

Mar Thoma Sunday Schools

Diocese of North America & Europe



Curriculum

BEING GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S WORLD

Grade Six

(Samajam Curriculum - Junior Volume III)

Published By
Mar Thoma Sunday School Diocesan Council
2006



MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

**Diocesan Bishop
Rt. Rev. Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos**

Foreword

Dearly beloved in Christ,

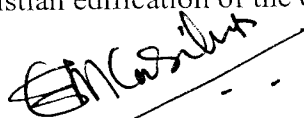
A new curriculum for our Sunday School has been a felt need in this Diocese. I am glad that the new curriculum is ready to be introduced in 2006. Here we are in the process of a transition from Cokesbury to the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam Curriculum. While retaining the essential elements and the 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 in Upper Primary Classes (Grades 4, 5 &6)

The primary classes are divided into two, First: Grades 1 to 3 and Second: Grades 4-6. Teachers are expected to read Notes to Teachers of Grades 1-3. Most characteristic features mentioned before continue to this stage. There are two terms, lower primary and upper primary (or junior or middle school) though they are not universally used. The term middle school is also vague because it refers to a few grades between lower primary and high school. Anyhow, we are not interested in the precise use of these terms.

Characteristic Features and the Learning of these children

As already mentioned in primary school years or ages 6-12, children are very active as they are full of energy and vigor, both physical and nonphysical. It is for this stage that the psychologist Erikson used the term “industry.” The emphasis we place on activities can be continued during these years. Projects assigned to these children are in groups, but expecting greater individual initiative and responsibility. Models and heroes presented to these children are drawn from real life situations.

Today we live in a world where universal primary education is the goal. The target is to provide education till the age of 12 or 14, usually grades 4-6. However, there are many countries which do not meet the goal of basic education for a few years. Along with the number or quantity, attempts are being made to improve the quality of primary education. It includes better building, facilities, improved curriculum and qualified teachers. Among them let me comment on one, qualified teachers.

Teacher Preparation: There are teacher preparation institutions or “training” schools and colleges to create qualified teachers. In the United States, Canada and some other countries, teacher preparation is offered in colleges, while in most other countries of the world, including India, teachers for primary or elementary schools are prepared in schools, usually a post-secondary training schools for two years. These two systems of teacher training carry with it two salary scales, higher salary scale for teachers in high schools and a lower one for primary schools. The former is considered more prestigious than the latter.

What is the qualification for becoming a Sunday school teacher? In my view there are two qualifications, one the knowledge of the Bible and the other a person’s commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior. Other than that, there is no formal preparation to become a Sunday school teacher. However, teacher preparation must be arranged in Sunday schools at parish, center and diocesan levels. Teachers must continue preparation (in-service) throughout their teaching career. A good teacher is always a student who continues learning in such formal arrangements. Also, the teacher takes time to prepare the lesson for each class. Preparation for Sunday school teaching involves time for devotion because the goal here is not limited to providing further information or knowledge, but to transform the child following the model of Jesus. There are goals or aims to be accomplished and each lesson is organized as an organic unit, one segment or

item related to the other. The teacher must be well-versed with this arrangement or organization of each lesson.

Sources: As already noted, primary school children learn better through activities. Teachers who prepared the new curriculum have done their share by suggesting suitable activities and projects. If teachers want more suggestions and ideas they can use the internet. (See the Resources given in the Notes to Teachers... grades 1, 2, & 3)

Teachers who maintain the habit of reading books for their preparation, let me suggest a book: Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998. I recommend this book for Teacher Training Workshops.

Acknowledgement: Let me 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

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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PART I GOD’S WONDERFUL WORLD

Chapter – 1 DIVINE PLAN BEHIND CREATION

Lesson Theme: The Creation of God
Aim: To recognize God’s glory
Bible Reading: Genesis 1:1-31; 2:8-17

Values for Life

1. *God created the world by His word*
2. *Man, God’s creation is a temple of God*
3. *To lead creation to its fulfillment, God needs man as a partner in his mission*
4. *Our role in life is to follow God’s will*
5. *A complete transformation occurs when we submit ourselves before the Holy Spirit*

Preparation

Planning and preparing is a key to long-term success. For example, a farmer plans and puts in his effort that takes months and years to ensure a good crop. Likewise, it could take months to design and build a house or to design and build a highly specialized computer program.

Smart and intelligent students plan well and are punctual with their assignments. They organize their day-to-day activities effectively.

The planning stage takes even longer when the expected end-result is highly creative and useful. In the Book of Genesis, God provides us a great example of a step by step effort that resulted in a great creation.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. **A Divine Plan**
The Book of Genesis is the book of beginnings. God created everything by following a step by step plan. The earth was empty, formless, without order, and without laws. This condition was miraculously changed when God commanded, “Let there be....” One by one everything took shape and order was established. God’s divine power is revealed to us in the creation.
2. **Order of Divine Creation**
God’s plan is completed in six days. On the seventh day, He rested. God made light on the first day and then separated the light from the darkness. He called light “day” and darkness “night”. A divine light brightened the earth even before the creation of the sun because light is essential for the existence of life. On the

second day, God created the “sky”. The land and seas were created on the third day. In addition, seed bearing plants and trees were created.

God created the lights (the sun, moon and stars) on the fourth day. On the fifth day, living creatures to live in the waters and birds to fly above the earth, was created. God blessed them to be fruitful and multiply in numbers.

On the sixth day, Man was created in the likeness of God and was allowed to rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, over the livestock and over all creatures that move on the ground.

3. Man – God’s Last Creation

Man was last in the scheme of creation. He was God’s own handiwork and created in God’s own image. God had already created everything that man needs. Man is the crowning glory of all the creations. God gave him the right to rule but not to reign over the creation. God expects a partnership with humans. Humans are expected to be good stewards of everything that has been created.

4. Our Duty

God gave man the opportunity to name every creation and thereby allowed human participation and cooperation in the divine work. Such a holy relationship requires humans to:

- Accept God’s creation with gratitude
- Be grateful to God for His care and concern
- Be good stewards of God’s divine creation
- Preserve and beautify nature; humans are not owners but stewards.
- Be God’s partners on earth.

We are God’s temple and the abode of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:9 and 6:19).

5. God the Creator

The fundamental belief of the Christian creed and the Bible is that God is the creator. The Bible begins with a description of the creation. This truth is repeated several times later in the Bible. In the Book of Isaiah (42:5), in the Epistles (Colossians 1:16) and Revelations (10:7), God the creator is praised. The Nicene Creed begins with praising the creator God.

God’s word is the basis of creation. This word took flesh in Jesus (John 1:1-3; 14). The fulfillment of creation begins in the new creation and continues through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:16). Renewal of the creation is through Jesus Christ.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Discuss the solar system fundamentals (how each of the planets and associated moons travel is clearly defined paths around the sun) by reviewing a large color map of the solar

system. Provide a map or a sketch of the solar system. Reflect on how the earth is purposefully created to support life. How does the sun support life on earth? Can Pluto support life? Why not?

Bible lesson for Our Times

God has clearly instructed us to be good stewards of the earth. Discuss how well we meet our expectations. If you were getting graded on how good a steward you are of God's creation how would you grade yourself. Identify five simple ways to be better stewards of the environments.

Life Response

How can we practically apply this lesson in our life? What can we do in our own community to change attitudes and perceptions towards the environment? How can we help keep our house, our church and the surroundings beautiful? What are the qualities of a good steward? What are duties God has given us?

Memory Verse:

You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

Prayer

Lord, the creator of the world and all that are in it, help us to see you through your creations. Amen.

Chapter – 2 NATURAL RESOURCES

Lesson Theme:	God's Earth
Aim:	To understand how the earth and its resources have been designed by God for the existence of the created
Bible Reading:	Genesis 2:1-17

Values for Life

- 1 *Each element in nature has its own unique role*
- 2 *The balance of nature depends on the interdependent relationship among all the living beings on earth*
- 3 *Man has the divine duty to take care of God's creations*
- 4 *The very existence of nature is threatened when land, air or water is polluted*

Preparation

Actively taking care of our earth is more than a smart choice. It is our divine duty. God has given humans the great responsibility to be good stewards of God's marvelous creation. All of elements that make up our environment are interdependent. It is critical that our desire for modernization should not prevent us from our divine duty to take care of all of God's creations.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- 1 **Nature as a Family**
God created every element on earth that was a formless, empty celestial body. Nature was created as a very intertwined and interdependent family. Each element in the environment plays a critical and unique role. A harmonious coexistence is essential to maintain the proper balance and rhythm of our universe.
- 2 **Land Resources**
God created all the elements needed to sustain human life on earth. Everything that we use is a divine gift – the land, the water, all the living creatures, all the plant life etc. Ecological mismanagement disrupts the harmony of nature.
- 3 **Aquatic Resources**
Water is an essential of life. Two-thirds of earth is covered with water. The first forms of life originated in water. The Bible reveals this fact to us. God has entrusted the great responsibility of maintaining the quality of water resources to us.
- 4 **Sky Resources**
The seasons and the weather are essential for the balance in nature. The sun, the moon and the stars are all important to maintain the balance of life on earth. The sun gives us heat and light to sustain life.

5 Our Responsibilities

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands (Psalm 19:1). The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it (Psalms 24:1).

It is our divine duty to prevent pollution and the destruction of nature. Ecological problems and associated loss of life are opposed to divine plans. We should:

- maintain all that the Lord has created
- have the realization that all the God created are for the coming generations too
- see God's presence, power and glory in all creations
- praise God for all these creations

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Discuss some of the programs in place to prevent further destruction of the rainforests. Many national and international environmental groups have actively taken up this cause. Review the reasons for this active involvement. Reflect on how every nation on earth benefits from sound environmental policy.

How do national and international environment agencies work together to develop good environmental policy in your state?

Bible lesson for Our Times

God has clearly instructed us to be good stewards of the earth. Discuss how Green House Gas and Global warming has changed the world. Set a personal goal to understand the mission of one environmental group in the next 30 days.

Life Response

How can we practically apply this lesson in our life? How can we help keep our earth pollution free? Man cannot exist without depending and being part of natural ecological cycle.

Memory Verse:

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them- the Lord, who remains faithful forever. (Psalms 146:5-6)

Prayer

Lord, the maker of the earth and all things in it, help us to utilize all these resources wisely. Amen.

Chapter – 3 DOVE: THE SYMBOL OF PEACE

Lesson Theme: God's Creatures
Aim: God's messengers include even birds
Bible Reading: Genesis 7:1-10; 8:1-12; 15:9-17

Values for Life

- 1 *God uses all creations including the birds as messengers*
- 2 *God wants each creation to help another because all of creation is interdependent*
- 3 *All God's creation reflect divine glory*
- 4 *All of creation, including the birds, maintain the ecological balance*

Preparation

In the book of Kings, during a time of famine and drought, we read about a raven that was directed by God to feed a prophet Elijah meat and bread. The raven became an instrument of God in this story that glorifies the power of the Master of the universe. A story like this may at times seem unbelievable to our human mind. But consider this perspective: Using a raven to feed prophet Elijah pales in comparison to the events that took place during the first six days of creation. God's power, glory and greatness keeps us alive in a self sustaining universe.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Noah and the Flood

God caused a big flood during the time of Noah to cleanse the world of wickedness. Noah and his family were saved because of God's grace. The 40 days and nights of rain drowned the earth for five months. Later God caused a wind to blow and the waters began to recede. To find out whether the waters had completely receded, Noah sent out a raven. It kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. Each element in the creation plays a role to maintain the balance of nature. God desires an interdependent ecosystem.

2 Noah gets the Sign through the Dove

Noah later sent a dove to check to see if the waters had receded. But it returned back to the ark. A week later, the dove was sent again. This time, it returned with a sign – an olive leaf in its beak. Noah understood that the waters were receding. After a week, the dove was sent out again. This time, it did not return. The land was dry for Noah, his family and all the living beings in the ark.

Noah built an altar to the Lord, sacrificed a burnt offering, praised and worshipped God.

3 The Dove and Spiritual Lessons

The Dove is a symbol of innocence, tenderness, peace and purity. It also symbolizes abundance. Solomon's Song of Songs addressed a bride as a dove. Here the word "dove" indicates love. The eyes of the dove are always moist – a symbol of a believer praying with tears. The dove represents the Holy Spirit and God's grace.

4 The Dove as an Offering

Folks who could not offer a lamb for sacrifice used to offer a dove instead. Mary offered for sacrifice a pair of doves when Jesus was brought to the Temple to be presented to the Lord.

5 Dove for Confirming a Covenant

In the Old Testament days, a dove was used to confirm a covenant made between two parties.

6 Dove as a symbol of Peace and Plenty

According to the Bible, Palestine is home to seven varieties of doves. The nation considers the dove as a symbol of peace, purity and plenty.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Contact a local group arranging bird watching trips in different parts of the country. Invite one of the members to come and speak about birds commonly seen around your town and their migration habits. Have a discussion on how birds fly vast distances in response to seasonal weather changes. What guides these creatures during their journey?

Review the Main Ideas of this lesson. Why is the dove a symbol of peace?

Bible lesson for Our Times

God has clearly instructed us to be good stewards of the earth. Discuss how birds fit into the ecological balance on earth.

Life Response

Take time to meditate and reflect on this lesson. What do you think God expects us to do in supporting the balance in the ecosystem? Write down three things you can do to improve the wellbeing of birds?

Memory Verse:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. (Job 12:7-

Prayer

Our Lord and Father, help us to see your glory in each and every creation and give us the grace to accept your glory. Amen.

Chapter – 4 DAVID – THE KING CHOSEN BY THE LORD

Lesson Theme:	Human beings – the crown of creation
Aim:	To recognize God has created us for the fulfillment of His plane
Bible Reading	1 Samuel 10 & 16:1-13

Values for Life

- 1 *Humans fail when God is no longer part of their lives*
- 2 *We discern only what the eyes can see but God sees our heart*
- 3 *God's plan is fulfilled when we become His partner*

Preparation

God has very high expectation of humans. We are expected to positively respond to our divine duty as good stewards of all God's creations. God expects us to care for our environment and for the generations to come.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Saul – First Ordained King

Saul, the first king of Israel was chosen by God. According to God's command, Samuel anointed Saul. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and became very powerful. Later, Saul began to act foolishly, offered sacrifices to himself and disobeyed God. Saul even consulted a medium dishonoring God's will.

Saul's thoughtless deeds resulted, in God casting him away from his kingly rights.

2 Choosing the Next King

Samuel again received the call to anoint the next King of Israel. God commanded Samuel to fill his horn with oil and take a heifer to the household of Jesse in Bethlehem. God had chosen one of the sons of Jesse as the future king. Seeing the oldest son, Samuel thought him to be the chosen one. But the Lord asked Samuel not to pay attention on how handsome and tall he was. Man looks at the outward appearance. But, the Lord looks at the heart.

3 Anointing David

Samuel was not led by God to pick any of Jesse's sons that were presented to him. He asked Jesse, "Do you have more sons?" "There is still the youngest", Jesse answered, "but he is tending the sheep." The youngest son, David was sent for. When David arrived, the Lord said to Samuel, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." David was called and anointed when he was at work. Samuel took the horn

of oil and anointed him in the presence of all his brothers. Immediately, the spirit of the Lord filled David with power.

4 David – Excellent at Work and Faithful

David was good at playing the harp. He played the harp to drive away the evil spirit that used to affect King Saul. Saul was impressed by his abilities and chose him as the man to carry his weapons. David became more and more powerful because he was filled and led by the Holy Spirit.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Review the life of a shepherd boy during David's time. Discuss how they took care of the sheep and led a life that allowed time to think about the deeper meanings of life.

Why was David chosen to replace Saul? How was David anointed as king? Why was David a powerful king?

Bible lesson for Our Times

David is an excellent example for us to follow. He had a clean heart and noble qualities. But he also made mistakes. His repentance later allowed him to reestablish his close relationship with the Lord.

Life Response

How can we practically apply this lesson in our life? Why was David able to create a great relationship with God unlike King Saul? How is our relationship with God? Has it improved over time? Are we able to talk to God about our problems? Or do we assume that God should know our problems and help resolve them? Is there room for improvement? Identify one change you can make in your life that can greatly improve your relationship with God.

Memory Verse:

After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' (Acts 13:22)

Prayer

Lord, let your plan be fulfilled in us. Amen.

Chapter – 5 FIRE FROM HEAVEN

Lesson Theme: Science and Faith
Aim: To realize that nothing is impossible for God
Bible Reading: 1 King 18:1-46

Values for Life

- 1 *Nothing is impossible for God*
- 2 *We should be partners with God in fulfilling divine plans*
- 3 *Our lives and activities must be blameless*
- 4 *God will help us when we do His work according to His will*

Preparation

Napoleon as a child truly believed that there was nothing that impossible. He excluded that word from his dictionary. This child later grew up to become Emperor of France. Later this Emperor failed as a leader and was exiled. In his old age, Napoleon was rather disappointed. He failed to do God’s will in his life. Today we shall learn about a prophet who changed the impossible to the possible through relentless prayer.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Elijah – the Prophet

Elijah was a prophet who changed the impossible to the possible through relentless prayer. The meaning of his name is “the Lord is God.” Elijah was from the village of Tishbe in Gilead during the reigns of King Ahab and King Ahaziah.

King Ahab’s wife, Jezebel propagated the worship of Baal, a heathen God. She caused the death of a few of God’s prophets.

Prophet Elijah, even during the times of great danger while living in hiding followed the will of God.

2 Prophet Elijah and King Ahab

Prophet Elijah said that it would not rain for 3.5 years as punishment from God. In the third year, Elijah received a message from God to convey to Ahab that it is going to rain again. Elijah pointed out the reasons for God’s anger. King Ahab and his family had moved away from God and now followed a heathen God.

3 Test of Fire at Carmel

King Ahab summoned all the people of Israel following the advice of Prophet Elijah. Four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah were also summoned. He challenged the assembly to decide on one path - our

Lord or Baal. Prophet Elijah asked for two bulls to cut and placed on the wood on the altar for a burnt sacrifice. Each group had separate altars. Then, each group would call their respective gods to send down fire to consume the sacrifice.

The prophets of Baal and their followers got the first chance to call for a fire to be sent down – but did not get any response.

Prophet Elijah got the next chance. He gathered the people around him and cried out for an answer to the Almighty. The fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

When the people saw this, they fell before the Lord and cried, “The Lord – he is God, the Lord - he is God!”

Prophet Elijah’s prayer, for the return of the people to God, was answered.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Review the life of Elijah. His success in life was the result of standing firm in his beliefs and actively pursuing the will of God.

How did King Ahab turn away from God? How was he punished for it?

Discuss in detail how Prophet Elijah was able to demonstrate the power of the Lord.

Bible lesson for Our Times

This is a lesson that has application for all times. Our leaders (political and others) are quick to follow the popular trends in society. Prophet Elijah may not have won the support of the majority of the people. But that did not matter – Prophet Elijah focused his life on the truth and the right cause.

William Carey’s motto, “ Expect great things from God, do great things for God”, is reflected throughout the life of Elijah.

Life Response

We as Christians have the responsibility for strongly believing and standing up for the truth.

Memory Verse:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Prayer

Almighty Lord, enable us to experience you in all the walks of our lives and Amen.

Part II God's Wonderful People

Chapter – 6 FAMILY – A DIVINE PLAN

Lesson Theme: Family

Aim: To understand how a family that keeps God's commands is blessed and how a family passes divine values from one generation to the other

Bible Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 11:18-32

Values for Life

- 1 Families are a part of the divine plan to carry out God's will
- 2 A family is made perfect in God, by God
- 3 A family is a learning center where parents are the teachers
- 4 Both parents and children have responsibilities to maintain and sustain a family

Preparation

Parents have a very important role in creating a Christian environment for the children. That divine responsibility helps mould Christian values in the children, the society, and even the nation. Abraham Lincoln often spoke about the role his mother in creating a sound value system. Healthy Christian parenting is critical in the building of God's kingdom on earth.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- A family is the basic unit of society.
God established the first family in the Garden of Eden where they led a happy and contented life with God. God has selected parents to tell their children about God's great works. A family is the place where divine values are passed on to the next generation.
- Obey God to receive blessings.
Moses reminds the Israelites about the need to follow God's commandments, decrees and laws again and again. Those who obey God's word will be blessed.
- Love your God
Moses tells the Israelites to love God. We are expected to love Him with all our strength, with all our soul and all our heart. This is the essence of the Ten Commandments.
- How to love God
Moses clearly teaches the Israelites on how the people should love God. He said:
 - a. Fix God's Commandments in your hearts and minds

- b. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.
- c. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates
- d. You should carefully observe all these commandments, love the Lord your God, walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him.

- **Blessing vs. Curse**

God promises us blessings if His Commands are followed and a curse if His Commands are not followed.

- **Families should fulfill God's purpose.**

God chose families to carry out his will. He chose the family of Noah to warn mankind against evil and sin. He called Abraham and family to make them a great nation. He called the family of Joshua to lead the Israelites. "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:18).

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Show how the family is the basic unit of society.
2. What did Moses remind Israelites?
3. What is essence of the Ten Commandments?
4. How should people love God, according to Moses?
5. Who were some of the people God had chosen to carry out His will? Show how they carried it out?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Addiction to drugs and alcohol is a common social problem facing our society. Often, young adults become a victim to an addiction and lose their focus in life. They forget the awesome power of God in overcoming any difficulty. At times, even suicide is considered as a solution of human problems. God can and will help us overcome any challenge. We only need to obey His instructions.

Life Response

How can we practically apply this lesson in our life? Parents have a critical role in teaching children God's ways. Children should actively participate in the learning experience.

Memory Verse:

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for our home, parents, brothers, sisters and friends. Help us to remember your favors and blessings and to obey you gratefully. Amen.

Chapter – 7 WRESTLING WITH GOD

Lesson Theme: **Humanity, One in Unity**
Aim: **God can transform any individual even if he is a deceiver**
Bible Reading: **Genesis 32:1-32**

Values for Life

1. *There is a price to pay for our evil ways*
2. *God forgives and blesses those who forgive their fellow beings*
3. *Prayers prepares us for all difficult challenges*
3. *We become new creations when we repent and change our wrong doings*

Preparation

No one likes the companionship of the wicked. But evil still exists on earth. Nazi Germany was an evil nation. Most people today accept that fact. But most people living in Germany in the 1940's did not recognize that reality. They had explanations or excuses for many of the evil actions perpetuated by Hitler and his associates.

Today's lesson tells us how God can change our reality. This is very true in the life of Jacob and Esau. Asking and inviting God to be involved in our lives change the character of our relationship with God and everyone else.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- 1 Jacob's evil deeds
 Jacob was a man of dichotomies. He depended on God at times and at other times, he did evil things in the sight of God. Jacob deceived his brother, Esau and tricked his father, Isaac, to get blessed.
 Jacob later had to run away from home to avoid the wrath of this estranged brother, Esau
- 2 Jacob returning to meet Esau
 God blessed Jacob and he became very wealthy. Laban also prospered because of Jacob. God commanded Jacob to go back to the land he was born. In response, Jacob took everything he had and left in a hurry. Laban pursued Jacob but God intervened to allow an agreement to be made between these two men.
- 3 Jacob prepares to meet Esau
 After making peace with Laban, Jacob decided to make arrangement to meet Esau. Along the way, the angels of God met him. He called the place when he met the angels Mahanaim. In preparing to meet Esau, Jacob send messengers (to Esau) to inform him that he had enough livestock and slaves. But Jacob did not gain Esau's favor. Instead, the messengers reported that Esau was coming

with four hundred men to meet Jacob. Worried and scared, Jacob divided up the people, sheep, goats, and camels into two groups. He hoped that if Esau attacked, one group might be able to escape.

4. Jacob's heart-broken prayer

Jacob also realized that his human efforts were not enough to gain the favor of Esau. He prayed earnestly with a broken heart. Jacob remembered the many blessings of God that he and his forefathers have enjoyed. He also prayed to God to save him from his own brother. Praying to God was the second part of Jacob's preparation to meet Esau.

Jacob felt guilty about his past dealings with his brother, Esau. His past deeds made him restless. Again in order to pacify Esau, he sent some servants ahead of him with gifts.

5. The transformation of Jacob

After his wives, eleven children and his possessions crossed the River Jabbok, Jacob stayed back that night at a camp. Then a man came and wrestled with him. Jacob bravely wrestled with this man using the will power and presence of mind Jacob had gained over the last twenty years.

When the man saw that he was not winning the struggle, he hit Jacob on the hip and it was thrown out of joint. When Jacob realized that God wrestled with him all night, he insisted to be blessed. He accepted his mistakes and repented.

God blessed Jacob and gave him a new name Israel.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What are some evil deeds of Jacob?
2. What were the preparations that Jacob made to meet Esau?
3. What was the heart-broken prayer of Jacob?
4. Describe the transformation of Jacob.
5. What was the new name of Jacob? How did he get it?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Evil gets a foothold in our lives when we make God less welcome in our day to day activities. When God's word take a backseat in our lives, evil ways become more acceptable to us. It is very important that we to closely follow God's ways in all our activities.

Life Response

When we repent our sins, God will forgive and we will become His children.

Memory Verse:

If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. (Psalms 37: 23, 24)

Prayer

Lord, let us not be cunning and deceitful in our lives. Help us to be faithful and sincere in all aspects of our lives. Amen.

Chapter – 8 GOD SPEAKS TO ELIJAH

Lesson Theme:	God reveals in history.
Aim:	To show how God revealed Himself to Elijah and strengthened him for his ministry
Bible Reading:	1 Kings 19: 1-21

Values for Life

- 1 *Remember God's favors and blessings even when fear and frustration make us weary*
- 2 *Fear and disappointment can make us lazy and ineffective*
- 3 *We cannot runaway from God's influence*
- 4 *God can help us overcome any difficulty*

Preparation

Human history is filled with numerous examples of people who in difficult circumstances lifted up for extraordinary accomplishment. Sir Winston Churchill, the former British Prime Minister, was the leader of the Allies during World War II. His motto, "the final victory is ours" filled the people with courage. His speech at Harrow, his alma mater is famous; "Young friends, never retreat, never retreat, never, never." Fear and frustration should never dishearten us. We should not retreat. Today we are going to learn how God strengthened a prophet who was disheartened by adverse circumstances, and used him for his ministry. This lesson focuses on Prophet Elijah. He was picked out to reveal the power of God to the rest of humanity.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Fleeing from King Ahab

Prophet Elijah had earlier brought fire down from heaven by prayer to prove to the Israelites and the prophets of Baal that the God of Elijah was the living God. After that the people seized the prophets of Baal, brought them down to the River Kishon and killed them.

When King Ahab told his wife Jezebel everything that took place at Mount Carmel, an angry Jezebel sent a messenger to Prophet Elijah to inform him that he would meet the same end as that of the prophets of Baal the following day.

Elijah got scared and fled for his life. Fear destroyed Prophet Elijah's ability to think clearly and remember the great power of his living God.

Elijah went to Beersheba and later walked away into the wilderness. The tired and scared Elijah lies down under a tree and just fell asleep.

2. The love of God seeks Elijah

An angel of the Lord woke Prophet Elijah from his sleep. A loaf of bread and a jar of water were placed near his head. Elijah ate and fell asleep again. The angel woke him up a second time to eat again.

Prophet Elijah got up, ate and drank and was strengthened enough to walk forty days and nights to reach Horeb, the mountain of God. There the Lord appeared to the prophet Elijah.

3. God appears before Prophet Elijah

Elijah heard God's voice in a soft whisper. We need to be quiet and be focused to hear God's voice. Prophet Elijah was transformed by God. When Elijah was on the Mount Horeb, four incidents occurred. A strong wind, an earthquake, fire and soft voice. God was not there in the first three. In the soft whisper of a voice that came last, Elijah heard God's voice. Silence is necessary to hear God's voice. God's voice transformed him. He experienced the strengthening grace of God that came to him.

4. God entrusts responsibilities to Elijah

God accepted the run-away Elijah, lifted him up, strengthened him and entrusted him with new responsibilities and a divine message. God gave him four commands:

- 1 Return along the wilderness near Damascus and enter the city
- 2 Anoint Hazael, the King of Syria
- 3 Anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi as King of Israel
- 4 Anoint Elisha, to succeed Elijah as the prophet

He carried out the responsibilities God has entrusted him. God wants to fulfill His purpose through us.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Why did Elijah run away from King Ahab?
2. What did God's angel tell Elijah?
3. Where did God appear to Elijah?
4. What responsibilities did God entrust Elijah with?

Bible lesson for Our Times

God's power is greater than any other power. We should not be frightened of evil doers on earth but instead rely on the strength of the Lord to take a stance for good like Prophet Elijah.

Life Response

Discuss some of the difficult circumstances facing the world – poverty, wars, terrorism, etc. How can we use the strength of our Lord to help fight these problems?

Memory Verse:

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them. (Psalms 145: 18, 19)

Prayer

Dear Lord, fill us with your courage as you have given to Elijah. Strengthen us spiritually to live courageously in times of discouragement. Amen.

Chapter – 9 JOSHUA – A COURAGEOUS LEADER

Lesson Theme: Response to God’s revelation
Aim: When we respond to God’s call, His presence will be with us
Bible Reading: Joshua 1:1-16, 24:14-15; Numbers 14: 5-9

Values for Life

1. Those faithful in small matters will be entrusted with greater responsibilities
2. God’s people are separate and different from other people
3. A successful life with God is accomplished when we make good use of our time and opportunities

Preparation

Martin Luther King was the leader of the Civil Rights Movement in America during the 1960s. Blacks were denied of their rights as citizens of the country. They were segregated in schools, buses, and public facilities. They could not vote in elections because of regulations. Dr. King fought against the laws and social practices discriminating the blacks. Though many people did not support his movement, he gained it because of his moral strength and conviction that God has entrusted a great task on him. Today, we are going to study about a leader who lead Israelites from slavery. That leader was Joshua.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Joshua – Commander of the Army
 Joshua, born a slave in Egypt was the son of Nun, an Ephraimite. When the Amalekites attacked the Israelites at Rephidim, Moses appointed Joshua as the commander of the army. He authorized Joshua to pick out suitable men and fight the Amalekites. He defeated the Amalekites.
2. Joshua, the Helper of Moses
 Joshua was the helper of Moses. He always served and helped Moses in the journey through the wilderness. When Moses went up the Holy Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, Joshua was with him. The experience he had with Moses enabled him to be a good leader.
3. A Leader Who Gave Courage to the People
 Moses sent one leader each from all the tribes as spies to explore the land of Canaan. As the Lord of Ephraim tribe Joshua was there. The spies came back with their findings. Ten among them spread a false and frightening news about the land they had explored and this disappointed and discouraged the people. But Caleb and Joshua who depended on God, encouraged the people saying, "The Lord is with us; so don't be afraid". They were faithful in their mission. God entrusts greater responsibilities to those

who are faithful in little things.

4. Joshua – A leader blessed and strengthened by God

After the death of Moses, Joshua was commissioned by God to cross the River Jordan and to conquer the Promised Land. The promises from God strengthened and encouraged Joshua.

The four promises were:

1. I will be with you; I will never abandon you or forsake you (Joshua 1:5).
2. Be determined and confident. You will be the leader of these people as they occupy this land which I promised their ancestors (1:6)
3. Be strong and courageous. Be careful to obey all the laws that Moses gave you (1:7). Be sure that the Book of the Law is always read in your worship and make sure that you obey everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (1:8).
4. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go (1:9).

5. A Leader who strengthened the People in Faith

Joshua led the people to Canaan. By depending on God, the Israelites were able to win the battles and divide the land among the twelve tribes. Towards the end of his rule, Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem and gave his final message.

He exhorted the people to continue to honor the Lord only and to remain separated from the world. Then he proclaimed his decision, “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Who was Joshua?
2. How did Joshua help Moses?
3. Evaluate the minority views of Joshua and Caleb after spying the land of Canaan?
4. What were the four promises of God to Joshua before conquering the Promised Land?
5. Discuss the final message of Joshua toward the end of his rule.

Bible lesson for Our Times

God-chosen leaders are essential for the betterment of our lives on earth. We have to be prepared to accept such responsibilities if and when we get an opportunity. A prayerful mind and a humble heart are essential to prepare us for a divine mission.

Life Response

Joshua was a perfect model for a leader. His dependence on God, faith, dedication, courage and prayer is a model for us to follow. Discuss how we can use Joshua as a role model in our lives.

Memory Verse:

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

Prayer

O Lord, who made Joshua a good leader, help us to grow stronger with you in our day to day life. Amen.

Chapter – 10 A MODEL TO BE FOLLOWED

Lesson Theme:	Modern human ventures.
Aim:	To show how Jesus Christ serves others and to encourage every believer to behave in the same way
Bible Reading:	Luke 2:24-27; John 13:1-7

Values for Life

1. *Jesus followed the lifestyle of the suffering servant*
2. *The duty of a Christian is to serve and not to be served*
3. *Those who want to be great should be a servant*
4. *Service motivated by God's love has value and influence*

Preparation

Swami Vivekananda, a great scholar, was very much influenced by the teachings of Christ. Once, while he was sick, some of his followers visited him. After supper, he helped them to wash their hands by pouring water. They asked him why he helped them in spite of his weakness. His answer was, "Jesus Christ washed the feet of his disciples on the day before his death. Hence I helped you to wash your hands." The next day he passed away from this world. This incident shows how much Swami Vivekananda was influenced by the life and teachings of Christ. Jesus revealed his greatness through service.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Preparations for Passover

Jesus made arrangements to celebrate the Feast of the Passover with his disciples. As instructed by him, the apostles prepared the Passover meal in the upstairs room of Mark, at Jerusalem. In the evening, Jesus took his place at the table with the apostles. Who among them was the greatest was a matter of dispute among the disciples. But Jesus taught them that life in total was service. He always adopted the life-style of the suffering servant. In the Last Supper, Jesus showed the example of the servant.

2. Who is the Greatest?

When Jews sat for meals, they used to observe their positions. The one who sits on the right hand of the chief guest is considered the greatest. As an answer to the question 'who is the greatest', Jesus showed them the example of washing their feet. He taught that the duty of a Christian is to serve and not to be served. He practiced what he preached. The last supper fully revealed the life and mission of Jesus. "But I am among you as one who serves", Jesus pointed out to them.

3. Wash One Another's Feet

Jesus was the chief guest of the Feast. According to the Jewish custom, the legs of the guest are washed and wiped before they enter the house. The host would appoint a slave, with a vessel of water and a towel to do this. When all sat to dine, Jesus rose from the table, took off his outer garment and tied a towel around his waist. He took the water and began washing the feet of the disciples and wiping them with the towel. When Jesus came near Peter, Peter said, "You shall never wash my feet" to which Jesus answered, "If I do not wash your feet, you will no longer be my disciple". To this Peter replied, "Then wash not only my feet, but wash my hands and head as well." Jesus was actually putting in to practice the advice he had given a number of times to his disciples. Jesus, our Lord and teacher showed himself as an example of service and meekness.

4. Greatness through Service

Jesus revealed his greatness through service. He followed the lifestyle of the suffering servant. The way of the cross, Jesus pointed out, is to attain greatness through service. Greatness through service is a truth which the world has not fully understood. For the existence of society, we should be willing to serve one another. Leadership is not showing power, but it is service. Only the service rendered out of God's love has value. We can see the model of love in Jesus Christ.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. How did Jesus celebrate the Feast of the Passover?

2. Compare and contrast the answers of Jesus and his disciples on the question of 'who is the greatest?'

3. How did Jesus show the lessons on service in action?

4. What is leadership? Express your views on leadership.

5. Who are some of the people who showed greatness through service today. Discuss.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Today people are interested on the question of leadership. So people conduct workshops and offer courses on leadership. Much research is going on. The assumptions in these studies are different from what Jesus taught us. Jesus wants service at the center of leadership qualities. There are such leaders who serve others in every society at all times.

Life Response

I want to serve others in order to become great. This is the answer that Jesus gives on the question of greatness.

Memory Verse:

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. (Mathew 20: 26, 27)

Prayer

Dear Lord, you come into this world to serve others. Give us also the will to serve others instead of wishing to be served. Amen.

PART III God's Purpose For God's World

Chapter – 11 REBELLIOUS PEOPLE ARE PUNISHED

Lesson Theme	: Nature of God
Aim	: Learn how disobedience to God could lead to judgment
Bible Reading	: Exodus 19:5-6, 20:1-4 & 32:1-35

Values for Life

- 1 *God expects us to follow his teachings*
- 2 *God is disappointed when we do not follow his commands*
- 3 *God is brokenhearted when we go astray*

Preparation

There are many stories in the Bible about disobedient people and how God gets involved to change the circumstances. The story of Noah and his Ark is a great example of such a story.

In the flood story, sin had become so widespread in the world that humans had become evil. God is not just angry at what has happened. He is also brokenhearted and full of sorrow and is using the great flood to cleanse the world.

God's compassion for humankind is seen again when He promises never again to bring a flood of such magnitude upon the earth.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Covenant on Mount Sinai

Three months after the Israelites left Egypt, they come to the Desert of Sinai and Moses goes up to God. God promises to make the Israelites a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if they keep faith in the covenant.

2 Sins of the Israelites

When Moses took a long time in returning from the top of the mountain, the Israelites began to wonder and worry. They went to Aaron and demanded him to make them gods to go before them. Unfortunately, the people had quickly lost their faith in the very God that led them miraculously out of the Egypt.

Aaron molded a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. They did this at the same place where the first commandment (Exodus 20:3: "You shall have no other gods before me.") was received.

By this action, the Israelites disobeyed the commandments, spurned God and His loving care and their divine calling.

3 God's punishment

God is angry and disappointed by the sinful nature of the Israelites whom He rescued from Egypt. But Moses pleads to God not to bring on his people a great disaster. The Lord later punishes the disobedient Israelites with a plague. God punished His people out of His deep love.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read Exodus 19:5-6, 20:1-4 & 32:1-35

Discussion Topic: In both the stories discussed today, we see the great love that God has for his sinful people. Is God angry or disappointed when He decides to punish His people?

Think of examples from your life when you have been punished by your parents. Wasn't the punishment the result of a deep love for your well being and future? Our father in heaven deeply cares for us. He expects us to keep his covenants.

Bible lesson for Our Times

The secular world looks at punishment and justice as a means of making amends for wrong behavior. Our Christian faith teaches us otherwise. We are taught that God at times uses punishment to change and make us better.

Life Response

God has laid a clear set of instructions for His people to follow. Many a times, we fall short of His teachings. It is our responsibility to look into our lives and identify our failings and weaknesses and start the process to overcome them. Our God has promised us strength to overcome any and all life challenges.

Memory Verse (Exodus 20:4):

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

Prayer

Dear God, thank You for giving us the Bible to learn Your word and Your ways. Help us understand the true meaning of Your word. Help us learn to recognize our failings and weaknesses and give us the strength to change our sinful ways. Amen.

Chapter – 12 A NEED FULFILLED

Lesson Theme	: God in Fellowship with Humans
Aim	: God always understands our needs and help us
Bible Reading	: Mark 10:46-52

Values for Life

1. *God cares about all our needs, however unimportant it might seem to others*
2. *God is never too busy for us and our prayerful requests*
3. *God has a solution to all our problems*

Preparation

Being able to see is a blessing that most of take for granted. Life would be dramatically different if we did not have the ability to see. Have you ever wondered how your life would change if you lost your sense of sight as a result of a terrible accident? Have you ever wondered how your life would be if you were born blind?

Louis Braille in 1829 published the method of writing by means of dots for use by the blind. This method – Braille – is the standard form of reading and writing for people who are blind or visually impaired.

Louis Braille lost his eye sight at the age of three while playing with some of the sharp tools his father used for work. Braille did not give up after losing his ability to see.

With the help of a local priest and schoolteacher, Louis continued his education. He helped simplify a system called “Night Writing” which the French army used for communication at night and created what is now known as Braille.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The faith of Bartimaeus in the power of the Son of David
Bartimaeus was a beggar who depended on others for help. When he heard that Jesus was nearby, he shouted for help. He was not hoping to get some money but was looking for a healing intervention by Jesus. He had faith to cry out for help. He has faith to rely in the power of God.

The attempt by some people get Bartimaeus to be quiet
Some of the people who were around Jesus did not want Bartimaeus to disturb Jesus. They felt that Jesus should not be bothered by mundane needs and requests. But blind Bartimaeus was not going to calm down.

God’s healing intervention
Jesus asked for the blind man to be called. Bartimaeus threw his cloak aside, jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. He was more than ready to be healed. He was ready to

receive God's blessing. Jesus told Bartimaeus that his faith has healed him. After getting back his sight, he followed Jesus. Discipleship is following with obligation. We should express our gratitude.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read Mark 10:46-52 and Mark 8:22-25

Discussion Topic: How do the two reading passages from the Gospel of Mark compare? In one story there is a blind man that some people brought to Jesus for healing while in the other there is a blind man asking Jesus for mercy directly. Think about how you can be involved in the life of someone who needs the healing touch of God.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Getting God involved in our lives is very important. God has the power to transform our lives. Having faith about this transforming power is critical for Christian living. In a modern society, it is not uncommon to see humans try to resolve their problem without getting God involved.

Helping others who are less fortunate than us is a Christian duty. The blind definitely deserve our compassion and help.

Life Response

Our God is a powerful and awesome God. We have to understand and believe in that power. God is never too busy for our concerns and needs. It is up to us to get God involved in our lives. It is up to us to consider our God as our Father in heaven.

There are many Christian and other organizations whose primary mission is to help the blind. Take time to understand the life of blind and find ways of helping them.

Memory Verse (Mark 10:51):

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him. The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

Prayer

Heavenly Father - thank you for being a solution to all our problems. We pray that you give us the wisdom to have faith in you. We pray that you open our eyes to see you Lord. We pray for both the physically and spiritually blind. Amen.

Chapter – 13 JEALOUSY BREAKS GOOD RELATIONSHIPS

Lesson Theme : Broken Relationships
Aim : Learn how jealousy can break a relationship
Bible Reading : 1 Samuel 18:1-16

Values for Life

- 1 Broken relationships creates breeding ground for sin
- 2 Jealousy is a manifestation of sin
- 3 God does not like broken relationships

Preparation

Mahatma Gandhi was one of India's greatest freedom fighters. His non-violent ways of expressing disobedience is considered a model for creating social change without bloodshed. Gandhi later became the undisputed leader of the freedom struggle. He had no aspirations for political office after independence though others doubted his remarks.

Jinnah was one of those doubters. He was never comfortable with the undisputed moral authority of Gandhi's convictions. Jinnah slowly started moving on a separate path for independence that eventually resulted in the creation of Pakistan and India from what was called British India.

The political and social map of the Indian subcontinent would have been dramatically different if Gandhi and Jinnah worked together. Indian sub continent would have been one country that includes Pakistan. Same way Israel's history would have been different if Saul, the first king, and David, the second king, worked together.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Saul and David

David led the Israelites to a major victory over the Philistines during the time of King Saul. When the victorious army returned home, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing. They sang praises to King Saul and David. The King became jealous when he heard that the women praised him for slaying thousands in the battle field while praising David for slaying ten thousands in the battle field.

2 Saul's attempt to kill David

King Saul could not control his jealous nature. He started believing that David was becoming more powerful and important than himself. King Saul attempted to kill David by pinning him against the wall with a spear.

David finally had to run away from King Saul to safeguard his life.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read 1 Samuel 18:1-16, Proverbs 27:4 and Ephesians 2:14

The celebration when a victorious army returns from the war front is somewhat similar to what football fans engage in after a victory at the Super Bowl game. Fans of the losing side sometimes are so driven by jealousy and anger, that fights erupt. Some of these fights have led to big riots, looting and even murder.

Celebrating victories of even close friends might become difficult if room is allowed for jealousy to grow. Saul allows jealousy and enmity to grow in his heart preventing him from being logical in his thought process and leading him to start planning ways of killing David. Saul allows a jealous nature to make him forget how David has helped him overcome enemies and troubles in the past.

Discussion Topic: Why is it so difficult to overcome jealousy when compared to anger and fury?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Jealousy is a sinful nature that has been part of recorded human history since biblical times. Friends have become enemies. Nations have become enemies because of jealousy. It is important that we recognize how jealousy leads us to sin.

Life Response

As Christians, we have the strength of God to overcome all our weaknesses. It is very important that we recognize our sinful nature and take steps to remove them. Jealousy is one of our sinful natures. Think about how jealousy has caused conflict in your life. What is my attitude to my friends when they accomplish great things? Do I feel uncomfortable when people I know become successful and are praised by others?

Memory Verse (Proverbs 27:4):

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?

Prayer

Lord, thank you for allowing us to learn your word. Help us understand our weaknesses and be able to overcome them with your strength. Help us not become consumed by jealousy like King Saul. Strengthen us with your wisdom. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Chapter – 14 THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Lesson Theme	: Reconciliation
Aim	: Learn the importance of forgiveness
Bible Reading	: Genesis 25: 24-34, Genesis 31: 40-42, & Genesis 33:1-20

Values for Life

- 1 *Love can always overcome hatred*
- 2 *Forgiving others is a Christian act*
- 3 *Reconciliation frees us from the sins of hatred*

Preparation

Reconciliation and forgiveness are difficult steps to undertake. It becomes even more difficult without strength and wisdom from our Almighty God. This is true for brothers and sisters in conflict, neighbors in conflict and even nations in conflict.

Egypt and Israel were in a state of war for many decades. During these difficult years, many tried to resolve the conflict but it seemed the leaders of both countries lacked the wisdom to see beyond the present to a time to peace.

President Carter helped President Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Begin of Israel to see the value of reconciliation, the value of peace and the value of forgiveness. These three great leaders of peace were willing to help create an environment that allowed for the two nations to reconcile.

Reconciliation is difficult because admitting mistakes is a difficult step. This has been a difficult step from the time of Adam and Eve. Jacob and Esau face a similar challenge as they prepare to meet each other after years of estrangement.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1 Esau sells his birthright

Jacob and Esau, though twin brothers did not always behave like brothers. One day, Esau was very hungry and wanted his brother Jacob to give him some of the stew that was being cooked. Rather than giving Esau some food right away, Jacob wanted to bargain a deal. Esau gave up his birthright to get some bread and lentil stew from Jacob.

2 Jacob gets Isaac's Blessing

Rebekah encouraged Jacob to deceive his father Isaac to get the blessings that truly belonged to Esau. This evil and sinful act further alienated the relationship between the brothers Jacob and Esau. The relationship was so alienated that Esau planned to kill Jacob to get even.

3 Jacob prepares to ask for forgiveness from Esau

The Lord asked Jacob to go back to the land of his fathers and relatives. The angels of God met Jacob to give him the strength to go to his brother Esau to ask for forgiveness. Jacob also prayed to God for strength and wisdom to be able to meet Esau and be forgiven.

4 Esau forgives Jacob

Jacob bowed to the ground seven times in the presence of his brother Esau as a sign of total submission. Esau ran to Jacob and hugged him and kissed him. God had prepared Esau to have a forgiving heart.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read Genesis 25: 24-34, Genesis 31: 40-42, & Genesis 33:1-20

Discussion Topic: According to ancient law, the older son would have birthright and authority over the younger son. But in the case of Esau and Jacob, God decided otherwise. God's election of the younger son to rule over the older son highlights the fact that God's people are not of worldly development but the result of his sovereign intervention in the affairs of humans.

Today's Bible readings encourage the settlement of disagreements. Why do you think it is important to forgive sins and reestablish a good relationship? How does God help us to forgive and be forgiven? Discuss examples of divine intervention in the Old and New Testaments.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Litigation and lawsuits are part of our culture. It seems at times that very few people are willing to forgive the wrongs of another. Christians have an important role to show others the value of forgiveness. We are expected to be good examples for the world to emulate.

Life Response

Am I willing to forgive those who have wronged me? Am I willing to ask forgiveness of those that I have wronged? As you read and meditate on this lesson, prepare yourself to forgive and be forgiven. Consider preparing a list of situations where you may have wronged someone or someone may have wronged you. Should you ask for forgiveness?

Memory Verse (Genesis 33:10):

“If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably.”

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us a forgiving heart. Help us Lord, look deep into our lives. Help us understand how we have wronged others. Give us the strength and courage to ask others to forgive our wrongs. Give us the wisdom to forgive those who sinned against us. Thank you again for giving us a forgiving heart. Amen.

Chapter – 15 FAITHFULNESS EVEN IN SMALL THINGS

Lesson Theme : **Eternal Purpose in Life**
Aim : **God expects us to be faithful in all things**
Bible Reading : **Mathew 25:14-30**

Values for Life

- 1 *God gives everyone talents*
- 2 *God expects us to use our talents for His glory*
- 3 *God wants us to build up our talents*

Preparation

Charles Haddon Spurgeon often remembered as the 18th century Prince of Preachers, was only 19 years of age when he started seeking God’s will for his life. He made an application to Regent’s Park College, and an interview was set between the head of the college, Mr. Macmillan and young Spurgeon. Charles Spurgeon rose early the day of the interview, prayed to God seeking guidance and then left for Mr. Macmillan’s home.

He rang the bell and a servant showed him into the parlor. Young Spurgeon sat there for two hours before calling for the servant whom he had talked to before. To his annoyance, he discovered that the servant did not let anyone know that he was there.

Mr. Macmillan was sitting in another room separated by just a few walls wondering why Charles Spurgeon decided to not show up for an interview. Later Mr. Macmillan left for London without the interview ever having taken place.

A deeply disturbed Charles Haddon Spurgeon took a long walk in the country to calm down. As he walked, a verse of the Scripture came to his mind forcibly. It was Jeremiah 45:4: And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them!

Spurgeon never made it to college. He became the most powerful, successful and fruitful minister in the history of Victorian England.

A missionary once said, “Don’t worry about doing something great. Be great by doing what you can where God has placed you. It will pay off after a while.” God expects us to use all our talents.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- 1 God gives us talents based on our ability.

We have all been blessed with talents. Examples of God-given talents include the ability to sing in choir, ability to pray, ability to lead and organize church, Sunday school and mission activities and ability to care and pray for others. When we are

young, our talents might seem unimportant. But that line of thinking is wrong. All our talents are important. God gives us talents based on our ability to use the talents.

2 God wants us to gainfully use the talents we receive.

All our talents are a blessing. We have the freedom to use or not to use our talents. However, God wants us to utilize all our talents regardless of how unimportant we consider these abilities to be. It is up to us to find when and how we can make use of our God-given abilities.

3 God entrusts us more talents if we gainfully use the talents we currently have.

The talents we receive from God are mere building blocks of even greater abilities we can expect to receive in the future. Our God is very interested in matching our abilities with the talents we receive. When we improve our abilities, God blesses us with more talents. With God there are not limits to our potential for success in building up his kingdom.

4 Our talents will be taken away if we do not gainfully use it.

It is critical that we as Christians utilize our talents usefully. If we do not, God will take away the few talents we have leaving us none to use. Our talents and abilities are associated with set of responsibilities. As Christians, we have no choice but to submit prayerfully to the expectations that God has placed on us.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read Mathew 25:14-30 & Matthew 21:18-19

Discussion Topic: How does the story of the fig tree compare to the Parable of the Talents? Why is it important that we bear fruit for the Kingdom of God?

Bible lesson for Our Times

We live in a society that greatly values success in our secular lives. We aspire to be lawyers, doctors, engineers and political leaders. But are we placing limits on our aspirations. Couldn't we instead aspire to be like Charles Haddon Spurgeon or Mother Theresa? God has placed no limitations on our talents and success in our spiritual life. Are we placing limitation on our God-given talents?

Life Response

List 3 of your talents that you would like to use to praise God and build His Kingdom. How would you go about using these talents?

Are our responsibilities in school and the activities we are involved with preventing us from using our talents for God's glory?

Do we have to change our priorities? If so, how can we change our priorities?

Memory Verse (Matthew 25:21):

His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us another opportunity to learn your word. We pray that you give us heavenly wisdom to develop and use the talents that you have blessed us with. Help us become excellent stewards of all our talents. Help us find our hidden talents and use it effectively for the glory of your kingdom. Amen.

Part IV God With God's World and God's People

Chapter – 16 BUILDING THE LORD’S TEMPLE

Lesson Theme: History of Religions
Aim: To understand that we should worship the Holy God in holiness
Bible Reading: 1 King 5:1-18; 6:1-3; 8:22

Values for Life

- 1. We become God's people in God's world when we worship Him and experience His presence*
- 2. The best form of worship is dedicating ourselves and what we have before God*
- 3. We should transform our hearts to make it suitable for God to dwell in us because He always wishes to dwell in us.*

Preparation

When we worship in beautiful churches in America of our own, we have to remember the time when we did not have a church. Not long ago, we struggled to build or purchase a church. Like the first generation of immigrants in America, Israelites were longing for a place of worship. Today, we are going to study about the building of the first temple to worship the Lord.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. David's desire
King David after defeating the Philistines brought the Covenant Box to Jerusalem in great celebration and placed it in a Tent. He wanted to build a permanent place for the Covenant Box, but God told him that his son Solomon would do that job. David was a man of war and had shed too much blood. To help with the construction of the Temple, David accumulated expensive gems, silver, gold, bronze, wood and stone. He gave Solomon the needed advice and instructions to plan and build the Temple. Solomon was advised to obey all of God's laws and commandments.
2. Solomon and God's Blessings
Solomon means "peace". Prophet Nathan named him Jedidiah meaning the Beloved of God because the Lord loved him. Solomon's reign was blessed with peace and prosperity. He asked God to give him the wisdom needed to rule the people and to know the difference between good and evil. God blessed Solomon and responded to his prayers making him the wisest man in the world. In addition, he was blessed with more wealth, treasure and fame. We must ask of God who gives generously. But prayer should never become a forum for making requests only.

3. Solomon builds the Temple

The temple was built in Jerusalem on Mount Moria – a place where the Lord appeared to David. The Temple consisted of a court, Holy Place and Most Holy Place. The inner side of the Temple was covered with pure gold and decorated with art works. The Ark of the Lord's covenant was placed in the Most Holy Place. It took 183,000 men for seven years to complete the work. The purpose of the temple was to worship God and to become his people.

4. Dedication of the Temple

The Temple was dedicated by Solomon along with a festival that lasted for fourteen days. The people assembled together happily singing and praising the Lord. The musicians Asaph, Heman and Jedudhun led the people in worship. The Temple was later filled with a cloud shining with the dazzling light of the Lord's presence.

5. Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

Solomon mounted on the platform, knelt down where everyone could see him and raised his hands towards heaven and prayed. He meditated and prayed to God for the people and for the country. His prayer can be summarized as: "Give justice to the people, hear the prayer, forgive their sins when they repent and give them salvation when they turn to God". Solomon's prayer is a good model for us to follow. Fire came down from heaven and burnt up the sacrifices that were offered. The Lord later appeared to Solomon confirming acceptance of the new Temple.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Why did God not allow David to fulfill his life desire of building a temple?
2. What were some of the blessings God bestowed upon Solomon? Discuss the reasons.
3. Where did Solomon build the Temple? Show the significance of the place.
4. How was the Temple built? Show its special design as a place of worship.
5. What was Solomon's prayer of dedication? Evaluate his concern for the people.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Building churches and other places of worship is divine work. David and Solomon are excellent examples to follow when we contemplate building God's kingdom. Worship, prayer and obedience are critical elements in God's kingdom. When dominant trends, like secularism, naturalistic explanations and humanist tendencies are on the rise, faith community like ours, has a special mission.

Life Response

Those of us who come to worship have a responsibility to bring others to church and provide Christian fellowship.

Memory Verse:

And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it 'a den of robbers'." (Mark 11:17)

Prayer

Lord, help us to worship you whole heartedly and to transform our lives to become Temples where you can dwell. Amen.

Chapter – 17 THE PROPHETESS USED BY GOD

Lesson Theme:	History of Salvation
Aim:	To understand how God used a woman to bring victory to the Israelites
Bible Reading:	Judges 4: 1-24

Values for Life

1. *Prayer and Meditation give us courage and inspiration.*
2. *Timely action will lead us to success*
3. *God chooses for his missions those who have perfect faith and who work with sincerity*
4. *We should always be vigilant to defeat our enemies*

Preparation

Who are some of the women leaders of today? Select them from various walks of life. (Prime ministers, cabinet ministers, judges, social activists, reformers, charitable person, bishops, priests and others) There was a well-known women leader who led Israelites after they settled in Canaan. Today we are going to study about her. She is Deborah.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. The Period Of Judges

After reaching Canaan, the Israelites forgot God and sinned. They mingled with the people around them, worshipped idols and led an immoral life. Hence, God also forgot them and punished them. He let enemies all around over power them. During this time, God sent fourteen judges to save them. They led the Israelites for 290 years. The first judge was Othniel. Other prominent judges were Deborah, Gideon, Samson and Samuel.

2. God gives responsibilities to Deborah

In those days, Jabin, a Canaanite king called ruled Israel with cruelty and violence. The commander of his army was Sisera. When the people cried out to the Lord for help, God called on Deborah for a divine mission. She was the wife of Lappidoth from the Issachar tribe. Burdened by the misery of the people, this housewife came forward to lead Israel. During that time, Jewish women were not given any important position and status. Deborah carried out her responsibilities faithfully and gracefully.

3. Deborah as a Prophetess and Judge

Deborah was both a Prophetess and a Judge. Whenever there was a dispute among the people, they would go to her and her decisions were honored. Deborah was recognized and accepted because she acted according to the will of

God. She used to sit for judgment under a palm tree which was known as the “Palm of Deborah”. She used this place for prayer and meditation also.

4. Deborah - a leader with Vision

Deborah was a leader with a vision who had the ability to lead the people. After asking for God’s grace and getting inspired, Deborah called on Barak, a soldier, to gather 10,000 people and make preparations for war. Inspired by God, she made him courageous, even though she herself was not a soldier.

5. Deborah the Warrior

When Barak summoned 10,000 soldiers and set out to war, Deborah went with him. Sisera and his army were defeated. He got down from his chariot and fled on foot. Sisera ran away to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber because King Jabin was at peace with the Heber family. Jael received Sisera and hid him behind a curtain, but later killed him in his sleep.

6. Glorifies God by Singing

After the victory Deborah and Barak sang and praised God for the blessings and guidance received from Him. They asked people to sing songs of praise thankfully. Deborah’s intelligence, wisdom and her dependence on God is revealed in the songs she sang.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the meaning of the word Deborah?
2. Describe the life of Israelites under Judges?
3. Discuss the mission entrusted to Deborah and show how she carried it out.
4. Evaluate the secret of Deborah's success.
5. Which Canaanite king was defeated by an army led by Deborah and Barak?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We live at a time when women assume greater responsibilities in public life. It includes prime ministers, judges, college presidents, cabinet ministers and others. Some churches allow women priests and bishops.

Life Response

When confronted with "a mission impossible" Deborah shows the qualities of a good leader. When we take up responsibilities, let us ask for God's grace. Also, we must entrust specific task to others and inspire them.

Memory Verse:

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. (Proverbs 31:30)

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to complete the tasks you have entrusted us. Help us to work with others. We seek your help and guidance. Amen.

Chapter – 18 YOU ARE CHRIST

Lesson Theme:	The fullness of Life in Jesus Christ
Aim:	To realize that Jesus Christ is the son of God and the Messiah
Bible Reading:	Mathew 16:13-23

Values for Life

- 1 *The son of God became son of man to make us children of God*
- 2 *Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian Church*
- 3 *God's children should strive for perfection*

Preparation

Abraham Lincoln is known as the American president who proclaimed the freedom of slaves. Before it, he was touched by the sale of a slave. On one occasion he bought a slave by paying his price and freed him. Instead of going home, the slave stayed with Lincoln all the time. Indeed, they developed a friendship which lasted for life. Like Lincoln, Jesus bought us by paying a price. Today, we'll learn more about it.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- 1 **Jesus and his disciples at Caesarea Philippi**
Jesus revealed himself to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi, a town near Mount Hermon on the eastern boundary of Palestine. This town constructed by Philip, son of Herod and named to please Caesar is an important place for the Israelites and is the starting point of the River Jordan.

Jesus chose a quiet place, away from the crowds to understand how well the Disciples understood him as a result of his work and teachings. Jesus also wanted to make sure they knew the truth to help continue the ministry even after his crucifixion.

- 2 **The important questions asked by Jesus**
Jesus asked his disciples two very important questions. Who do people say that son of man is? Who do you say I am?

The people were yet to realize who the son of man was and gave answers like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets, etc.

Peter responded to the second question by saying, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus complimented him for this doubtless answer and gave him the key role in the church.

3. The response and promise of Jesus
Peter's response was a declaration of his faith and dedication. Christ is a Greek word that means anointed. Messiah is the Hebrew word for Christ. Messiah is the anointed, the savior and the redeemer.
4. The keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.
Jesus was happy and satisfied by the declaration of Peter. He called Peter the rock and also declared to build His church on this rock. Jesus recognized Peter's strong faith. Jesus gave him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven which means the church on Earth. Key is the symbol of power and authority.
5. Forgiveness of Sins
Only God has the power to forgive sins. No one including the disciples have the power to forgive sins. We have to forgive those who wronged us. Jesus forgives the sins of people because he is the son of God.
6. Rebuking Peter
Though Peter had strong faith, he was defeated by Satan. When Jesus spoke about the afflictions and death he is going to face, Peter told Him not to undergo the experience of the cross. Jesus then rebuked Peter. Jesus knew that Peter would deny him because his nature to react quickly and then regret. Jesus restored him when he repented.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Satan is always looking for ways to make us fall in our walk with Christ. Peter had great faith, believed in the divine work ahead of them, but was less than perfect in staying focused. Situations of great danger made Peter deny the Lord later.

Discuss the faith of the a few important characters in the Bible. How were they successful? How were they not successful?

Answer the following questions:

1. Where did Jesus reveal himself to the disciples?
2. What were the important questions Jesus asked and discuss their answers?

3. Why did Jesus give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven to Peter? Evaluate the reasons.

4. Why does Christianity give an important place for the forgiveness of sins in its teaching?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Peter gave his answer to the question who Jesus is. Each person in every generation has to give his/her answer to this important question.

Life Response

What is my answer to this question (who is Jesus)? What is my role in the church?

Memory Verse:

Simon Peter answered, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Mat 16:16)

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, Son of God, make us your children. Help us to realize that you are our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Chapter – 19 PHILIP’S DIVINE GUIDANCE

Lesson Theme:	Work of the Holy Spirit
Aim:	To show how the Holy Spirit leads a person to repentance and transformation
Bible Reading:	Acts 8:26-40

Values for Life

- 1 *The study of the Bible helps us develop good habits and values*
- 2 *Those who know Jesus have the joy of the spirit*
- 3 *We need the Holy spirit to be witnesses for Christ*
- 4 *The word of God leads one to transformation*
- 5 *Every Christian is a missionary*

Preparation

Joseph Morgan was a priest. He was returning from a jail in New York, after visiting his brother James Morgan who was facing death sentence. A journalist friend offered him a ride in his car. “Father, where have you been,” he asked. “I went to visit a jail,” the priest replied. “Any one whom you know?” “Yes, one of my brothers is there.” “Your brother, Father? What happened?” “When he was young, he played truant with regard to Sunday school. It caused his destruction and finally he killed a man.” His words were full of pain and sorrow. The study of the Bible helps us to develop good habits and values. Today let us study about a man who found Jesus Christ through the word of God.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- 1 **Philip, who serves Tables**
We read about two Philips who followed Jesus in the New Testament. One was Philip, the disciple of Jesus and the other was the evangelist Philip. Philip means one who loves horses.
The evangelist Philip, was one of the seven chosen to handle finances. While the Apostles focused their time for prayer and preaching, these seven men including Philip did their work faithfully. We have to be faithful in all things big and small.
- 2 **Philip, the missionary in Samaria**
After the resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to become witnesses. Philip was the first missionary to go to Samaria with the good news. God used Philip to form a Church in Samaria
- 3 **Philip obeys the commissioning of the Holy Spirit**
While forcefully spreading the word of God in Samaria, an angel of the Lord gave a new responsibility to Philip. Philip was told to go to a deserted road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Philip left his important mission in Samaria to go to an unimportant place. As a result of this obedience, God's word spread in Africa.

4 The Work of the Holy Spirit

An important official of the Queen of Ethiopia was on his way home from Jerusalem. This eunuch was in charge of the treasury and has come to Jerusalem to worship God in Jerusalem. While traveling, this eunuch was reading from the book of Isaiah.

Philip went near the slow moving carriage and asked the eunuch if he understood what he was reading. The official from Ethiopia responded by saying, "How can I understand unless someone explains it to me."

He invited Philip to climb up, sit in the carriage next to him and explain his reading. Based on the word of God the eunuch was reading, Philip explained to him the good news of Jesus Christ.

The eunuch received Jesus Christ as his savior and got baptized as a sign of his dedication and took the message of Christ to Africa.

5 Christian Baptism

Baptism involves three things:

1. Baptism is a sign of purification. Just like water cleans the body, the impurities of the soul is purified by the grace of God through Jesus Christ
2. Baptism is the beginning of a new experience. It is a decision to give up the old and live in communion with God
3. Through baptism, we become one with God. By baptism in water, one dies in Christ and resurrects in Him.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Use a map of the middle-east and generally track the trip of the eunuch from Ethiopia to Jerusalem and back. How long do you think such a journey took approximately 2000 years ago?

Answer the following questions:

1. What is the meaning of the word Philip?
2. What was the first responsibility given to Philip?
3. Who was the first missionary who brought the Good News to Samaria?
4. What portion of the bible was the eunuch reading when Philip approached him?

5. Discuss the role that Philip did, in bringing the Good News to Africa.

6. What are the three things involved in baptism?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Philip and other disciples travel distant places to spread the Good News. Today we have better travel and communication facilities. There are places where Gospels has not reached. Modern missionaries have reached many such places. Still there are more.

Life Response

The Ethiopian eunuch did not understand the Bible he was reading. In the same way, there are times we do not understand the Bible even when we read it. We need help. The Bible Study arranged by the church in small groups, will enable us to understand the Bible more. Do I attend these groups? Does my Sunday school help me to understand the Bible more?

Memory Verse:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. (Romans 1:16)

Prayer

God, we thank you for the Bible. Help us to read and understand your word. Enable us to live our lives obeying your will. Amen.

Chapter – 20 THE CONVERSION OF LYDIA

Lesson Theme: Commitment to Jesus Christ

Aim: To understand that we should dedicate ourselves for the Lord and to bear fruits.

Bible Reading: Acts 16:6-15

Values for Life

- 1 Prosperity and achievements of our lives are the gifts of God
- 2 Serving others is a Christian duty; faith and action should be practiced alike
- 3 Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters
- 4 We will become perfect only when we dedicate ourselves to the Lord.

Preparation

The women's auxiliary (Sevika Sangham) in the Mar Thoma church was initiated by Kandamma Varghese and formally inaugurated at the Maramon convention in February 1919. Kandamma was committed of the Word in Kerala. There are instances where she managed to give copies of the Bible to the king or queen of Travancore, the state was called at that time. Today we study about the spread of the church in Europe during the first century, an instance we read in the Bible. In that movement, a woman played an important role and her name is Lydia. She is considered to be the first Christian in Europe.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Paul, the Apostle and his co-workers made three missionary journeys. The second of these journeys took him to Europe. Paul had a vision in which he saw a Macedonian standing and begging him to come over to Macedonia to help them. Paul and others believed that God was calling them to preach the Good News to the Europeans. Paul, Silas and Luke went to Philippi to preach the word of God to the women who gathered there. A lady named Lydia listened to the attentively. The Lord opened her mind and she received Christ as her savior.
2. Lydia – a good worker
Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, lived in the town of Thyatira. This town was the main center of this costly, red colored cloth used by the rich and the royal. Only the wealthy traded in this cloth. God used Lydia as His partner in the formation and growth of the Church in Philippi.
3. Lydia – interested in spiritual matters

Lydia was a devout believer who regarded all her success in life as gifts of God. She actively participated in spiritual affairs, especially in the worship on the Sabbath. Her spirituality is an example for us.

4. Lydia – good listener of the Word
Lydia listened to Paul attentively. God opened her mind and she was converted. Because of her, the other members of her family also believed in Jesus. The early Christian missionaries regard Lydia as a faithful servant of the Lord. It is believed that Lydia formed the Church in Thyatira, one of the seven churches mentioned in the Book of Revelations.

5. Lydia – enthusiastic in serving God's servant
Lydia invited Paul and Silas to her house. As a result of their gospel work, both Paul and Silas were imprisoned. Later, when they were released, they went to Lydia's home first.

It is a Christian duty to serve others. Lydia opened her home for God's children. She received them and took care of them. She was willing to use her wealth to help God's children.

God opened the mind of Lydia and she became a daughter of God. Lydia was transformed by God.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Use the map of Paul's missionary journey (usually at the end of the Bible).

Answer the following questions:

1. Which missionary journey took Paul to Europe? Why did he decide to include this place?

2. Who was the first Christian in Europe?

3. What were the good qualities of Lydia? Show how these qualities resulted in the formation of the church in Europe.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Lydia was enthusiastic in serving God's servants especially Paul and his coworkers. Today also we find such people. There are evangelists who travel from place to place. We are familiar with evangelists coming from India to visit different cities from North America. Usually, they receive warm welcome from our people here. They stay in houses which are open to them and arrange gospel meetings. In that way, Good News is spread today just as it happened in the past.

Life Response

Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. She used her influence and wealth to spread the Good News. Through our work, we can serve Jesus and help in spreading the Gospel. There are fellowships organized in our church for a specific vocation; for Doctors, nurses, business people, teachers and for others.

Memory Verse:

And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
(Mathew 5: 47 & 48)

Prayer

O Lord who transforms people, lead us to a life of repentance through listening and learning your word. We pray for evangelists and others who spread the Gospel today.
Amen.

PART V GOD’S WORK AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE

Chapter – 21 CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH

Lesson Theme: God’s work in history
Aim: To understand the need to keep the Church sanctified and clean
Bible Reading: 2 Chronicles 29: 1-36

Values for Life

1. *Ideal leadership never forces one to do evil*
2. *Reformation is a continuous process; we have to live each day in the reformation experience*
3. *Dedicating ourselves and our possessions in the presence of God is known as “ideal worship”*
4. *We are the temples of the living God and it is our duty to maintain holiness*

Preparation

Have you attended the dedication of a Church service? Or have you seen video or photos of it. Do you have a church building of your own (built new or bought)? Who dedicated the church? How was the dedication done? What are the important steps (items) as part of the celebration? What Bible passage is usually read? Who opens the door?

Places of worship like a Mar Thoma Church are considered holy. Why do we say that a Mar Thoma Church is holy? The meaning of the word “holiness” is “separated” or “set-apart”. Our Churches have been consecrated to worship the Holy God.

Desecration or destruction of our holy places will hurt the believers and the faithful.

In this lesson, we learn about King Hezekiah who lifted Judah both politically and spiritually after an era of evil during which the Jerusalem Temple was defiled.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Desecration of the Jerusalem Temple

King Ahaz, the father of King Hezekiah, just like his forefathers did evil things. The Jerusalem Temple and furnishings were defiled by Ahaz. He erected idols of Baal, established idolatry and appointed priests to offer sacrifices.

Whose duty was to lead the people in God’s way, misled them? Leaders should always stand for the good and never forces anyone to do evil.

King Ahaz even closed the doors of the Temple in Jerusalem to stop people from worshipping. This evil king was later killed in battle in his youth and was not buried in

the royal tombs.

2. King Hezekiah renovated and sanctified the Temple

Hezekiah (which means “God strengthens) did what was right. He ensured that the God’s holy place in Jerusalem was restored by doing the following:

- The Temple was sanctified: In the very first month of his reign, King Hezekiah opened the Temple doors that remained closed for sixteen years and repaired them. He assembled a group of Priests and Levites and appointed them to purify the temple. They brought out everything that was unclean and carried it to the Kidron Valley. In addition, they purified the altar and furnishings.
- The Priest and Levites renewed their dedication by consecrating themselves: King Hezekiah required the Priests and Levites to consecrate themselves. After purifying themselves, the groups of Priests and Levites ritually sanctified the Temple.
- Courageous reforms were made: The King destroyed the pagan places of worship and the idols. Hezekiah’s trust in God gave him immense strength to reform society.
- Service was restored: King Hezekiah gathered all the city officials and ordered a “sin offering” for all Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship restoring worship in the Temple of God.
- The Lord was praised: The King and the nation praised God with the words of David and Asaph. They sang in gladness, bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord. The assembly brought sacrifices and thanks offerings reestablishing the service in the Temple.

The secret of Hezekiah’s victory was the respect people had for the king. In all his activities, Hezekiah sought God and worked whole heartedly.

3. A place of worship is the place of the Living God

Our Churches must always be kept sacred and tidy. We are the temple of God and have the duty to keep ourselves holy without defilement. God wants us to be holy because we are God’s own creation.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Which king sanctified the Jerusalem Temple?

2. Who was that King that defiled the Jerusalem Temple?

3. What is the meaning of the name “Hezekiah”?

4. Who did the King order to consecrate and dedicate themselves to God?

5. Discuss the desecration of Jerusalem Temple by King Ahaz and later, its renovation and sanctification of Hezekiah. How do we keep our churches suitable for worshipping God (write the answer in essay type)?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Keeping our Church facilities clean and sacred is a responsibility we have to take seriously. We are expected to be leaders like King Hezekiah in taking care of God’s temple. What are your suggestions?

Life Response

I take my responsibility to keep the Church facilities clean as a divine command. How do I worship and prepare myself to worship the holy God in his temple, our church?

Memory Verse:

If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:17)

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to keep our body, which is the temple in which you live, holy. Amen.

Chapter – 22 THE FAITH OF THE CANAANITE WOMAN

Lesson Theme:	Wider Fellowship
Aim:	The greatness and purity of faith is expressed when it overcomes difficulties that tests the depth of our faith
Bible Reading:	Mathew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

Values for Life

1. *Triumphant faith is one that shines in the midst of adversities*
2. *God's silence is the best time for retrospection and correction of our defects*
3. *God never hesitates to reveal our limitations*
4. *Faith enables us to humbly overcome our trials and go forward*

Preparation

When a communist government came to power in Ethiopia, God's influence was removed from public life. Churches were closed down, religious leaders arrested and public worship banned. Thousands of people were killed for just having a point of view different from the communist ideology.

In spite of these difficulties Christianity survived the communist revolution. Goodness triumphed over evil. Many Ethiopians kept a faith in the midst of uncompromising atheism.

Today we study the life of a Canaanite woman who kept her faith in the midst of great problems.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- A Canaanite woman approaches Jesus

A Canaanite woman, whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, approached Jesus with great hope. She wanted her daughter to get healed. She cried aloud, "Lord, son of David, have mercy on me!"

This woman had a distinct disadvantage under the circumstances at hand.

Canaanites were considered as a cursed group. Mark introduces this Canaanite woman as a Greek, in the region of Phoenicia, which was part of Syria and part of a tribe. The Canaanites had frequent disputes with the Jews.

Spiritually, this woman was not a Jew – but rather a worshipper of the idols of Astarte. Her special need forced her to overcome tradition and her faith compelled to approach

Jesus for help.

The disciples were not pleased by the presence of this Canaanite woman. They urged Jesus to send this wailing woman away. But she did not leave. Her faith, need and hope did not diminish in the midst of the adversaries she was facing.

Jesus tested the strength of her faith and patience by being indifferent to her begging.

Finally, Jesus spoke by saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Jesus was telling the Canaanite woman that the time of the Gentiles had not come. But she would not accept that reasoning and walked away. She pleasantly replied, “Lord, help me!” and knelt before him.

Jesus again tested the strength of her faith by saying, “First let the children eat all they want, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” The Jews used to address the Gentiles as “dogs”. In response, this woman gave a humble answer, “Yes Lord, but even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”

Jesus was satisfied with the answers and showed mercy. The daughter was cured only because of the faith and intercession of her mother.

➤ Need for Great Faith

Faith enables us not to get discouraged in the midst of trials and tribulations. It rather humbles us to move forward with life, overcome difficulties and triumph in the midst of adversities. We should never lose our faith in God, even when God remains silent, or when the answer to our prayers is delayed.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What did the Canaanite woman request Jesus?
2. What was the Canaanite woman’s second request?
3. List and briefly describe the difficulties the Canaanite woman faced. How did she overcome these adversities? What are some of the good qualities that you have noticed in this Canaanite woman?

Bible lesson for Our Times

In our modern world, quick answers are expected for all problems. Many Christians extend this expectation to their faith and have trouble being patient in times of adversities. The Canaanite woman's story gives us a great example to follow.

Life Response

The story of the Canaanite woman shows us how our patience, perseverance and faith can help us get closer to our Lord.

Memory Verse:

Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted". And her daughter was healed from that very hour. (Mathew 15:28)

Prayer

Dear God, who loves us through Jesus Christ, let us praise thee, for you are merciful. Help us stand firm in faith in the midst of difficulties. Help us to receive thy blessings. Amen.

Chapter – 23 CONFESS YOUR SINS

Lesson Theme: Foundations of Faith
Aim: To study different aspects of faith proclamation
Bible Reading: 1 John 1:5-10

Values for Life

- 1 *Confession, a divine quality results in blessings from God*
- 2 *Confession is the reflection of humility and contrition*
- 3 *God honors our tears of confession*
- 4 *God's children have to confess to get their land healed*

Preparation

Confession is one of the seven sacraments accepted by the Mar Thoma church. A confession gets us closer to God and heals our inner self. A confession is a proclamation of our faith. You have studied all seven sacraments in previous classes (Grades 1-5 from “Mar Thoma church: Our Foundation and Vision). What is confession? Which sacrament is related to confession (Holy Communion)? Recall a few specific ideas that you have studied about confession (bring your book “Foundation and Vision” to the class). Today you will learn more about confession. A confession gets us closer to God and heals our inner self. A confession is a proclamation of our faith.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- Importance of Confession (Psalms 32:1-3, 51:1-4)

King David explains his inner dilemma when he did not confess his sins for a year by saying, “When I kept silent, my bone wasted away through my groaning all day long.” (Psalms 32:3). When David later confessed, God forgave his sins. Failures and troubles in our lives can get us depressed – but a confession lets us move forward in optimism with hope and faith to overcome our problems.

- What is confession?

Confession involves repenting sins and seeks forgiveness from God. It offers a sweet feeling to a person's life. In the parable of the lost son, the father is compassionate enough to accept his son, who repented his wrong behavior. The relationship between the son and the father in this story gets lifted to new heights, adding sweetness to the relationship. The parable is described in Luke 15:11-32. Luke chapter 15 is known as the “Gospel in the Gospel.”

Confession is also a reflection of humility and contrition. We should feel sorry about our sins in the presence of God. Confession is embedded in our prayers and worship. In the story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the tax collector went home justified before God while the Pharisee returned without getting blessed.

The tax collector felt so unworthy to be in the presence of God that he stood at a distance, repented with a broken heart and humbled himself while requesting God's mercy (Luke 18:10-14).

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What part (chapter) of the Bible is known as “the Gospel in the Gospel”?
2. What is confession? Describe the importance of confession. (Write a paragraph)
3. What were the ways in which the tax collector confessed?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Confession is one of the seven sacraments of the Mar Thoma Church. We need to continue to respect and value this Christian practice. While the Mar Thoma church administers public confession (during Holy Communion worship), some other churches follow private confession. What are these churches?

Life Response

I need to confess my sins with a contrite heart. Do we limit our confessions during the time of worship or do we repent our sins on a regular basis in our prayers? We need both habits.

Memory Verse:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Prayer

Loving God, remind us of our manifold sins and give us strength to confess them. Amen.

Chapter – 24 **DISOBEYING THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD**

Lesson Theme:	Hindrances to God’s work
Aim:	Punishment and failure will be a reality to those who disobey God
Bible Reading:	Joshua 7:1-26

Values for Life

1. *Trust in God, faith and obedience to God’s word leads to victory*
2. *God expects us to be sanctified and pure*
3. *Influence of Satan is a hindrance to God’s work*
4. *God understands all our thoughts, minds and decisions*

Preparation

Are you familiar with the story of Ananias and Saphira? They sold their property on the understanding that the money would be given to the apostles. But they decided to keep part of the money to themselves and gave the rest to the apostles. Moreover, they lied about it. As a result, they died. In the same way, we find a story in the Old Testament and it is about Achan, who stole gold, silver and other things.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

➤ **Conquest at Jericho and defeat at the City of Ai**

The Israelites led by Joshua crossed the River Jordan and entered the Promised Land. God made it possible for them to conquer the fortified city of Jericho without a battle. Their trust in God, faith and obedience to the God’s word were the reasons for the victory at Jericho.

The City of Ai was weaker than Jericho. But Joshua sent three thousand men to battle. But the Israelites were defeated by the men of Ai. Joshua and all the Israelites lost their courage and grieved.

What was the reason for the unexpected victory at Jericho (without a battle) and the unexpected defeat at the City of Ai (in battle)?

Joshua and the elders fell before the Lord in prayer with contrite hearts till evening begging for God’s mercy. God then revealed the reason for their defeat. They broke God’s commandments and sinned. They took some of the things condemned to destruction. They took it as their own possessions and lied about it.

God's own people should not become a barrier to God's work in this world. Before the Israelites set out to conquer Jericho, Joshua made the Israelites swear that they would destroy everything in the city except the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron. These had to be stored in the treasury.

Achan coveted and stole a Babylonian garment, silver and gold and hid these in his tent. Achan was later caught and condemned to be stoned to death in the valley of Achor.

God would abandon the Israelites if they did not destroy the things they were ordered not to take. They had to purify themselves to stand before the enemies.

➤ **Curse removed and Blessings obtained**

The Israelites were able to identify the reason for defeat at the City of Ai. This event in history teaches us a number of spiritual values:

- Society as a whole can suffer because of one person's sin. Our actions can have an impact to many.
- We will be punished for our sins.
- We are not able to hide our true self from God.

God perceives our thoughts, minds and actions. We should never become hindrances to God's work in God's world.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. How did Joshua conquer the city of Jericho?

2. What was the reason for their defeat at Ai?

3. What was the Commandment that the Israelites violated in the battle at Ai?

4. Discuss the role of Joshua in removing the curse and restoring God's blessings. (Short Essay)

Bible lesson for Our Times

In our society we find the domination of self interest, readiness, cheating and other such vices. We sometimes forget the impact of our action on others. The story of Achan is very interesting. His sins resulted in a big defeat for the Israelites. Our actions should never become a hindrance to God's work.

Life Response

When corruption and immorality are on the rise, Christians have a great responsibility to work against them and strengthen the virtues in society.

Memory Verse:

If I sinned, you would be watching me and would not let my offense go unpunished. (Job 10:14)

Prayer

Lord, grant us the strength to follow your commandment. Help us to know that disobedience will lead to curse. Amen.

Chapter – 25 JEREMIAH THREATENED WITH DEATH

Lesson Theme:	Response to hindrances in God’s work
Aim:	To make the children courageous to stand by God boldly in the face of difficulties
Bible Reading:	Jeremiah 26: 1-15

Values for Life

1. Those who neglect God’s commandments and appeals will be punished
2. Dependence of God is necessary to stand firm in faith
3. Repentance is “the return to God” and God expects that from us

Preparation

When India became independent, the Diwan (Chief Minister) of Travancore (now part of Kerala) Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer declared Travancore to be an independent state and tried to retain the rule of the King. He curtailed freedom of the press and arrested and jailed hundreds of people.

Our Metropolitan, Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma visited the arrested people in jail and expressed his strong disagreement to the actions of Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer.

Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer issued an order to arrest Thirumeni. A lot of people gathered in Thiruvalla and laid flat on the road leading to the Aramana declaring that if Thirumeni were to be arrested, he must be taken over their bodies.

Sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer later gave up the attempt to arrest Thirumeni.

Let us now learn about a prophet who stood boldly in the face of difficulties and how he responded to those hindrances. He is Jeremiah.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The Old Testament includes 15 prophetic books. There are three Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel) and twelve Minor Prophets. These prophets chosen by God at critical times in history to lead the Israelites were noble preachers. Their mission was to bring the people back to God.

➤ Prophet Jeremiah

The meaning of the name Jeremiah means “Jehovah exalts”. Jeremiah was born into a priestly family in Anathoth, a town near Jerusalem. He was called to prophesy when he was twenty. Jeremiah declined the commission before God revealed to him that he was

ordained for this mission before birth.

God calls even those who are lacking in wisdom and strength for His work.

God asked Jeremiah to preach at the gate of the Lord's Temple because the people were neglecting the ways of the Lord. Jeremiah boldly told the people that if they do not turn away from their evil ways, their prestigious temple and city would be deserted and cursed.

The ruling class of Judah and the leaders at the Temple were against Jeremiah. They believed that the prophet was not patriotic and did not have enough religious fervor. They sentenced Jeremiah to death for "prophesizing against the city".

God will punish those who ignore and neglect the truth. The leaders of Judah were not able to recognize God's will.

➤ **Prophet Jeremiah call for repentance**

Jeremiah prophesized to the worshippers assembled at the Temple, strongly encouraging them to repent and mend their ways. He told them that if they decide to obey God, God would relent and not bring disaster. Jeremiah warned them not to bring the guilt of innocent blood on themselves and on the city.

Jeremiah became sad at the sight of the deplorable condition of the nation and people. We see the sadness of the prophet in his oracles and confessions. He shed tears for the people of God and interceded for them. He is known as the "the weeping prophet".

Repentance means the return to God. God expects our repentance. John the Baptist preached that repentance was needed in all fields of life. Jesus Christ proclaimed the same message in his ministry. Let us listen to his words, repent and obey them.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the meaning of the name Jeremiah?
2. Who is known as the Weeping Prophet? Why?
3. Who said that Jeremiah deserved to die? What are the reasons given for his death?

4. Discuss the sad conditions of the Jerusalem Temple, showing the conflict between the prophet and the authorities. Evaluate the consequences.

Bible lesson for Our Times

Recognizing the truth about God is usually challenging. Our prophets and leaders have the great responsibility of helping us understand God's ways. If we have a leadership role at Church, we have the added responsibility of not making the mistake, the leaders at the Temple made when Jeremiah was preaching at the gate.

Life Response

I want to be like Jeremiah. I want to be able to speak the word of God boldly and courageously when I see bad influences around in our society.

Memory Verse:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mathew 5:10)

Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to read and listen to the word of God. Enable us to repent and lead our lives in the path of the Lord. Amen.

PART VI OUR MISSION IN GOD'S WORLD

Chapter – 26 BROTHERS ARE FORGIVEN

Lesson Theme:	Personal Values
Aim:	To understand that we must forgive those who harm us
Bible Reading:	Genesis 50:1-21

Values for Life

1. *Guilt weakens us and stifles our minds and destroy our happiness and peace*
2. *A mediator is needed for reconciliation*
3. *We achieve peace through repentance*
4. *Those with a humble self and a heart based on God's trust can forgive others*
5. *God forgives us just as we forgive others*

Preparation

Corrie Ten Boom, her sister Betsy and their father were persecuted by the German soldiers in Holland for helping and providing refuge to Jews during the Second World War. Betsy and her father were cruelly beaten to death. After the war, Corrie traveled throughout Europe proclaiming the love of Christ. Her messages transformed the lives of many. One day Corrie met a man who had killed her sister at a Nazi Camp. This man told Corrie that he has become a Christian and now enjoys the love and peace of our Lord. He asked Corrie to forgive him. Corrie prayed to God to give her the ability to forgive. Suddenly she felt God strengthening her heart. She forgave the man who killed her sister. God forgives us when we forgive others.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

➤ **Asking for forgiveness**

Jacob and his family moved to Egypt because of Joseph. After seventeen years of living in Egypt, Jacob died. He had asked to be buried in the family burial ground in Canaan. After the burial, Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt. The death of Jacob unsettled the brothers who had harmed Joseph. They had a great sense of guilt, but they were afraid to speak to their brother Joseph. Instead, they sent a messenger to intercede on their behalf. On hearing their request for forgiveness, Joseph cried with tears of forgiveness, compassion and love. The brothers bowed down before Joseph with broken hearts begging for mercy and reconciliation.

When we repent, we reconcile ourselves to God and others.

➤ **Forgiveness, Consolation and Instilling Courage**

In the midst of guilt, fear and gloom, Joseph reassured his brothers and asked them not to be afraid. He told his brothers that God turned their evil plot into good. Joseph had forgiven his brothers long time ago. He believed that God sent him to Egypt on a divine mission. Joseph reassured his brothers, asked them not to have any fears and promised to take care of them and their children.

➤ **Overcoming Evil with Good**

Good works always overcome evil. We see that in the life of Mother Theresa. She overcame all the difficulties placed on her ministry by focusing on good works. Eventually, she converted many of the people who caused her problems through her actions and works.

God works in the lives of those who believe in Him. God's care and love helps us to forgive others and overcome resentment and hatred that may build up in our hearts.

We must confess our sins and shortcomings to our living God. Repentance leads to reconciliation. Repentance is a three step process:

- To our own self - we must confess with a sincere longing for peace in our hearts
- To the offended – we must ask the person we offended for forgiveness
- To God – we must ask for forgiveness and strength to forgive others

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Where was Jacob buried? Why?

2. What did Joseph's brother fear after the death of Jacob?

3. Describe how Joseph dealt with his brothers who moved to Egypt, showing the good qualities or virtues of Joseph.

4. List and briefly discuss the values that we see in Joseph's life?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Repentance and forgiveness are very important for Christian living. God expects and requires us to confess, repent and forgive others. Following this way of God will make us great Christians. Instead of keeping vengeance and resentment which will destroy us, we need forgiveness and reconciliation.

Life Response

We want to repent, forgive and confess our sins. We want to be like Joseph - always following God and always willing to forgive and forget.

Memory Verse:

If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. John 20:23

Prayer

Our loving father, teach us to forgive those who hate us. Amen.

Chapter – 27 THE COMMAND OF THE RESURRECTED JESUS

Lesson Theme:	Outreach
Aim:	To understand that we are Christ's messengers of peace
Bible Reading:	John 20:19-23

Values for Life

1. *Jesus helps us in times of trouble*
2. *Peace is Jesus, it is in Jesus and is with Jesus*
3. *The spirit of God acts when we are awakened to our spirituality*
4. *We must repent and confess our sins*

Preparation

There is a mythical story about the meeting of our risen Lord and the angels at the gate of heaven. One angel asked "What did you do to make them know about your love for God?" Jesus replied, "I have entrusted that task to Peter, James, John and others." The angel was doubtful and asked, "What happens if they forget this task of telling the good news to others?" Jesus said, "I have no other plans. I have entrusted them this task."

Let us study the commission of the resurrected Christ.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. The resurrection and His appearance
The resurrection of Christ celebrates the triumph over death. Jesus appeared for the third time after the resurrection at John Mark's home to ten of his disciples. When Jesus appeared to the group, the disciples were in a state of despair and retreat. On seeing Jesus, they were overjoyed and spiritually ready to receive the great commission.
2. The disciples received Peace
Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, "Peace be with you." He fulfilled the disciples need for peace. Peace is Jesus, in Jesus and with Him. He wishes to live among us and grant us peace when we receive him in our hearts.
3. The disciples are overjoyed
When Jesus appeared to the disciples, He filled them with joy. They understood the power of God in the resurrection and thereby celebrating the power of God.
4. The disciples increased their faith
The resurrection proved the fact to the disciples the power of God. Their doubts were removed and faith increased. We live in faith because Jesus lives (John 14:19). It is

resurrection that gives a believer assurance of life after death.

5. The commission of the resurrected Christ

After the resurrection, Jesus gave the apostles a great commission. We must obey the command of our Lord. The characteristics of the commission are:

- Jesus sends them with authority: Those who believe in Jesus work as missionaries and every Christian is a missionary. We are sent to preach the gospels. Jesus gives us the authority and strength to preach it.
- Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit: Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The disciples received the Holy Spirit and were strengthened. The Holy Spirit sometimes leads individuals to particular tasks.
- Jesus gave them the authority to preach redemption of sin: The apostles became tools in God’s hand to redeem sinners.

We have the duty to proclaim the gospel to those who have not heard the good news. If we do not follow the great commission, many others will not receive the message.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Who first saw the resurrected Jesus? To whom did Jesus appear for the third time? Where did this happen?
2. What did the resurrected Jesus give his disciples?
3. Explain the experiences of the disciples on seeing the resurrected Jesus?
4. What was the commission that Jesus gave his disciples? Do we have a responsibility for it?

Bible lesson for Our Times

Our duty as a Christian is to proclaim the gospel to those who have not heard it. Just like Jesus relied on the apostles to spread the word, Jesus is relying on us to fulfill our great commission. Who are some of the widely known missionaries of today? Select one and discuss their work.

Life Response

Sunday School students and teachers are also missionaries. What can we do in our schools? Do we keep in touch with the mission fields of our church and pray for them?

Memory Verse:

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has send me, I am sending you."
(John 20:21)

Prayer

We pray for peace in our hearts and in the world when nations fight against each other.
Help us to be peace-makers wherever we are placed in life. Amen.

Chapter – 28 CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Lesson Theme:	Role of the Family
Aim:	To understand the duties of children and parents in a family
Bible Reading:	Deuteronomy 6:6-7; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4

Values for Life

1. *Children must grow and be fostered according to God's wishes*
2. *We must obey His law to receive His blessings*
3. *Parents must teach children the word of God*
4. *Children must respect and obey parents*

Preparation

Parents have an important and divine duty to provide children with a Christian home to shape their values and mold their life. A Christian home is the necessary foundation for building good and upright citizens.

C. F. Andrews who later become a great missionary decided very early in life to dedicate his life for spreading the gospel in India. He grew up in a great Christian home. When he was a missionary in India, he became a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi, “the Father of the Nation”. The upbringing of children in their early years will enable them to achieve great things in later life.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Family and the importance of children

A family is the smallest unit of society created by God. Children are a gift and blessing from God. Parents are stewards – but God has a greater claim on the children than parents. Both parents and children have duties and responsibilities to make a family heavenly.

2. Duties of parents

The primary duty of parents is to teach children the word of God. Parents must teach their children God's laws. “Teach a child how he should live, and he will remember it all his life” (Proverbs 22:6). There are three parts to this command – teaching, learning and the subject of learning.

- Teaching: The Church and Parents are duty bound to teach the child in the ways of God. The word of God gives us wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ
- Learning: The child must grow in relation to God and experience Him.

- Subject of learning: The child must not choose the path he wishes to walk but the path he ought to walk according to God's wishes.

3. Children should be reared under discipline

Parents have the duty to raise their children in a disciplined manner. This discipline includes self control, order and punctuality. Advising, rebuking and punishing are part of discipline and they should always be done lovingly and seriously. Parents should always keep in mind what is good for the child.

4. Parents should pray for their children

Parents should pray regularly for their children to keep them away from the evils of the world. Prayer is the cornerstone of strength for a Christian family.

5. Duties of parents

The children have an important duty in fulfilling the promise of a Christian family.

These duties include:

- Children should respect and obey their parents: The reason is obvious. It is the Christian duty to obey your parents always. Jesus taught us this lesson well. Even when he was on the cross, he cared enough to entrust his mother to John. Jesus grew in obedience of his parents and relied on their training as he grew in wisdom.
- Children should regularly attend church service and worship: Jesus went to the synagogue regularly. Abraham built an altar to the Lord and worshipped him wherever he went. Worshipping is a divine duty.
- Children must spend time daily for prayer: Jesus prayed in the morning, evening and night. We should do the same.
- Children must be interested in spiritual matters: Jesus was the master of spirituality. As followers of Christ, we are expected to grow in our attachment with God.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What are the main responsibilities of parents?

2. "Teach a child how he should live, and he will remember it all his life" (Proverbs 22:6). What are the various things included in this command?

3. What are the duties of children at home?

Bible lesson for Our Times

We live in a society where there are many broken families. Divorce, alcoholism, abuse are on the rise. There is a need for family prayer and worship together as families. What are your suggestions to strengthen family ties?

Life Response

Children can take part in family prayers. What is your role in the family prayer? How can it be improved?

Memory Verse:

“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 6:2-3)

Prayer

Dear Lord, we thank you for our families. We pray for the broken families and their well being. Grant us grace to obey and respect our parents. Amen.

Chapter – 29 APOSTLE WHO SUFFERED FOR CHRIST

Lesson Theme:	Self emptying life style
Aim:	To understand that we must be strong in faith when we face suffering
Bible Reading:	2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Values for Life

1. Paul, as a result of his trust in God considered adversity a blessing
2. Paul who experienced God's comfort had the assurance of God's glory
3. God's grace allowed Paul to praise God even in prison
4. We must face our life challenges with God's grace
5. Blood of the martyrs are the seeds of the church

Preparation

When you look back at history, there are many who have suffered great pain, difficulty, hardship and sorrow for the sake of the gospel. David Livingstone is one such example. He worked for a long time and an agent of God in Africa.

While addressing a group of college students at Glasgow University, David Livingstone was asked about what inspired him for his great ministry in Africa. He replied by saying that he truly believed in the promise of the Lord to be always with us till the end of the world. He believed it and God guided him. Today, we study about an Apostle who suffered for Jesus; he is Paul.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. A transformed Paul becomes a missionary
Paul suffered great hardships for the gospel and is not included in the list of twelve disciples. The name Paul means one who is small. But, before Paul was transformed for the work of the Lord, he persecuted Christians. God transformed him through a divine intervention. On the road to Damascus, Jesus called Saul by name and asked why he was persecuting the believers. Saul asked, "Who are you, my Lord?" The Lord replied by saying, "I am Jesus, the one you persecute."

The persecutor, Saul fell on his knees and got up as Paul, a soldier of the cross. Paul believed in Jesus, was baptized and proclaimed in synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.

2. The great missionary and Apostle
Paul was passionate about sharing the gospel, especially among the Gentiles. He was

also known as the “Apostle of the Gentiles”. He became the greatest missionary of the church. Paul suffered a great deal and had to defend his qualifications to be called an apostle of Jesus Christ. Others made false accusations against him. Paul defended his missionary zeal by making the following points:

- Are they Hebrews? So am I: The Jews spoke Aramaic while the written religious language was Hebrew. Jews, scattered throughout the world, were often called Hebrews. Though Paul lived outside Israel, he claimed that he was a Hebrew.
- Are they Israelites? So am I: The Israelites are God’s chosen people. Paul was born in Tarsus and was influenced by the Greeks. But Paul stated that he was an Israelite.
- Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I: Since Jews are the descendants of Abraham, they are the inheritors of the Abraham’s divine gifts. Paul stated that he is a circumcised Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew and a Pharisee.

3. Suffering and persecution for the sake of the Gospel

Paul was very proud of the sufferings that he endured to become the greatest missionary. He preached the gospel and established churches in Asia and Europe. Paul’s suffering can be broadly categorized into three types.

- Punishment according to national law: Paul’s work as a servant of God landed him in prison many times. He was even punished with the rod – a Roman punishment usually reserved for criminals – but not used on Roman citizens. Paul, a Roman citizen, has to suffer this punishment also for the gospel.
- Punishment according to Jewish law: Paul was given 39 lashes – one less than the maximum allowed by Jewish law. He was punished several times by lashes that could have resulted in death – but Paul was proud to suffer for God.
- Dangers during journeys: Paul faced numerous dangers in his missionary trips. He was caught in three ship wrecks, suffered dangers from floods, drought, dangers in forests and in cities, and dangers from false friends and robbers. Even though Paul faced great physical and mental hardships, he did not get frustrated or stumble. Everything that Paul suffered was insignificant because of Christ. His belief in gospel mission is evident in his words. “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

3. Paul’s work in prison

Paul’s gospel work did not end when he was imprisoned. Even when Paul was in prison or in house arrest, he effectively spread the word of God to all around him including his jailors. Paul wrote 13 epistles in 15 years. The prison epistles are: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the meaning of the name Paul?
2. How many Epistles did Paul write?
3. List the Epistles of Paul written while he was in prison?
4. Discuss Paul as a great missionary and Apostle who suffered for the sake of the gospel. (Write an essay.)

Bible lesson for Our Times

Paul through his life teaches us how insignificant any of our problems are when compared to the great commission he was called for. Today also there are many who give up honor, wealth and life for Christ. They stand firm during trials and hardships by holding onto their faith. Teaching the gospel is a divine duty – but it is not a duty that comes without trouble. There are martyrs today also.

Life Response

Let us think about Paul's suffering when we are troubled with problems. Like Paul we get strength if we realize that the suffering is for a greater purpose, namely the glory of God.

Memory Verse:

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. (Gal. 6:14)

Prayer

Lord, help us to see the glory of God in suffering. We pray for those who suffer hardships. Give us the grace to grow in strength relying on your grace. Amen.

Chapter – 30 FEATURES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson Theme:	Service
Aim:	To understand that Christian believers enjoyed fellowship and shared everything
Bible Reading:	Acts 2:41-47; 4:32-37

Values for Life

1. Believers have faith in the Son of God, Jesus and his individuality
2. Believers must hear and study the Word of God to grow in Christ daily
3. Fellowship in faith, life and witness gives Christian life fullness and vigor
4. We must be co-workers of God in the process of purifying the world

Preparation

A priest was called to visit a dying man. The eighty year old was very troubled and restless. The priest spoke to the dying man about God's everlasting love and the salvation of man. The sick man replied, "I never found time to think about such matters."

The priest was saddened. This man has thousands of opportunities to listen to God's word – but decided not to use the opportunity.

Christians should be spiritually active. The Church is the body of Christ and each believer is a part of that body.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Pentecost day and the birth of the Christian Church

After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles came back to Jerusalem and gathered at Mark's house. Jesus has commanded the disciples to be his witnesses throughout the world. To effectively accomplish this mission, they must first receive the Holy Spirit.

On the day of the Pentecost, the apostles received the anointing of the Holy Spirit and were filled with it. As a result of this anointing, the apostles were strengthened and witnessed Jesus Christ fearlessly. The Pentecost day became the birthday of the Christian Church.

2. Characteristics of fellowship in the early Church

The four characteristics of the early Church believers are:

- Believers who heard the message – The Church is a group of believers who have heard the message. The message of the apostles was authoritative because of their

close association with Jesus. They had seen, heard, studied and taught the teachings of Jesus Christ.

- Believers who took part in fellowship – The Church is a group of believers who have fellowship with other believers. A Church becomes an effective institution when believers help one another. Christian fellowship is made whole by faith, life and witness.
 - Sharing is part of fellowship – The early Church counted all wealth and property as common. They shared spiritually and financially. The believers experienced the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. A Church is the symbol of the Kingdom of God and is built on the sharing at the cross.
 - Serving is part of fellowship – Another great element of the early Church was serving. The believers visited the sick, prayed and healed them by anointing with oil. Christian fellowship is a fellowship to those in need. For example, the Church of Antioch helped those in Jerusalem affected by famine. It was in Antioch where the believers first came to be known as Christians. The early Church was involved in several activities including caring for poor widows. They chose seven men for this task. One of these men, Stephen became the first martyr of the Christian Church.

- Believers were partakers in “breaking the bread” – The Church consists of a group of believers who followed the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion) established by Jesus Christ. Great importance was given to worship. As a group of believers, the early Church worshipped the Lord with a focused love, thought and mind. The best form of worship is dedicating ourselves and what we have to Jesus.

- Believers who prayed together – The Church, again, is a group of believers who pray. The early Church placed a very strong emphasis on prayer and conversations with God. We get close to God and have communion with God through prayer.
Prayer must be an active part of our daily life. Prayer is the process of humbly dedicating ourselves to the Lord. As we pray, we must confess our sins and humbly request forgiveness and comfort from the God.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Answer the following questions.

1. Where did the believers get the name of Christians first?

2. Who was the first martyr of the Christian Church?

3. Write down the four features of fellowship in the Early Church.

4. Compare and contrast the Early Church with the church today.

Bible lesson for Our Times

We live in a different kind of society from that of the first century. However, some of the basic principles are common. Let us find what they are and try to implement them for our situation today. For example, the spirit of fellowship which was central to the early church is applicable today also. Hence, our church is organized into prayer groups in various areas of the parish. Let us try to participate in them actively and strengthen them.

Life Response

The early Church sets a great example of what every Christian Church should be modeled after. Let us follow the common principles and make our church life better.

Memory Verse:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Prayer

Lord we praise you for giving the church to glorify you. Help us to strengthen ourselves through fellowship and prayer and to become your servants and to work for the growth of your church. Amen.

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