents who hailed from Kaviyoor, Kerala, India. Upon hearing an inspiring message from an American missionary during a convention, he expressed his immense yearning to study theology. His desire was honored when he was selected as a theological student in the South India Bible Institute. He was then introduced to the visiting residents of 'Christa Sakshya Sangham' Ashram in Hoskote, Bangalore, India.



Hoskote is a county, which consists of 350 villages. The local people lived in small houses. The villagers had to cope with sweltering temperatures and unsafe drinking water. During the summer of 1953, Achen, accompanied by other colleagues, visited the Ashram to do evangelistic work. During each summer, until 1955, he taught the Gospel to the villagers in their local language of Kannada, encouraged the farmers by visiting their farms, and supplied Homeopathic medications to needy patients. In 1956, the Metropolitan Bishop sent him to

Hoskote for 3 years of voluntary service, fulfilling his long cherished dream. Incidentally, Mrs.Thankamma Chacko (wife of Rev. P.Chacko), subsequent to completing her theological studies, was also a voluntary worker in the Ashram. Achen and Kochamma, after their marriage in 1959, continued their missionary work as Ashram members until 1964. He served as a missionary in Malaysia, Singapore, Palghat, Kothamangalam, and Andaman/Nicobar Islands. Currently, he serves as a retired clergy in the Detroit and Indianapolis areas. Achen was blessed with hands laid on him by his father who was a devoted Christian, to be loyal to his call as a workman approved by God. By his inspiring and practical Christian life, Rev. P. Chacko is a living example of a steadfast soldier of Jesus Christ.

WORDS FOR BIBLE TIMES: Main Ideas

1. Church and Mission

"The fire exists as a result of a burning flame. So does the Church through its mission" (Emil Bruner). This statement clearly describes the inseparable relation between the Church and its mission. The existence of the Church depends on accomplishing the mission entrusted to it. One of the most important duties of the Church is the fulfillment of its mission. The Church consists of individuals with unique gifts. One may have the gift of imparting knowledge; another may have the mission of serving the sick and the destitute. Some others may have the ability to confront and defeat the evils prevalent in economic, social, political, and religious arenas. As Christians, our mission should be to partake in the sufferings of Christ and reveal His glory.

In the early Church, each individual tried to lead a life of self denial through fellowship. Therefore, they succeeded in mutual understanding, praying for one another, sharing their rights and responsibilities, and living in Christian fellowship.

2. God's Mission Continuing

The text for our study is from Paul's second letter to Timothy. Here, Paul explains how to share and accept the Christian faith. Receiving the Christian faith as well as sharing it with future generations is a privilege. Three symbols are used to explain this process: (1) Soldier, (2) Athlete, and (3) Farmer

Similar to a steadfast soldier, a Christian should be totally dedicated in his walk with the Lord. As a soldier does not indulge himself in day-to-day affairs, a Christian should also be extremely focused on his goal. A soldier's only aim should be to win battles. Obedience, trust-worthiness, and sacrifice should be his solid assets. An athlete must be well disciplined to compete by the rules. He must exercise self-denial and observe the rules. Similarly, a Christian must also do exactly the same. A farmer is expected to diligently work in his field. He needs to persevere with tremendous patience and flexibility to work in accordance with the conditions of nature. Though the toil of the farmer is hard and tedious, he receives pleasure and satisfaction when the yield is good. Just as a farmer shoulders all the troubles to ensure a good yield, a Christian should also be able to overcome the difficulties and disappointments in the field of Christian services.

This type of mission and social-centered attitude is well depicted in the concepts of Ashrams. The concept of Ashrams was based on the premise that if the Gospel work in India is to be fruitful, its style, nature, and modes of operation should adhere to the pattern of Indian ethos. They were aware that the influence of Ashrams on Indians was by no means insignificant. Therefore, attempts were made to incorporate the concepts of Ashrams into missionary work. Ashram is a Sanskrit word that can be expanded as "Ashrama" which means 'hard or intensive effort. This word also means to be identified with God through penance, searching, and experiencing God.

3. Christian Ashrams

The activities of Ashrams are organized in the model of the ancient Guru-Shishya (Teacher-Student) relationship. In Christian Ashrams, Christ takes the place of the Guru (teacher), and the devotee / seeker takes the place of Shishya (Student). Ashram is a place, where people live in an ever-deepening awareness of the presence of God. This is fostered by renunciation and detachment in an atmosphere of quietness, serenity, creative silence, and poignant joy. The concept of Ashram, as a popular movement, is also relevant. Under this concept, Ashram serves as a catalyst to spread the message of equality, justice, and peace to common people.

Inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's Ashram, the first Christian Ashram (*Christa Prema Seva Sangh*) was started in Pune in 1920 by Father Winslow. Bishop Peckenham Walsh and his wife started an Ashram known as 'Christu Shishyashram' at Thadaakam in Coimbatore, India where unmarried people were also included as residents. As the years passed, more Ashrams sprang up with varying patterns. Some of them are Christu Kula Ashram (Tirupattur), Pandit Ramabai Ashram (Pune), and 'Christhuvashram' (Manganam).

4. Ashrams of the Mar Thoma Church

The first Ashram of the Mar Thoma Church was established in 1926 by Rev. John Varghese. Being a missionary of the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, he started a fellowship at Palghat which later grew as 'Christudasashram'. In 1940, the 'Christa Mitra Ashram' was established by Rev. P.J. Thomas at Ankola in North Karnataka. Christa Sakshya Sangha Ashram, in Hoskote, Bangalore was established in 1947, while Christa Panthi Ashram, Sihora (near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh) was established in 1942. The Ashram in Hoskote is a model for the Ashram Movement. All these Ashrams exerted a profound influence on the common people. Their work involved direct evangelism, medical work, improvement in literacy, and social development. The basic tenet of all ashrams of the Mar Thoma Church is: "Response to 'my neighbor'".

5. Ideals of Ashram Life

Following are the ideals of Ashram life

1. Christian Fellowship
2. Simple Life Style
3. Adjusting economic needs according to the ideals of a dedicated life.
4. Importance to discipline and sacrifice
5. Prime place of prayer, worship, and meditation
6. Glorifying God through Bible study, testimony, and service
7. Giving importance for physical work in daily life.

Mission is much more than preaching. It is a genuine witness and a way of life. Despite scientific advances and modern amenities such as transportation, movies, and

cable TV, one finds that the people in rural areas easily adapt and relate to the Ashram life. Ashramites are people who are capable of imparting religious knowledge. The gospel of Jesus Christ has to be presented not only through preaching, but also through a lifestyle that reflects Christ, as an indigenous expression of Christianity in India.

In these days of rising corruption, threats, violence, callous materialism, and rapidly deteriorating moral and ethical values, Ashrams and fellowships stand out as guiding beacons amidst growing darkness, to lead the people towards the Cross of Christ.

WORDS FOR OUR TIMES

The Christian Ashram is a powerful way to share the Gospel with people who predominantly live in rural towns and villages of India. The needs of the ashramites are few, since ashrams emphasize a simple lifestyle, resembling that of Christ when He had lived on this earth. He would like us to lead a similar lifestyle.

WORDS FOR MY LIFE

We often need to break away from our busy and hectic schedules to spend time quietly, in the presence of God. A Christian ashram in India offers a place of solitude to concentrate on God, detached from the outside world. Traveling and spending time in an ashram may not be a viable option for all of us. But, we can experience the same peace and serenity of the ashram in our own homes, by waking up before sunrise and spending time in the presence of God. Make it a challenge today to rise up and meet God in the morning, before your regular day begins. Notice what a difference this experience would be!

BIBLE LEARNING: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

A. True or False:

1. The three symbols that Paul refers to in 2 Timothy, for sharing the Christian faith are: Soldier, Athlete, and Preacher. [True/False]
2. "Ashram" is a word from the "Hindi" language. [True/False]
3. In Christian Ashrams, Christ takes the place of the "Shishya". [True/False]
4. In Ashrams, a closer relationship with God is attained through Bhakti (Devotion), Gnjana (knowledge), and Prarthana (prayer). [True/False]
5. Ashrams are popular places for holding "rock concerts". [True/False]

B. Short Answers:

1. How does Paul typify Christian service in the form of a soldier?

2. Describe how Paul typifies Christian service in the form of an athlete?

3. Explain how Paul compares Christian service to that of a farmer?

4. List the ideals of Ashram life.

C. Essay Question: 500 words

1. "The fire exists as a result of a burning flame. So does the Church through its mission." Describe the mission of the Church and the impact of Indian Christian ashrams.

Essay format:

- a. Introduction: How is God's mission for the Church accomplished by each individual?
- b. Paul uses the three symbols: soldier, athlete and farmer. Explain their relevance.
- c. Discuss the concept of the Ashram and its effect in spreading the Gospel in India
- d. Name some of the Mar Thoma ashrams and the ideals of ashram life.
- e. Conclusion: Mission is much more than preaching. Explain briefly based on the concept of ashrams.

MEMORY VERSE: Mark 6: 7-9

"Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic."

CLOSING PRAYER:

Prepare us O Lord, to sacrifice ourselves for the betterment of others, just as You sacrificed Yourself for us. Give us the strength to serve others and to share your Word to the ends of the earth. Amen

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