

Mar Thoma Sunday Schools

Diocese of North America & Europe



Curriculum

BEING GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S WORLD

Grade Seven

(Samajam Curriculum - Intermediate Vol. I)

Published By
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MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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

Foreword

Dearly beloved in Christ,

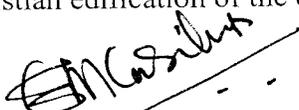
A new curriculum for our Sunday School has been a felt need in this Diocese. I am glad that the new curriculum is ready to be introduced in 2006. Here we are in the process of a transition from Cokesbury to the Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam Curriculum. While retaining the essential elements and the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

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

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

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

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



Rt.Rev.Dr. Euyakim Mar Coorilos
Diocesan Bishop

July 4, 2006



MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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

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

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

would be adequate. The “Teacher Manual” prepared by Samajam as booklet, was sent to all Sunday Schools last year. It is suitable for such workshops and seminars.

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

Thomas Koshy
Secretary (2002-2005)

M.C.Varghese
Secretary (2005-2008)

July 5, 2006

Mar Thoma Sunday School
Diocese of North America & Europe

Notes to Teachers on Teaching in Junior High School classes, Grades 7, 8 & 9

When children complete 6th grade or 12 years, they move to Junior high school classes as an adolescent or teenager (pre-adolescent stage). Three classes are included here, Grades 7, 8 and 9. It is the intermediate stage between elementary and high school.

Characteristic Features of this Age Group and the Learning Process:

Children move from childhood to the next stage starting with pre-adolescence. There are remarkable changes taking place one after another, covering various aspects of personality. The body changes are spectacular or noticeable. Physiological growth is different in boys and girls who grow faster. Puberty or attaining sexual maturity brings emotional disturbance. Also, there are secondary sexual characteristics appearing now. It takes time to cope with the changes taking place for the body and the emotional conflicts. Along with physical growth, there are several other changes taking place in the young person. Among them, we select intellectual development and identity formation.

Piaget and Cognition: Among 20th century psychologists, Piaget of Switzerland is known in many countries for his studies on cognition or intellectual development. Piaget discussed it by using his concept “formal operations.” The capacity for abstract scientific thinking begins around age 11 or 12. Hence schools encourage discovery learning and exploration. Adolescents needed intellectually challenging questions and discussions on issues. Since reasoning capacity grows, students do not accept everything as told by teachers and others; rather they take their own stand and formulate their own belief systems. Youngsters stand on the side of their peers or friends, rather than their teachers and parents from whom they try to keep a distance. They are self-conscious and cautious in the presence of adults.

In response to the growing capacity for abstract reasoning or scientific thinking, teachers must find out new methods of teaching suitable to this age group. Let me suggest one: use more higher-order questions. In all classes teachers use a large number of factual questions from which we obtain information. Usually such questions begin with “what.” Different from this “lower level” questions, teachers of adolescents shall use higher-order questions beginning with “why” and “how”. If so, students are expected or encouraged to think and give their reasons and their stand or views on issues. Thus there is a shift from memorization to thinking and discovery. Teachers are expected to follow inquiry method and research for learning. Creativity in children is enhanced in this child-centered approach. While multiple choice and other objective types of questions test a student’s memory, essays and short-answer questions open up room for promoting creativity.

Identity Crisis: While Piaget concentrated on cognitive or intellectual development, Erikson continued his studies on his psych-social dimension and introduced the concept “Identity Crisis”. The young person reformulates his/her sense of identity by drawing together various elements that have made up the life so far. New answers are found for the question, “who are you?” This question “who am I?” is not

limited to adolescents, but it is a human quest covering all people everywhere and at all times. We can summarize the teaching of Socrates, the great Greek philosopher and teacher, in two words and they are “Know Thyself.” The uniqueness of this question to adolescents is that it encourages new answers for their personal life, not just the answer of someone else. Of course, teen-agers have their own heroes or models whom they admire or follow.

The Christian answer to this question of identity is “I am a child of God.” Psychological studies on identity, in general, assumed the modern virtue of independence or self-assertion. Different from it, the idea, “child of God,” takes for granted human dependence or the need for the other. Traditional cultures, including that of India, accepted the virtue of dependence or care of the neighbor. I would argue that we should have a balance between these two virtues, independence and dependence, and move toward the recognition of interdependence. I present this issue as a possible seminar topic for teachers when they gather for their retreat. Teachers need the time to study and reflect on issues we face in our society.

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

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

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

Table of Contents Grade 7

PART I – GOD'S WONDERFUL WORLD

- Lesson 1 – World - A Beautiful Garden
- Lesson 2 – The Treasures of The Earth
- Lesson 3 – Living Things - God's Creation
- Lesson 4 – Man - The Creation of God
- Lesson 5 – The Power of Faith

PART II – GOD'S WONDERFUL PEOPLE

- Lesson 6 – God's People in Family
- Lesson 7 – The Israelites - A Chosen People
- Lesson 8 – God's People All Over The World
- Lesson 9 – Prophets-God's People With Special Mission
- Lesson 10 – God's People-God's Faithful Stewards

PART III – GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GOD'S WORLD

- Lesson 11 – Gideon
- Lesson 12 – Divine Intervention And Divine Purpose
- Lesson 13 – Jacob Reconciles with His Brother
- Lesson 14 – Father of Believers
- Lesson 15 – God's Kingdom – God's Purpose

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

- Lesson 16 – God With His World And His People
- Lesson 17 – God's Chosen One
- Lesson 18 – The Holy Spirit - The Counselor
- Lesson 19 – Victory Through Victor
- Lesson 20 – From Slavery To Brotherhood

PART V – GOD'S WORK AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

- Lesson 21 – Let us Rise up And Build
- Lesson 22 – Man And Woman Co-workers With God
- Lesson 23 – Salvation - God's Gift
- Lesson 24 – Discrimination - Hindrance to God's Work
- Lesson 25 – Facing With Courage

PART VI – OUR MISSION IN GOD'S WORLD

- Lesson 26 – Prayer-Power For Our Mission
- Lesson 27 – Vision And Mission
- Lesson 28 – Family-God's Purpose
- Lesson 29 – The Purpose Of Mission-God's Glory
- Lesson 30 – Mission-Living For Others

Part I God's Wonderful World

Chapter – 1 Creation

Theme :	Creation
Aim :	To study how this world came into existence
Bible Reading :	Genesis 1&2

Values for Life

1. God is the creator of this universe.
2. The earth was void and dark before creation.
3. The spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters.
4. The beginning of faith in an omnipotent God.
5. God moves over the chaos and brings forth order.

Preparation

The hanging garden of Babylon is considered as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Have you ever visited a beautiful garden? How beautiful it is to stand in the midst of a garden with all kinds of fruits, flowers, streams and fountains. Let us also imagine of a place which is covered with darkness and nothing in it and pause for a moment, to think of the beautiful world in which we are now. Let us look into the Bible and see how this beautiful world was created. Many atheists believe in Darwin's theory of evolution, while other religions believe in different gods and various myths of creation. We believe and affirm our faith in our omnipotent God, who created this beautiful world. Our God is Alpha and Omega.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

God's act of creation - Genesis 1:1

This verse is an admission of that what had not existed and that a higher power is at work. It starts with the phrase "In the beginning". The book of Genesis starts with an account that offers a set of detailed instructions for human race.

The order that comes out of chaos first - Genesis 1:3

First God is ordering/organizing the universe by separating heaven from earth, the light from the dark, the sea from the dry land (Genesis 1: 4-10). After the divisions are completed, God deals with the earth first and then with the sky. The whole earth is made to bring forth plants and then the heavenly bodies are fixed in the sky.

The phrase "it was good" is an integral part of the creation account. This phrase appears 6 times in the first chapter. God is creating nature with some order. The first creation account makes it clear that human beings are not above nature, but as a part of it. God created humans after all the other creation was done.

Though man is created last, God gives special significance in that God created them in his own image (Genesis 1:26-27). "And God said let us make man in our image and likeness so God created man in his own image, and in the image of God created him; male and female he created them". The human creation is the culmination of God's work. Man has a special relationship with God because man has been entrusted with God-like qualities; responsibility and authority given to name the rest of creation and use them for their needs.

Creation of woman seems to be very different and interesting - Gen 2:18-23

It is not good that man is alone. "I will make him a help mate". So God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh. From the rib God took from the man, God made a woman.

This shows the close relationship between man and woman. "Therefore shall a woman leave his father and mother and leave to his wife and they shall be one flesh". Man is the head of the family. Finally, God ended all his work and rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.

Adam and Eve break the rules. We see in Adam and Eve the powerful foes at work from both within and out.

Sin enters the world - Gen 2:15-18, 25

Human beings reintroduce confusion by crossing boundaries which God has set to protect us. Genesis 2 and 3 set up human accountability for this predicament. There is an ownership of sin. God brought order out of chaos but by choosing wrong, human beings open the door for chaos and confusion to reenter the world. By violating the boundaries, we put our hope in jeopardy.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Describe how the Garden of Eden would look like.

2. What should we do to stay in God's garden?

3. How did sin enter this world?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

God's power controls all history. Whatever that exists springs from Him. What are some of the hopes that give your life purpose? In choosing to do good over evil, one needs to make responsible decisions. In making decisions we keep our hope alive. We humans are created in God's image. It means dignity and freedom rule the earth as God rules.

Life Response

Am I ready to accept this creator as my father? Am I willing to let him lead me in my every day duties?

Memory Verse

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work and to take care of it. (Genesis 2: 15)

Prayer

Loving Father, I thank you for giving me life and giving me freedom to enjoy all the good things around. Empower me with your spirit to glorify your name in this life. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Chapter –2

The Treasures of the Earth

Theme : God’s Earth
Aim : To make the children realize that the earth created by God is rich in resources
Bible Reading : Genesis 2:10-14, Psalms 104:10-28

Values for Life

1. The resources of the earth and its richness convey the great care and concern of our God and His creation.
2. The earth’s resources are to be utilized in the wisest and most responsible way.
3. Children should have the awareness to preserve the environment.

Preparation

Have you ever knelt down outside and looked at a patch of grass close up. You probably see dirt and bugs crawling between the stalks. It seems quite unimpressive and without any order. Now take a couple of steps back and take a look at the entire lawn. That patch of grass seems to play an important role. Pretend you were in an airplane and looking down. Things would appear much different and you would see an order not possible from below. Now imagine looking down at Planet Earth from space. How would you describe the view? From our vantage point we may not realize how beautiful and resourceful God’s creation really is.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Let us take a look at the four rivers of Eden – Genesis 2:10-14

1. Pishon - Pishon flows around the whole land of Havilah, which is said to lie at the east of Palestine. Genesis 25:18 places it in North East Arabia. It is believed that this river flows through the Indian subcontinent as well. The area where Pishon runs is filled with gold. Gold in this area is considered to superior to gold from other parts of the world. The valley of Pishon is rich in Bdellium (transparent yellowish resin of the bdellium tree valued for its perfume) and Onyx stone.
2. Gihon – Gihon covers the whole area of Ethiopia. Gihon is perhaps the Nile river in Egypt
3. Hiddekel – It is the Tigris River which flows east of Assyria in modern day Iraq. The cities of Nineveh and Assure are situated on the banks of this river. The Book of Daniel refers to this river as the Great River (Daniel 10:4).
4. Euphrates – It flows close to the Tigris in modern day Iraq. The discoveries of the past century led to the hidden treasures of the earth. The resources of the earth are to be used for the welfare of mankind.

The Prosperous Land of Canaan

but must be careful not to abuse them. Let us be faithful to the Creator for His greatest gifts. Let us not exploit the rich land.

Life Response

We live in a land this has been showered with God's blessings. Will I take this for granted and waste or be a good steward to His creation?

Memory Verse

How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

Psalms 104:24

Prayer

O God, I thank you for showering this land with your blessings. Help us to realize that we should not take your creation for granted. Help us to preserve and protect what you gave us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Chapter – 3 God’s Creatures

Theme : God’s Creatures
Aim : To learn about the diversity of creation
Bible Reading : Genesis 1:20-25; Acts 11:1-2

Values for Life

1. God is the creator of all living things.
2. All of God’s creation is good.
3. Humans are responsible for being stewards of God’s creation.

Preparation

The beautiful earth in which we live is filled with so many living and non-living things. Have you ever gone to a zoo? Or an aquarium? How about a botanical garden? There are so many beautiful animals, birds, plants and trees! How did they come in to being?

The pen we use, the shoes we wear and everything we use daily were manufactured by somebody. So quite naturally, there is someone behind the creation of the plants and animals and the birds. Let us read Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Let us see what our God created each day.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

First day	-	Genesis 1:3
Second day	-	Genesis 1:6-8
Third day	-	Genesis 1:9-13
Fourth day	-	Genesis 1:14-19
Fifth day	-	Genesis 1:20-23
Sixth day	-	Genesis 1:24-31

The Old Testament describes the animals and birds that were known to the ancient Hebrews. On the fifth day God created the birds and the aquatic creatures and on the sixth day all the animals on the land were created.

Animals ranging from camel to flies have significant influence on human life. Domestic animals such as cows, buffalo, and sheep provide food for human beings while horses, camels, and donkeys are useful for transportation. Pets such as dogs and cats provide humans with companionship.

Some animals have symbolic meaning in the Bible. The snake, as seen in the Garden of Eden, has come to symbolize temptation and evil. For example, the dove in the story of Noah and the great flood (Gen 8:11) is a symbol of deliverance. Jesus is often referred to as the “Lamb of God” (John 1:29). In this context, lamb is used to symbolize sacrifice. The “Lion of Judah” (Rev 5:5) refers to Jesus Christ. The lion, the king of the jungle, is a symbol of royalty.

4. Name some endangered species. What things can mankind do to help protect God's creatures?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

God's creation is constantly being endangered. Whether it be the deforestation of the rain forests in Brazil or the hunting of elephants for their tusks, mankind is not acting as caretakers of God's creation. We need to respect the earth and all its inhabitants. We need to conserve our natural resources. This could be done through recycling or looking for alternatives. For example, recycling aluminum cans means less of need to mine for aluminum. Using recycled paper means less trees have to be cut down. We need to learn what we individually do to be better caretakers. It is important to educate those around us as well.

Life Response

God has called us all to be caretakers of his creation. Will we accept our calling and work to sustain his wonderful creation?

Memory Verse

For every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine.

Psalm 50:10-11

Prayer

Lord, we thank thee for all the living things on this earth. Lord, help us to realize the dignity of Thy creation and fulfill Thy will to sustain life on this earth. Amen.

Chapter – 4

Man – The Creation of God

Theme: Human Beings – The crown of creation
Aim: To teach students that human beings are uniquely created in the image of God and higher than all other creation.
Bible Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

Values For Life:

1. Human beings are to live in fellowship with their Creator in Whose image they are made.
2. Human beings possess a divine nature.
3. Humans are to live in harmony with others.
4. Science and technology should be used for the well being of humans.

Preparation:

What's your favorite brand of jeans? Is there a difference between brands? After all, jeans are jeans, right? Does the quality of a pair of jeans matter?

Today we're going to learn about God's awesome works. Specifically our focus will be on God's premiere creation – humankind. In the days before God created man, other creatures were brought into existence. But God waited until the time of His last creation to make something in His *own* image – in the image of the perfect and Almighty God. Therefore, there is a uniqueness humankind possesses that puts all human beings including you before God's awesome presence.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas:

The **order of creation** is as follows:

Day 1: creation of light, and the separation of light from darkness

Day 2: creation of sky, and the separation of the waters above the sky and the waters below

Day 3: creation of earth, and the separation of earth from the waters below; creation of vegetation and the separation of different kinds of plants (each after its kind)

Day 4: creation of the sun, moon, and stars to separate day and night, and to order seasons

Day 5: creation of non-land animals and the separation of different kinds of animals; the command to be fruitful and multiply

Day 6: creation of land animals and the separation of different kinds of animals; creation of human beings **in the image of God,**

command to be fruitful and multiply, given dominion over the earth

Day 7: God rests and blesses the seventh day

On the sixth day God created human beings as his final and crowning work. Such a creation illustrates the significance of divine power and wisdom. Human beings are the only one of God's creations that received God's life giving breath. Along with this, God awarded humans His blessings and gave them dominion over all creation. From this it is evident that humans are blessed above other creation, given authority over all creation, and have been created in the image of our divine God. Likewise, God's care and affection are also evident in His considering humanity's need for companionship – hence Adam and Eve. "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). *Heaven and earth, flesh and spirit are all put together in human beings and so they must be related to both worlds.*

In the Image of God

God created humans in His own image (Gen 1:27). The concept of "Image of God" is derived from the Latin word 'imago dei'. God's image upon humankind is not physical – it consists in His nature, constitution and intellectual ability: It is the soul of a human that bears the image of God. God has blessed us with special abilities, such as, high intellectual capacity and will power above other creation to live in communion with Him.

Human Beings With Each Other

God, through Jesus, has also taught us how to treat each other. John 15:12 reads "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Additionally, in Romans 2:10 we see that everybody is equal in God's sight and that He loves us all: "But glory and honor and peace for every one who does good...For God shows no favoritism."

In the Field of Science

The intellectual ability of human beings makes him different from other living beings. In Gen 2:19 we read of God's bringing all creatures before man to see what he would name them. As time passed, man has proved his intellectual ability. Progress in the fields of science and technology is extraordinary. We can hear and witness anything that happens at any part of the world at the very moment it happens and store unimaginable amounts of information in machinery that can fit just in the palm of your hand. For example, there is also tremendous progress in the field of Medical Science. Today open-heart surgery, kidney transplantation, and now genetic engineering and cloning are either in popular practice or soon can be.

Bible Learning Strategies and Activities:

Play a game of ‘Human Tic-Tac-Toe’: Have students split up into groups of two. Toss a coin and ask a student to call which side will land face up. If it’s the side the student calls then his/her team goes first, if not they go second. Ask team 1 a question. If they get it correct, have them place one of their players on a tic-tac-toe board laid out on the floor. If they get it wrong they may not place a player on the board. Then move on to the next team to ask your second question. In this manner, go back and forth between the teams. The first team to have 3 students standing in a line going horizontally, vertically, or diagonally wins.

Bible Lesson For Our Times:

What are some hot topics discussed in the religious sphere that are related to science as well i.e. genetic engineering, cloning? What do you think the church’s stance should be in regard to these new age concerns?

Life Response:

As God’s crowning creation, human beings have been blessed tremendously as well as given free will. Reflect and consider whether you’ve been doing what is expected of you as a holy creation of God:

1. How can you live as you should ?
2. How can you fulfill your responsibilities as a creation of God?
3. Are you using the intellect you’ve been blessed with to lead a good and holy life? If not why?

Memory Verse:

“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Genesis 1:27

Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for the many blessing You have bestowed upon us. We ask that You guide us each day and that we make the most of these blessings. Help us to maintain constant communion with you and live as You’ve intended us to with our fellow human beings. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Chapter – 5

The Power of Faith

Theme : Science and Faith
Aim : To recognize that a strong faith in Jesus and prayer will help you overcome all difficulties
Bible Reading : 2 Kings 20:1-11, 2 Chronicles 32:14 and Isaiah 38:1-8

Values for Life

1. To examine the life of Hezekiah and compare his faith to yours
2. To study the dual existence of science and faith and decide which to trust
3. To understand that peace comes from faith in God

Preparation

In 1964, Joni accepted Jesus as her Savior at a Young Life Camp in Virginia. A natural move for a girl raised in a Christian home. And while life wasn't smooth-sailing all the time, for the most part, Joni was your average 15 year-old girl, living your average teenage life... until a hot summer afternoon in July 1967.

While driving her car during a trip to a Chesapeake Bay beach, Joni drove off the road and into a shallow lake. She woke in the hospital to the news that she had a spinal cord fracture which had left her paralyzed from the neck down. She would never walk again and she wasn't even 18. Today we will learn about Hezekiah who also had to deal with difficulty.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The Life and Times of Hezekiah, King of Judah

Quick Facts

Father: Ahaz

Reigned over Judah: 715-687 BC

Type of King: Overall, he was one of the good ones

Claim to fame: Trusted in God and overthrew all the alters to false gods that his ancestors had put up

At the age of 25, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, became the 12th king of Judah. In total, his reign lasted for approximately 29 years. Hezekiah, whose name means "Jehovah is Strength," ruled from the capital city of Jerusalem. Unlike his father who did a lot of things not pleasing to the Lord (including sacrificing one of his sons to fire and worshipping just about every false god there was), Hezekiah lived up to his name and relied on the one true God. He did much to bring the nation of Judah back to the God who had delivered them from Egypt.

On his first day on the job (king of Judah), Hezekiah found his kingdom to be corrupt and his people a superstitious group that were pretty much willing to worship any idol you put in front of them. Hezekiah set out to change all that. He broke the stone pillars and temples to the goddess Asherah. He destroyed the altars and the pagan places of worship. He got the people of Judah to stop worshipping the bronze serpent that Moses had made by destroying that as well. And lastly, he did something his father never did- he allowed God's prophet, Isaiah, son of Amos, to advise and guide him.

It is written of Hezekiah in the Bible, "There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him (2 Kings 18:5)." Pretty much, Hezekiah was a king among kings.

And just when things were going well...

King Hezekiah became seriously ill with boils. So ill, in fact, that the prophet Isaiah came to see him and delivered the following message, “This is what the Lord says. Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.”

Not surprisingly, Hezekiah didn’t exactly throw a party to celebrate that news. Rather, he got very upset, turned his face to the wall and said something to the effect of “I’ve been good. I followed your ways. I led your people faithfully. I believed in You to be my strength. I was faithful to You in every way and followed You with my whole heart.” And then Hezekiah cried-bitterly (and probably very loudly).

God heard Hezekiah’s prayers. Before Isaiah could even leave the palace, God stopped him and told him to give Hezekiah a new message. Isaiah told the king that he would be fully healed. In three days, Hezekiah was to go to the temple and God would add an additional 15 years to his life (2 Kings 20:5). And if that wasn’t enough, God also promised Hezekiah that he would deliver the people of Judah from the king of Assyria. Isaiah commanded Hezekiah to prepare a poultice, or paste, of figs and apply it to the boils on his body. When the king did so, he was completely cured.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Questions for Class Discussion:

1. If Hezekiah had not been healed, what do you think would have happened to his faith?
2. What do the Hezekiah and Joni Eareckson Tada have in common? Why do you think each of their stories ended the way they did?
3. Is it easier to believe in God when he answers the way you want Him to or when he doesn’t?
4. Do you rely on God or science when you’re sick? Why?
5. If you got news that you were going to die, what’s the first thing you would do? Pray to God? Or make an appointment to see your doctor? Why?
6. Have you ever prayed for someone to get better? Did s/he? If not, did God not answer your prayer?

Class Activity:

On slips of paper, write down various disabilities (i.e. blind, deaf, mute, no use of arm, etc.) making sure there is one for each student. Throw the slips of paper in a bag and have each student take one. Have each student “live” their disability during the time available.

- If you pull out blind, you have to wear a blindfold for the day
- If you get deaf, wear earplugs
- If you get mute, you can’t speak, etc.

At the end of the activity, have each student must write down what they thought, felt or difficulties they faced while living with their “disability.” Discuss the results.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

So there’s Joni: 17 years old, a Christian, and fresh out of high school. And she’s just gotten the news that she’ll never be able to walk again and will spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair, unable to use her hands. There was nothing medical science could do.

She begged her friends to help her end her life. When they refused, she tried to kill herself by thrashing her neck violently from side to side. She got bitter. And she got angry. And through it all, she implored God to explain how her accident could be his will.

She came to the understanding that her injury was an opportunity to see God’s love- To God, her soul was infinitely more important than her body. Paralysis has left Joni no room for part-time faith in God. She learned to cling to God, and found that he was enough. The last

sentence of her book, *The God I Love*, says it clearly: "There are more important things in life than walking."

Today, on the other side of fifty, Joni Eareckson Tada oversees her non-profit organization, Joni and Friends, which ministers to disabled people and their families all across the world. She has written numerous books, paints (with her teeth), has her own radio show and speaks regularly to large audiences across the world, all while being a wife to her husband, Ken. And through it all, she keeps singing God's praise and relies on her faith to get her through each day.

You might be thinking, okay, so she really trusts in God but couldn't he have healed her too? To that, we pose the following question: if the paralysis hadn't happened to her, would her faith in God be so absolute? More importantly, if she had never been paralyzed, would she have ever done so much for the disabled population? Would her life have led her to a share the salvation of Christ to the disabled?

Life Response

Faith is at the core of Christianity- an essential for living the Christian life. Whatever might happen to us, whether it be illness, disability, or death, we should not lose our faith in God.

Whatever situations arise, we must remember that God has us in his hands.

Take some time to reflect on your faith in God. Where does it come from? What makes you believe in God and Jesus? Take some time, each day this week, to talk to God about your faith.

Do you feel like you don't have enough faith? Talk to God.

Do you feel like you don't have any faith? Talk to God.

Do you favor science over a faith in God? Talk to God.

Memory Verse

"Go and tell Hezekiah, 'This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life.'"

Isaiah 38:5

Prayer

Father God, We thank you for these bodies that you have given us. Father, we praise you that, in your eyes, our souls are more precious than our bodies. Help us not to take these bodies for granted and to realize the blessings in what you're given us. We pray Father that our hearts and minds be open to your Spirit when you call us. Amen.

The following sources were used in creating this lesson:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/001/3.46.html>

<http://www.joniandfriends.org/>

The New Student Bible, Zondervan Press

The God I Love: A Lifetime of Walking with Jesus, Joni Eareckson Tada

Part II God's Wonderful People

Chapter – 6 God's People in Family

Theme :	Family
Aim :	To study the great role family has in an individual's life and society
Bible Reading :	Timothy 1: 1-6; Acts 16:1-3

Values for Life

1. The potential of a person as it unfolds in God's hands.
2. To learn how praying parents influence their children.
3. To understand how Timothy's family helped him grow spiritually.
4. To welcome God's servants into our homes.

Preparation

As we look back into history, we see great people have had great family heritage. John Wesley was brought up by Susannah Wesley who prayed and brought him up in the fear of the Lord. And in the Bible we see Hannah, a prayerful woman, gave birth to a son and he was given him back to God's service. John the Baptist was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth who loved the Lord and prayed. Now we proceed with our lesson by learning about the great life and testimony that Timothy and his family left.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

We see that Timothy comes from such a great heritage. His mother was a Jew and father was Greek. Family values are incorporated into the person in the form of habits, attitudes, values and ways of thinking. It is often said that a child's education starts at home and that a mother is his/her first teacher. A child's character is molded according to family patterns. A family that prays together stays and helps a child to understand God's central role in family life.

Timothy was a native of Lystra in Galatia. He was well read in Jewish law. Much of his faith and devotion was inherited from his mother Eunice, and grandmother Lois. Timothy and his mother may have become Christians during Paul's first missionary journey. They had become ardent believers in Christ. Paul was happy and proud to remember those families who had sincere faith in the Lord. Those were the days when Christians were severely persecuted.

Paul considered Timothy as his dear son (Phil 2:22). Timothy becomes a co-worker to Paul in his second missionary journey. Because his mother was a Jew, Timothy had to undergo the practice of circumcision before he could start out on his missionary journey. As you can see, family traditions were given much importance.

By that time, Timothy has grown in faith and had a great reputation among the believers in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2). Timothy was in prison for the sake of the

his faith (2 Tim 4:19, 21). In Hebrews 13:23, we read that Timothy was let out of prison. Timothy was in charge of the church in Ephesus after the death of Paul. He eventually died as a martyr.

There are many instances in the Bible where family influences future generations.

John the Baptist – He was filled with the Holy Spirit while he was in his mother’s womb. One could understand that a child of a pious man like Zachariah would be filled with the Holy Spirit in this way. Zachariah, Priest of the order of Abijah and Elizabeth, daughter of Aaron, were righteous before God and fully obeyed the Lord’s laws and commandments (Luke 1:6). The son of these parents prepared the way for Jesus Christ.

Jehoshaphat – He had before him a very good model to follow, his own father David. It is written in 2 Chronicles that “The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because in his early years he walked in the ways his father David” (2 Chronicles 17:3,4).

King Uzziah – “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done.” (2 Chronicles 26:4)

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What factors in Timothy’s family life contributed to his strong faith?
2. Describe the relationship between Timothy and Paul.
3. Identify others from the Bible who were influenced by faithful family members.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

It is important for us to continue in the ways our parents have taught us. As it says, a family that prays together stays together. We must look to God for strength in our daily walk. We are brought up in Christian homes today because of the faith and devotion of our ancestors. We have a great heritage dating back to our forefathers, being converted by St. Thomas. We must never forget this heritage, but continue on with this lineage. Let us try to be soul winners who hold out the torch of faith so that others may come to know Jesus Christ.

Life Response

Follow the example of Timothy. He was humble enough to live as the son of Paul. Let us grow in grace to have spiritual growth. Let us commit our lives into the Lord’s hands so that he makes us shining lights for Him.

Memory Verse

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
Ephesians 4:1-2

Prayer

Create in me a new heart O Lord. Kindle your fire of love and faith in my soul that I may be a burning witness for you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Chapter – 7 Israelites – A Chosen People

Theme : **Humanity : One in Unity**
Aim: **To study how God chooses and protects his people; to understand what it means to be God’s chosen people**
Bible Reading: **Deuteronomy 7:6-10**

Values for Life

1. To examine the relationship between God and the Israelites
2. To study God’s faithfulness to the Israelites and his response when the Israelites asked for help
3. To understand that we (Christians) are God’s chosen people
4. To share our faith in God and His promises with the rest of the world

Preparation

What would you do if you were told to leave your family, pack your belongings, and move to a strange country where you have no friends? Imagine telling all your friends, your parents and your family that you have to move because God told you to. And what did God give you in return? A promise that *one day* you’ll be a great nation.

This is exactly what happened to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-9). God promised Abraham that through him a great nation and people would exist. Although God gave him no evidence that this would happen, Abraham still packed up and left for place unknown.

The story of Abraham is an interesting one. After spanning centuries, the Bible leaves the big picture of the world to focus on this one man- not a great king or a person of great wealth but rather a childless nomad.

Why him? What made Abraham so much more special than the thousands of other people in the world? Why did God choose him to build one of the greatest nations on earth?

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The Life and Times of Abraham

Before God tells Abraham to move (Genesis 12), the Bible does not tell us that much about Abraham. Certainly, there is no mention of anything that makes Abraham so special that God would choose him to be the father of Israel. But perhaps the answer is in Abraham’s response to God’s command. “...Abram [his name before God changed it to Abraham] left, as the Lord had told him. Genesis 12:4”

Abraham doesn’t question God; he doesn’t say *God, are you sure you couldn’t make me into a great nation right where I am?* Instead, he immediately left Haran with his wife, nephew and all his servants and belongings to follow God.

Blind faith- Abraham had it in spades. In fact, it’s that faith which is the root of Judaism and, after Jesus, of Christianity.

Now Abraham made mistakes (see Genesis 12:10-20), plenty of them, but at the most important moments of his life, Abraham obeyed God. And God blessed him. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those you bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the people on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:2-3).”

Abraham and his wife didn’t have millions of children; rather, they had one son, Isaac, who had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob went on to have 12 sons whose descendents formed the 12 tribes of Israel.

The Israelites:

In the Bible, we see many examples of the blessings God showered on his chosen people, the Israelites. Here are just a few examples:

- There's a famine. Everyone's starving. What does God do? He sends his people to Egypt where he already has a leader in place (Joseph) who's willing to help them. [Genesis 47: 13-31]
- From the 70 Israelites that first came to Egypt, God built them to a nation of such greatness that 350 years later, the Egyptian pharaoh oppressed the Israelites because there were so many of them. [Genesis 11:31, Genesis 12:3, Deuteronomy 7:7-8, Exodus 1: 1-22]
- Just when it looked like the Egyptians were going to make the Israelites a nation of slaves, God sent Moses to free them from their bondage. [Exodus 4: 18-12:42]
- So that His people would know the way to walk in the desert, God went ahead of them as a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night. (Exodus 3: 21)
- Pharaoh finally let the Israelites leave Egypt but then he changed his mind! He chased after the Israelites with his chariots and weapons. Pharaoh had the Israelites trapped between his army and the sea with nowhere to go but then God parted the Red Sea, allowing the Israelites to escape and destroying their enemies! [Exodus 13:17-14:31]
- Even though they were in the desert, God feed the Israelites with, not just anything, but manna, food from heaven! And for those in the Israelites who were meat-eaters, God also provided quails. [Exodus 16: 1-36]
- After hundreds of years of living in foreign countries, God gave the Israelites a place all their own. [Joshua 1-22]

What does it mean to be a Chosen People?

Well, we've already seen that the Israelites, as God's chosen people, were rescued and blessed many times over. But God wanted his people to know that they were his- that he'd chosen them to be special. So He commanded that they set themselves apart from all the other peoples of the world.

From Abraham's time to today, the Israelites were given special rules to follow. All the Israelite males had to be circumcised and everyone was told to follow laws like worshipping only God and following the Ten Commandments. The other nations must have thought that the Israelites were pretty strange- most of them worshipped a lot of different gods.

But God was merely setting his people aside as wholly His.

Opps! Did we do that?

In spite of all the ways God revealed his power and authority to the Israelites, they still turned away from him. For example, Moses went up Mount Sinai to get the Ten Commandments. When Moses didn't come back right away, the Israelites started thinking he wasn't ever going to come back. And even though they had seen God part a sea, saved them from Egypt, and gave them food from heaven, the Israelites still thought they had to create their own god (Exodus 32:1-

Sadly, that wasn't the only time the Israelites doubted or betrayed God. Although God punished his people for their crimes, he never deserted them. Very similar to how God treats His people today...

The New Israel

With Jesus' death on the cross, everything changed. God's chosen are no longer just the Israelites, but everyone who accepts Jesus as their savior as their path to heaven.

Just as He did for the Israelites, God is always looking out for us, his chosen. The Israelites had God in a pillar of cloud and fire to show them the way through the desert. Likewise, God was given us the Bible to show us the path that we must walk. What a great gift!

Of course, that does not mean we will not face challenges. There might come a time in your life, where you might think God isn't there for you or that He has abandoned you (same as

the Israelites felt when Moses did not return from the mountain right away). But when that happens we must be like Abraham. We must remember that our God is ever faithful and will never desert us. He has proven it time and time again in the Bible. And if you have a personal relationship with God, He will prove it again in your life.

Our Task as God's Chosen

God has a command for us, not to pack up our bags and move to a strange land but to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] commanded. (Matthew 28:19-20).” God is telling us to share his son, Jesus, with others.

God asked the Israelites to set themselves apart as a nation for Him; God is asking us the same today. He wants us to believe in Jesus no matter what our friends might believe. He asks us to live our lives in a way that glorifies Him. No matter what we may see on television or in the movies or what our friends or peers might think is cool. We should never lose our faith in Him.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Questions for Class Discussion:

- 1 Why do you think Abraham believed in God?
Was it okay for the Israelites to doubt God during their years in the desert? If so, why was it okay? Would you have doubted?

- 2 What does the life of Abraham teach us about who God is?

- 3 How do you really know you're a Christian (i.e. God's chosen)?

- 4 What are some barriers that keep you from sharing Jesus with others? What can you do to overcome them?

Class Activity:

- On a piece of paper, have each student draw a time line with all important moments in their lives (moving residence, birth of siblings, new school and grades, etc.)
- Have the students discuss the following:
 - Did they have influence in the decisions in their timeline?
 - Did they rely on someone else? How do they felt about this?
 - Did God play a role in any of these decisions? If so, how? If not, why?
 - How is their timeline like the Israelites journey in the desert?
- On another paper, have them make a timeline for the future. They should record all major (future) events/moments in their lives.
- Have the students discuss the following:
 - How do they make choices about their future?
 - Who might they rely on to guide them?
 - How do they know that their “future” is the one God wants them to have?
 - Does following Jesus' commission to share Him with the world play a role in their timelines?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We're learned about a man and a nation that God choose to be His. If Christ lives in your hearts, then you are God's chosen. Are you willing to follow God blindly as Abraham did? Like the Israelites, do you sometimes take God's blessings for granted? Or when God doesn't answer your prayers as you want Him to, do you turn to other sources for help or comfort?

Life Response

A personal relationship with God is necessary to be one of God's chosen. Take some time to really think about whether you have that type of relationship with God. Do you talk to Him? Does he talk to you?

If you do not have a personal relationship with God and you would like to have one, talk to Him and tell Him that. If you are already one of God's chosen, take some time this week to think about what you do to set yourself apart as God's chosen. When was the last time you shared Jesus with someone? What is your response when God calls you to do something?

Memory Verse

"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."

Deuteronomy 7:6

Prayer

Father God, we thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for our sins. We thank you that through Him, we are your chosen people. Lord, we praise you for always being faithful, always loving us, always guiding us, and always looking out for us.

Amen.

The following sources were used in creating this lesson:

Encounter Christianity lesson plans

- <http://www.encounterchristianity.co.uk/lesson/jaj5.htm>

The New Student Bible, Zondervan Press

Chapter – 8 God’s People All Over the World

Theme :	God revealing in history
Aim :	To understand that people belonging to different religions and cultures are children of the same God and that we must love them and respect them, irrespective of who they are.
Bible Reading :	Genesis 10:1-32

Values for Life

1. Man started worshipping God and nature from ancient times.
2. All people are the children of God.
3. We must love and respect all people, regardless of who they are.

Preparation

For Mahatma Gandhi, Truth was God and non-violence was the way to achieve the realization of God. He devoted his life for India’s independence. He loved and respected all religions. The cross of Christ was of great fascination for Gandhi and the hymn “When I survey the wondrous Cross” was his favorite. Gandhi rejected the caste system and regarded it as a charge against Hinduism. He was particularly concerned of the untouchables and advised that they should be seen as the ‘Children of God’. He believed no one should be denied basic rights regardless of who they were.

As Christians, we believe that we are all descendents of Adam and Eve. God created all humans in His image, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. Today’s lesson goes deeper into how we are all connected through our Maker.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

People of the World

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth (Genesis 9:18,19). The people of the world can be classified into three groups, based on the descendants of Noah’s three sons.

The Shemites: The sons of Shem. They settled in the east. Their region stretched from Mesha to Sephar in the eastern hill country.

The Hamites: They were the sons of Ham who settled in the south (Genesis 10:6-20). Nimrod the son of Kush, the greatest warrior of that time belonged to this genealogy. The Philistines also belong to the genealogy of Ham (Genesis 10:14).

The Japhethites: They were the sons of Japheth (Genesis 10:2-5) who represented the people of the west and south.

Oneness of Religions

Regardless of our race, religion, culture, language we all belong to God. We are all the children of same God, created in his own image. “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” (Psalms 133:1)

Jesus did not come with a new religion, a new code, or a new philosophy, but He came to regain man from his fall. Jesus was in total obedience to God to the point of an agonizing and humiliating death. He died for all of humanity. God expects us to treat

others with respect and share his love with them. Jesus said “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16)

The Vision of Peter

While in Joppa with Simon the tanner, Peter had a vision (Acts 10:9-16). This vision helped Peter to have a change of heart with regard to people of other races. In his speech he said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35) In the same way, man should not discriminate against others.

Ecumenism – A wider perspective

‘Ecumenism’ comes from the Greek word ‘Oikomene’ which means ‘inhabited world’. So ‘Ecumenism’ means not only the unity of all denominations but also the unity of all people everywhere.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Name Noah’s three sons.
2. What did Peter learn from his vision at Joppa?
3. Name some Ecumenical organizations that the Mar Thoma Church is a part of.
4. Essay :

As Christians, we believe that all humans are connected to each other.

- a. Explain this with reference to the Old Testament.
- b. Explain this with reference to Jesus and Peter.
- c. How does ecumenism relate to this?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Living in the United States, we are a part of a heterogeneous society. Daily we come into contact with people who are different from us. We are exposed to people from different cultures. We meet people from various religions. We are called to treat everyone with respect and love. Our kindness should not be reserved for people just like us but to everyone.

Life Response

We must not discriminate against people who are different from us. We must remember that we are all created by the same loving God. We must love and show respect to all we come into contact with.

Memory Verse

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

Acts 10:34-35

Prayer

Father, help me to accept all who I come into contact with as your children. Help me to share your love with them. May my life show others how important you are to me.

Amen.

Chapter – 9 Prophets – God’s People with Special Mission

Theme : Response to God’s Revelation
Aim : To learn about Prophet Jeremiah
Bible Reading : Jeremiah 1:4-19

Values for Life

1. Prophets give messages and warnings on behalf of God.
2. To be God’s true witnesses even in adversity.
3. We all have a prophetic role to fulfill.

Preparation

Players on a baseball team all have specific roles to play. Some are pitchers, some catchers, some infielders, some outfielders. Everyone has his own role to fulfill. In the same way, God has placed us in this world for some special purpose.

The Late Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church was a farsighted man with prophetic vision. In 1975 the Metropolitan raised his voice against the violation of human rights in India. He proposed the “Homes for Homeless” project. This forced the Kerala Government to launch the similar ‘One Lakh Housing’ project. Similarly, we find people with such vision mentioned in the Bible.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

In the Old Testament, God sent people with a special mission to this world. These people were called prophets who spoke on behalf of God. They were also regarded as foretellers of the future. Prophets are classified into three categories:

1. Counselors for the Kings
 Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and Nathan are included in this group. Their work and mission are given in the Book of Kings.
2. Major Prophets
 Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are included in this category. Their work is given as separate books in their names.
3. Minor Prophets
 There are twelve minor prophets in this group: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi. The work and mission of these prophets are recorded as Books.

Jeremiah – The Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah was the son of Hilkiyah, a priest from Anathoth. He was of priestly descent, perhaps from David’s priest Abiathar. The name Jeremiah signifies “raised up by the Lord”. He is known as the ‘Weeping Prophet of Judah’. He began to prophesize in the 13th year of King Josiah. In Jeremiah 1:5 we read, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” God assured him that He would stand by Jeremiah and help him in all his work. Jeremiah reveals himself in his writings as a soul of gentle nature, yielding, tender

Bible Lesson for Our Time

Like players on a baseball team, we all have a role God wants us to fulfill. We must never take God for granted, especially in our present materialistic society. We must also realize God's ultimate judgment is near. Leading a Christ centered life may bring ridicule from others. We must always be ready to tell the truth and live with Jesus in our hearts.

Life Response

We must realize we have a prophetic role to fulfill. We must always speak the truth, no matter how difficult it may be. We must continue to pray for those who do not agree with us. Are you willing to stand up for God?

Memory Verse

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

Jeremiah 1:5

Prayer

Father, help me to tell others of your greatness. May I always speak the truth. Help me to continue to follow you, especially in times of adversity. In your name we pray,
Amen.

Chapter 10 God's People- God's faithful Stewards

Theme :	Modern Human Ventures
Aim:	To help us realize that we should make the best of the talents and gifts granted to us.
Bible Reading:	Mathew 25:14-30

Values for Life

1. Each person is given unique talents according to their different capacities.
2. We are accountable to the Lord for the talents we are given.
3. When we make the best and most faithful use of our talents we will be given more opportunities to gain more.
4. When we don't make use of the talents we will face loss and disappointment in our lives.

Preparation

- Who in the Bible do you know that spoke in Parables?
- Do you know what "Parable" means?
- What do you think Parables taught?

Many times from the Bible we learn how to live our lives in today's world. Even though the Bible was written centuries ago it is still relevant to us now with all of the trials and tribulations we face in today's society. God has blessed us with gifts, talents, abilities and it's our responsibility to make use of these gifts, talents and abilities for the glory of the living God.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Parables

We all like to read and listen to stories. Jesus Christ taught his disciples and the Jewish people through stories or parables. The word *Parable* comes from the Greek word "*Parabole*" which means, "putting things side by side". In other words, saying things in a different way. A parable is also an "earthly story with a heavenly meaning". Jesus spoke in parables to teach us the truth about the kingdom of heaven, about the love of our eternal father. It teaches us about eternal truths.

Parable of the Talents

Let us take a closer look:

- A Master when preparing to go on a journey calls on his servants. He gives them each certain responsibilities.
- To one servant he gave 5 talents of money. To another he gave 2 talents of money and finally to yet another servant he gave 1 talent of money.
- These talents were given according to each of their abilities.
- Being faithful, the first two servants who received the 5 and 2 talents went out and invested the money and put it to work.

- These two men gained more from their investments. The man with 5 talents made 5 more and the man with 2 talents made 2 more.
- The servant with 1 talent dug a hole and buried his master's money.
- Years later the Master returns and settled accounts with his servants.
- The 1st two servants pleased the Master very much because they multiplied the master's accounts and so the master blessed them with many rewards.
- The last servant displeased the Master because he was lazy and did not bring forth anything for the master and so he was condemned.

Let's Review

1. Who is the Master?
God
2. What are Talents?
In the parable it refers to a specific amount of money in the form of gold or silver.
3. What's the point of these talents?
God gives us each a variety of responsibilities. He instills in us abilities and potentials that are to be used for his glory and honor. These abilities vary from person to person and we are all accountable to God to carry through and make use of these talents.
4. What does it mean to invest the talents?
To invest the talents means to make use of our talents for something greater. Now imagine these talents are your abilities and your strengths such as your strength to speak in public or sing. It is your responsibility; your job to make use of these abilities to give praise to God.
5. What were the Master's Rewards?
The master gave them many more riches than they imagined. If God is the master, then we learn that God has blessed us with an inheritance of blessings in heaven. They wait for us when we meet with God in heaven.
6. What was the point of this particular parable?
The Bible tells us that, "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." Mathew 25:29. In other words, when you submit what abilities and gifts you have to glorify God, you only gain more and the rewards are so much greater. Whereas when you do not submit your gifts and abilities, you gain nothing and what all you do have will also be taken away.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Short Answers

1. What is the importance of parables and how do they impact our lives today?
2. What were the rewards for those who invested and made use of their talents faithfully?
3. What happens when you do not invest and make use of the talents like the lazy and unfaithful servant?
4. Do you have talents that God has entrusted upon you? How have you invested these talents?

Activities

1. Take time to pray and ask God to reveal to you what talents and abilities he has bestowed upon you.
2. Read the word of God (the Bible) and ask God to speak to you, to help you understand what you are to do.
3. Ask God how you have to submit and make use of your abilities and potentials.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We must learn to take a closer look at all that the good Lord has blessed us with, especially our talents. He has bestowed them upon us so that we can praise and honor God through our many actions. In joys and adversities it is our responsibility to do what is pleasing in God's eyes. We may face many trials and tribulations but we must not forget or deny the gifts that God has blessed us with.

There once was a famous doctor in India named Dr. Mary Varghese. She was unfortunate to have been in an accident which caused her legs to be paralyzed and she was forever confined to a wheelchair. This did not upset her at all. She believed in God and she believed in the talents that God blessed her with. She knew that she would not put to waste the gifts that God entrusted her with and so she put them to good use by helping others in need. Years later she became a very talented surgeon who performed numerous surgeries while on her wheelchair.

What are do we learn from today's lesson? The first two men demonstrated courage and they believed that their abilities when invested would bring them greater rewards. You must trust our dear Lord and he will carry you through whatever the challenge we may face and we must trust in our abilities and potentials.

Life Response

God has given us many gifts and abilities. Therefore it is our duty to spend time and effort to develop these talents. It is also up to us to encourage others to make use of their gifts to glorify God. Will you take this challenge and take the chance to use your talents to praise and honor God?

Memory Verse

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!" **Mathew 25:21**

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the talents you have blessed us with. We pray that you enable us to use these gifts to glorify and praise your holy name so that we too may inherit your blessings in heaven. In Jesus name we pray Amen.

Part III God's Purpose for God's World

Chapter – 11 Gideon

Theme:	Nature of God
Aim :	To study how God reveals his purpose through the people of valor
Bible Reading :	Judges 6 and 7

Values for Life

1. God chooses an ordinary person to rescue the Israelites from their enemies
2. Obedience to the commandments of God is better than sacrifice
3. God gives us wisdom and favorable circumstances to overcome difficulties as we put our full faith in Him.

Preparation

Who was the president of the United States of America during the Civil War in the middle of the 19th century? The president was Abraham Lincoln. He grew up in a poor family and hence was born in a “log-cabin”. He provided critical leadership during a crucial time in American history. Before making important decisions, he turned to God in prayer. Evaluate the life and leadership of this great leader for our country.

Who were some of the leaders of Israel who rose to the occasion by relying on God? (Probable names are Moses, Joshua, Elijah, David and others). Today we study the contribution of another leader: Gideon.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. ***Who were the leaders of Israel after the Israelites settled down in Canaan, the Promised Land?***
The leaders between the time of Joshua and the Kings were called Judges (around 1200-1000 BC). Some of the Judges were Gideon, Samson, Barak, and Deborah (known as a prophetess).
2. ***Why did the Israelites cry to God for help?***
When the Israelites settled down in the Promised Land, the people in that region and their kings opposed them. Their strong enemies included the Midianites and the Amalekites. These enemies attacked the Israelites and destroyed everything including their crops. In desperation they cried to God for help.
3. ***Who was Gideon? How did God call him?***
When people cried for help, God sent Gideon to take action against their enemies. Gideon was an ordinary person who was chosen by God. He was the son of Joash. He was not a fighter, but an ordinary man. One day he was threshing some wheat secretly in a wine press, so that the Midianites would not see him. The Lord's angel appeared to him to inform him that he was the chosen one.
4. ***What was the sign given by God to show that Gideon was chosen?***
Gideon could not believe that the Lord was talking to him. He wanted a definite sign. When Gideon went up to give his offering of meat and leavened bread, the

angel of the Lord touched the offering with the end of the stick he was holding. Fire came out of the rock and burnt up the meat and the bread. Then God said to Gideon to pull down the altar of Baal and the idol of the Asherah and build an altar to God. Gideon did so. From then on Gideon was known as “Jerubbaal”. Thereafter, the Midianites threatened him with death. The Spirit of the Lord asked Gideon to free His people. For this also Gideon wanted a sign. God showed him a sign (Judges 6:36-40).

5. *How did Gideon select people to fight against the Midianites?*

The Israelites got ready for the battle, but the Lord wanted them to reduce their number, as He did not want them to feel that it was by their strength that they would win. Their strength was 32000, which they reduced to 300. This was done after performing a test, which is described in Judge 7:2-7. First he allowed the people to leave if they wanted. A large number of them left. The remaining people were led to a river to drink water. Some people knelt down to drink while others lap the water with their tongues like a dog. Three hundred men lapped water with their hands to their mouths and they were selected.

6. *How did Gideon fight against the Midianites with a small army?*

The previous night of the battle Gideon overheard a man telling a dream in which a barley cake was rolled into the Midianite camp and struck the tent. They were sure it was the sword of Gideon. Gideon then divided his army into three divisions and placed them in different directions each having a jar, a light, and a trumpet. On Gideon’s instruction each division would blow their trumpet and break their jars. As a result of this noise the enemy began to fight against themselves. Gideon sent a message throughout the hillside saying “Come down against the Midianites and seize the waters against them as far as Bethbarah and Jordan.

7. *What was the secret of Gideon’s victory?*

Gideon trusted in the Lord and not in a large army. Gideon believed that God alone could give him victory, rather than the strength of the army. God knew Gideon’s potential and patiently brought Gideon to the point of courage. He encouraged him, directed him and transformed him. Overnight, Gideon became a strong and decisive general. He used noise and lights as scare tactics, enabling his small band to defeat the enemy. The small army devastated and scattered the Midianites and Gideon triumphantly brought in an era of freedom.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Use a map of Israel and other Kingdoms in that region especially Midianites and Amalekites. Show how the different tribes of Israel were scattered among other nations.
2. Students can answer most of the above questions after they read the Bible passage. Hence the teacher asks students to read the relevant passage after the question is raised.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

God calls people who are wise and learned, as well as ordinary people. Whatever background they possess, God wants them to be meek and humble. They must be willing to listen and obey God. Find out such examples from our society today.

Life Response

When challenging tasks are entrusted to us, do I trust God and humble myself before Him so that I can carry out these tasks faithfully.

Memory Verse

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" (Judges 6:14)

Prayer

Lord we pray for our leaders in our church and country. Give them wisdom and courage to work for the good of all people. Amen.

Chapter – 12 Divine Intervention and Divine Purpose

Theme : **God in Fellowship with Human Beings**

Aim: **God’s people experience God’s deliverance when they are confronted with insurmountable challenges.**

Bible Reading: **Exodus 14: 5-31, 15: 1-21**

Values for Life

1. God saved his people miraculously [A miracle is a supernatural act of God that cannot be explained in human terms].
2. God listens to the prayers of his people.
3. God sometimes uses adverse circumstances to show his love and faithfulness for us.

Preparation

Have you or someone you know ever confronted a life-threatening situation? It could have been a serious automobile accident, a fire, the diagnosis of a terminal disease, or an armed robbery. A number of years ago, while strolling on a college campus with a friend of mine, we came to a street corner at the outskirts of the campus. My friend paused there for a moment, raised his head as he was browsing the overarching birch tree, and then looked down at the footpath below and said, “You know, I was mugged here at 2 a.m. on a balmy spring night in 1982. A tall dark figure suddenly appeared in front of me and pointed a gun at me and asked me to hand him my wallet. After I handed him my wallet, he told me to lie down on the ground with my face down and not to move. After about fifteen minutes on the ground, I slowly turned my head and looked, I could not find him. Then I got up and looked. Thank God, he had been gone. I ran to my apartment from here which was located five blocks away.” While my friend explained this incident, I could feel the tremor he felt that night in my own heart. Stories such as the one I just mentioned are far too common these days.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. *Why did Pharaoh pursue the fleeing Israelites?*
Pharaoh pursued the fleeing Israelites in order to capture them and bring them back to Egypt. The Israelites had been a source of slave labor for the Egyptians, which made Egypt very wealthy and powerful. Pharaoh had let the Israelites free after the Lord struck Egypt with the plagues.
2. *What was the composition of Pharaoh’s army that pursued Israel?*
Pharaoh had six hundred of his best chariots with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers all over them. (14:7)
3. *“The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh.” (14:8). How would you explain this statement? It seems like the Lord is ultimately responsible for Pharaoh’s evil acts, and then the Lord punishes him for his evil.*

Pharaoh with all his might is a symbol of the Devil. The fact is that the Devil is powerful and he operates in this world. However, God has the final victory over Devil. You see in this story the ongoing conflict between sin and justice. At the end, God's will is established and God's people glorify God. The sinful heart of Pharaoh is hardened against God's plan and purpose, but ironically it serves as a means to show God's glory (see verse 17 also).

4. *Where did Pharaoh's army overtake the Israelites?*
Near Pi Hahiroth, opposite to Baal Sefhon. (14:9)
5. *What was the bewildered Israelites' reaction when they saw Pharaoh's army?*
They cried out to the Lord and then blamed Moses for having brought them out of Egypt.
6. *What was Moses' reaction to the bewildered Israelites who were being pursued by the Egyptian army?*
Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Exodus 14:13-14).
7. *How did the Lord protect the Israelites from destruction by Pharaoh's army before they could cross the Red sea?*
The angel of God who had been traveling in front of the Israelites stood behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from the front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the Egyptian side and light to the Israelites so that the Egyptians did not get near the Israelites.
8. *Explain the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea.*
Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and the sea parted caused by a strong east wind. When the waters were divided, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea through the dry land.
9. *Explain the fate of the Egyptian army who pursued the Israelites through the Red Sea?*
During the night, the Lord brought the pillar of fire over the Israelites while crossing the sea, which threw the Egyptian army into a frenzy of confusion. The chariots also got stuck. The Egyptians began to say that the Lord was fighting for the Israelites and decided to retreat. The Lord commanded Moses to stretch his hand over the sea, which caused the waters to flow back over the Egyptians. At day break the Israelites witnessed a complete destruction of the Egyptian army.
10. *How did the Israelites respond to their miraculous deliverance from the Egyptian army?*
The people feared the Lord and put their trust in Moses. Moses and the people also sang a song of praise to the Lord that retold his mighty work at the Red Sea.

11. *Who was Miriam? How did she express her joy over the Lord's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army?*

Miriam, Aaron's sister, was a prophetess. She took a tambourine in her hand and sang along with all the other women, "Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Show the clip from the video *The Ten Commandments* where the Israelites cross the Red sea.
2. Trace the path of the Israelites from Egypt to the crossing of the Red Sea on a map (such maps are found in many Bibles).

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We live in a world that is filled with a lot of violence, poverty, and injustice. In this lesson we see Pharaoh, a symbol of power and might, exploiting a large nation for his own wealth and pleasure. In spite of the many miracles God showed him, his heart is turned against the will of God. Finally his army is destroyed along with his evil ambitions. We also see the character of Moses in this lesson, the humble leader of Israel, constantly seeking God's guidance in difficult times. He does what God tells him to do. In between, we also see the large masses of Israelites, who vacillate between praising God and criticizing Moses for every disappointment they encounter. We need to ask ourselves who do we want to be like: Moses, Pharaoh, or the people of Israel?

Life Response

In times of difficulty we pray to God. God listens to the prayer of a humble and trusting heart. Sometimes our prayers are answered at the time we wish with the result we expect. At other times, it doesn't seem to happen that way. Remember how the Israelites were complaining to Moses when there was a delay in God's answer to their prayer? But God had a greater plan for them. He made them experience one of the greatest miracles of history. Yes, their prayers were answered, at a time God knew was best and in the way God had planned. We Christians believe that everything works for the good of those who love God (Romans 8:28). God has a greater plan for us even in the worst of circumstances!

Memory verse

"Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again." (Exodus 14:13).

Prayer

Lord, we are not delivered by our might and strength, but by your grace. You love us Lord, and you have the best plan for us. Help us O Lord, to know your will and give us the strength to fulfill it in our lives.

Chapter – 13 Jacob Reconciles with His Brother

Theme:	Broken Relationship
Aim:	To study how God’s purpose is fulfilled in his world through reconciliation.
Bible Reading:	Genesis 32:1-21, 33: 1-17

Values For Life:

1. The relationship between the two brothers is broken because one son is the father’s favorite and the other is the mother’s.
2. Deceiving your father and brother for selfish gains results in agony.
3. For reconciliation, God’s guidance and patience are essential.

Preparation

1. Have you sometimes felt that your sibling is the favorite for your parents? How does that make you feel?
2. Have you been in serious disagreement, with your brother or sister? What was the outcome?
3. How did you regain friendship or closeness with you sibling?
4. What does it mean to reconcile? (To make disputing people friends again, to resolve issues, to settle differences, to patch up rifts between each other)

Sometimes you may face struggles and disagreements in your life as well as among your family members. What do you think God expects of his children? God wants his children to live together in harmony, by helping each other, respecting each other, loving each other and by learning to compromise, or to reconcile your differences. Today we will learn about a mother and father who placed favoritism on their children and about a man who reconciled with his brother.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Jacob and Esau

Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Jacob was the second born son who grew up to be a simple man who liked to live the quiet life. Jacob was the favorite of his mother Rebekah.. Esau was the oldest son of the household. He lived a more adventurous life. He was a hunter and the favorite of his father Isaac.

Jacob Cheats his Brother Esau (Genesis 25:27-34)

Jacob bought Esau’s birthright. A birthright is property or money that somebody expects to inherit. Jacob’s father Isaac loved and favored Esau and wanted to give him double-portion of his inheritance. (Deut 21:17). This meant that Esau would have full power to rule over his brother and the entire family (Gen 27:29), as well as Isaac’s blessing in the presence of God. (Gen 27: 4). This would mean that Esau would have possession on Canaan and the covenant fellow with Jehovah.

Jacob's Deception

Isaac wanted to declare and bless Esau as his heir. So Isaac told Esau to go hunting and bring him some wild game and prepare the food, as he likes to eat it. Then he could bless Esau. Rebekah heard this and told Jacob to go and find some choice animals so that she could prepare it for Isaac. His mother covered Jacob's hand and the smooth part of his neck in goat hair to fool his father because Esau was a hairy man. Rebekah sent him to receive the blessings that were promised to his older brother. With some difficulty, Jacob received Esau's blessing and obtained everything. When Esau returned with the wild game prepared the way his father liked it, he and his father realized that Jacob deceived them. Esau cried out in a great and bitter voice and he knew that he could no longer receive the special blessing from his father. (Gen 27:34). Esau was very angry and held a grudge against his brother. He hated Jacob and vowed that nothing less than Jacob's death could satisfy him. Hearing this, Rebekah told Jacob to flee from the country to safety. She told him to go to Syria to stay with his uncle Laban. There he stayed for 20 years. (Gen 31:41) He married Leah and Rachel and attained immense wealth and after sometime he left for his homeland. On his way home, Jacob met with God's angels and so he named that place Mahanaim. (Gen 32:2)

Rebekah Helps Jacob Flee from his homeland

Rebekah did not want to lose both of her sons on the same day and so she hoped that if Jacob would be kept out of Esau's sight his anger could be reduced with time and he would not hold onto the grudge, which he placed on his brother, Jacob.

Jacob Reconciles with Esau

After some time Jacob sent a kind and humble message to Esau. The idea was that when you approach someone in a polite manner, even an enemy could become a friend. Jacob called to Esau and addressed him as Lord and by doing so made himself Esau's servant. Jacob spoke to Esau in such a way that the grudge in Esau's heart melted away. Jacob told Esau of all that happened to him, when he was living with his uncle Laban. Jacob wanted Esau to know that he did not come back as a vagabond (a homeless wanderer), a beggar, or a prodigal son. He came to find favor in Esau and to be kind and loving to him. Esau embraced Jacob and talked to him with love and compassion. We learn that it is God who transformed the hearts of these men and that God transforms in secret and in silence. God can change enemies into friends, which happened here. He changed these two men by restraining grace (1 Sam 26:21-25) and by renewing grace (Acts 9: 21-22). Jacob and Esau were very content with each other and it was through reconciliation that God brought meaning and purpose into their lives.

Other examples in the bible where we learn about reconciliation of disputes are:

1. The reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers in Egypt.
2. In the parable of the lost son (prodigal son Luke 15:11) we see father and son reconcile with each other.
3. The reconciliation between Moses and the Israelites.

God's Expectation for us:

In our lives we will face disagreements and conflicts with others. But, it is our responsibility to forgive and forget and show genuine love and humility so that we too can show consideration to others when there are differences of opinion and actions. When we act in harmony with each other with our neighbors, with our friends, and our families we are doing what God expects from us. We reconcile when we commit ourselves to the will of God. (Math 5: 23-25)

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Questions:

1. What were some of the privileges of birthright that Isaac wanted to give his son Esau?
2. How did Jacob deceive his father?
3. Why did Rebekah tell Jacob to flee from his homeland?
4. How did Jacob reconcile with his brother Esau?

Bible Lessons for our Times

In today's situations, we may face many trials and temptations. We as children of God should learn to love and forgive one another.

- Can you think of a situation where people are broken away from their families and friends because they couldn't reconcile their disputes?
- How can we maintain a good relationship with our siblings and our parents?
- How can someone reconcile a broken relationship in his or her life?
- Who can help rebuild the rift between our loved ones and us?

Life Response

God taught us to love one another, to forgive one another, and to live in harmony with one another through his son Jesus Christ. God had given us the responsibility to be examples of his children for the world. He wants us to be a light upon a hill and he wants us to show through our actions His qualities and characteristics. Will you take this responsibility?

Memory Verse

“ How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Psalms 133:1)

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for loving us, for listening to us and for protecting us. Lord we ask that you give us the strength and the courage to take responsibility to bring peace and harmony amongst our families, our neighbors and our friends. Help us to be an example for others. In your most holy and precious name Amen.

Chapter – 14 Father of Believers

Theme: **Reconciliation**
Aim: **To learn how God used Abraham to carry out God’s purpose in the world**
Bible Reading: **Genesis 12:1-9, Hebrew 11:8-10**

Values for Life

1. God will bless all who are faithful.
2. God always keeps his promises no matter how difficult they may seem.
3. Remain steadfast in God and he will lift you up.

Preparation

How often have you asked your parents or friends for favors? How often have these favors been promised? How many times have they followed through on these promises? Humans often forget to keep their promises. When God promises us something, He never lets us down. His promises are always kept and delivered to us at the right moment. We are going to learn about one of these promises that God made to his faithful servant Abraham.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Abraham

The name Abram means “Exalted Father”. Later with the promise of the divine covenant his name was further changed Abraham, which means ‘Father of the multitude’. He was born in Ur of the Chaldees and was the son of Terah and founder of the Hebrew nation. He was a childless nomad. He roamed from place to place tending his sheep.

At the age of 75, Abraham, his wife Sarah, brother’s son Lot and all their possessions went to Canaan. It soon became evident that all their servants and herds could not co-exist in the same area. Abraham suggested that the two groups separate. He showed Lot the vast land and asked Lot to choose which part he preferred. According to custom, Abraham being older had the right to choose first. Instead Abraham gives Lot the first choice and demonstrates how he was unselfish.

The Covenant

God chose Abraham because he listened faithfully and was ready to sacrifice anything for Him. He made sure that his family was also steadfast in the ways of the Lord. He was able to ‘command his children and his household’ after him and keep them in the way of the Lord doing justice and righteousness (Genesis 18:19).

After being chosen by God, he was blessed and promised that he would have many descendants who would one day become a great nation through him. God told Abraham that a son would be born to his wife Sarah. Isaac was born and God’s promise was fulfilled when Abraham was 100 years old.

Obedience of Abraham

Abraham obeyed God's call without any reservations. After being given a son, God asked Abraham to give Isaac up as a sacrifice. He obeyed and in return for his faith, God gave Isaac back to him (Genesis 22). God promised that Abraham and his family would be blessed and be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

Abraham's Legacy

At the age of 175, Abraham died and was buried along side of Sarah in Machpelah cave in the east of Mamre. Abraham holds a prominent position in history as the father of the people of Israel and founder of the Jewish religion.

Other Covenants

In the Old Testament, we see Noah (Genesis 9) and Jacob (Genesis 32) also entering covenants with God. In the New Testament we see God renewing his covenant with all mankind through Jesus Christ.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Having faith in God means that you trust in Him regardless where He may lead you. Describe the feelings you may have if you go bungee jumping and how that relates to having faith in God?
2. Look at Matthew 1:1-17. Matthew begins the genealogy of Jesus with whom? What can you infer from this?
3. Abraham demonstrated total unselfishness when dividing the land with Lot. How can you demonstrate such character in your daily life?
4. What promises have you made that you did not keep? What should you do in the future to make sure that you keep your promises?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

John 3:16 is also known as "The Covenant of Grace". What has God promised us? How can we uphold our side of this covenant?

In our modern world, individual rights are asserted. In this situation people often times do not respect others. What lessons can we learn from the life of Abraham regarding trust and obedience?

Life Response

God has made a covenant with man through Jesus Christ. Will I uphold my side of this promise?

Memory Verse

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Genesis 12:2,3

Prayer

Lord, thank you for sending your son Jesus Christ to this world to die for me. Allow me to live a life according to your will so that I may be a part of your covenant of grace.

Chapter – 15 God’s Kingdom – God’s Purpose

Theme:	Eternal Purpose In Life
Aim :	To learn that the eternal purpose of God is to establish his kingdom
Bible Reading :	Luke 14:15-24

Values for Life

1. By the ‘Kingdom of God’, we mean surrendering to the almighty power of God
2. The purpose of Jesus was to establish the ‘Kingdom of God’ on earth and make all people its members
3. To enter into the Kingdom of God, great desire, preparation, and the mindset to surrender are essential.
4. The Kingdom of God is of the past, present and the future.

Preparation

Have you attended a wedding? If yes, why did you attend? You were invited. Were you ever invited to a celebration (wedding, birthday party, etc.) that you did not attend? Why did you not attend? You had other priorities that were more important than the celebration.

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast. We are all invited to that feast. Do you wish to attend? Let us look into the Bible and see what the response of the people was when they were invited to the wedding feast.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. What was the main theme of the teachings of Jesus?

The Kingdom of God was the main theme of Jesus’ teachings. ‘Kingdom of God’ and ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ were used interchangeably.

2. How did Jesus teach about the Kingdom of God?

Jesus used parables to teach the characteristics of the Kingdom of God. Parable is defined as “a simple story illustrating a moral or religious lesson”. In other words, “An earthly story with a heavenly meaning”. Here are some parables that Jesus told:

- Parable of the mustard seed (Mat 13:31-32)
- Parable of the yeast (Mat 13:33)
- Parable of the Treasure hidden in the field (Mat 13:44)
- Parable of the Vineyard (Luke 20:9-19)

3. In our lesson, what is Kingdom of God compared to?

The Kingdom of God is pictured as a wedding feast. The man had invited many important people, dear and near ones. When the day came and the feast was ready, the host sent for the people whom he had already invited. But to his surprise, no one showed up.

4. What were some of the answers people gave for not attending the wedding?

They all had their own excuses for not attending the wedding feast. We see the excuse of the first man. "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it." (Verse 18) Another man said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out." (Verse 19). Yet another man said that he just got married and could not come (Verse 20).

5. *How did the master respond?*

On hearing the excuses, the host was quite angry. How could he not be angry? He wanted them to come and attend the feast, but they all felt they had more important priorities.

The master of the home then sent his servant to the streets and alleys of the city to bring the poor, crippled, blind and lame. All had come yet there was still room. Again the master sent his servant to the roads and country lanes to compel all to come to the feast so that his home would be filled. How happy those people were! None of the men who were originally invited could enjoy the feast while many others did.

6. *What did Jesus mean by this parable?*

Jesus said that if we the chosen people of God do not respond properly to his call and obey him, we would also have the same fate as that of those who were initially invited. We will not enter his Kingdom but rather put into judgment. What a painful thing!

7. *What is the Kingdom of God?*

The Kingdom of God is not a geographical or political entity. It is God's kingly authority, which rules over all time and space. His Kingdom embraces not only all people but also all of his creation. It is totally governed and ruled by God. Since Jesus fully accepted the will of God, He is the symbol of the Kingdom of God. For God's Kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of the righteousness, peace and joy which the Holy Spirit gives (Romans 14:17)

8. *What are some truths that can be explained by the Kingdom of God?*

Jesus taught his disciples many truths about the Kingdom of God. Some of the important ideas are:

- A. It is a great treasure. It is very difficult for the rich to inherit the Kingdom of God as they love their wealth more than God.
- B. The Kingdom of God belongs to the children. If you are not born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.
- C. Everybody is welcome to the Kingdom of God. If the chosen people, the invited ones, do not turn up, God, in his mercy, takes in even the least deserving among the people.
- D. It is a just society where God rewards everyone according to his mercy.
- E. It is like yeast or a small seed. A small quantity of yeast ferments the whole flour. The small seed grows into a big tree giving shade and shelter to many
- F. It is of the past, present and future (Lk 13:28; 17:21; Mk 9:1). Jesus wants to make it clear that the Kingdom of God is open to all irrespective of wealth, creed, race or gender. The only requirement is that you accept His call.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Main Ideas in Bible Learning are presented as questions and answers. The teacher may use these questions for teaching the lessons. Avoid reading the questions and answers. Rather, the questions are used to tell the story of the wedding feast which Jesus told to reveal great truths about the Kingdom of God. Use the story-telling method in teaching this lesson. Give the assignment to read the lesson and the Bible portion one week prior to teaching the lesson. Then use the questions as a guide to retell the story.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

There are many people who are discriminated in society and they receive the second invitation from God.

- Can you name some groups ignored by society?
- Can you name some who have changed their life around and accepted Our Lord's invitation?
- What does our church do to help these people?

Life Response

God has called me to the feast. Is God your number one priority? What are some of the things that I put ahead of God? Will I accept his invitation or do I have other priorities that prevent me from accepting his call?

Memory Verse

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Mathew 6:33)

Prayer

Lord, thank you for making us inheritors of the Kingdom of God, through the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to experience your Kingdom here on earth and forever

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

Chapter – 16 God With His World and His People

Theme : The History of Religions
Aim : To study how God intervenes to liberate His People
Bible Reading : Judges 4:4-24

Values for Life

1. To fulfill His purpose, God uses all people, disregarding gender.
2. God sends those who listen to His word and obey Him.
3. Though God punishes the disobedient, He delivers them in time.
4. Live in harmony and co-operation and in full obedience to God.

Preparation

Have you heard of the International Court of Justice? It is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. It tries to ensure that all countries act in justice and righteousness. The wrong doers are brought and are made aware of their faults. We see instances of God's intervention in the lives of people in history. In the history of the Israelites, we see the life of the Judges as the best example. Today we are going to study how God intervened to liberate His people.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Judges of the Israelites

The Judges played a vital role in the history of the liberation of the Israelites. After the death of Joshua, there was no peace and harmony and they were quarreling among themselves. They prayed to God and He gave them leaders as we read in Judges 2:16. They saved them from enemies by taking lead, when there is crisis and in peace time tried to see things done in justice. Of these the first one is Othniel and the last is Samuel.

The major judges of Israel were Othniel (3:9), Ehud (3:15), Shamgar (3:31), Deborah (4:4), Gideon (6:11-14), Abimelech (9:1), Tola (10:1), Jair (10:3), Jephthah (11:11), Ibzan (12:8), Elon (12:11), Abdon (12:13), Samson (16:30) Eli (1 Sam. 4:18) and Samuel (1 Sam 7:3-16).

Deborah: The Judge

We will look at the story of a woman judge, Deborah, who was also a Prophetess. In those days women were equally powerful as men in leading people.

Deborah was the wife Lappidoth (4:4). She sat under the palm tree between Ramah and Bethel and judged the people of Israel. Her name signifies a 'bee'. She was true to her name as seen by her diligent work, wisdom, great usefulness to the public, and by her sweetness to her friends and sharpness to her enemies. She was close to God and this was evident by her being instructed in divine knowledge by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. She heard the Word of God and probably saw the visions of the Almighty.

She was entirely devoted to the service of Israel. She judged Israel at the time that Jabin oppressed them. She judged not as a princess or civil authority conferred upon her but as a Prophetess and God's mouthpiece. The children of Israel came to Deborah to ask her to pray for them so that they might be delivered out of the hands of Jabin.

Helping Each Other

Deborah had her own limitations to command an army in person. So she nominated Barak of Naphtali who was already famous due to encounters with the forces of the oppressor living near him. He could do nothing without her nor could she do without his help, but both together made a perfect whole and shaped a complete deliverance. The greatest and best are not always self-sufficient. They sometimes need each other.

Barak: Defeating Enemies

Deborah called Barak and told him that he would have to fight Sisera and his army at Mount Tabor. But Barak wanted Deborah with him and his army. Deborah immediately offered her company and encouraged him, though she said that the credit of killing Sisera would go to a woman and not Barak (4:8). Barak had his army of ten thousand men ready. Deborah joined Barak. Barak had only men on foot while Sisera had horses and iron chariots. But the presence of God and His prophetess were sufficient to confront the enemy. When Barak saw Sisera's army attempting to surround the mountain on top of which his forces lay encamped, his heart failed him and he resolved to retire to a place of greater safety. But Deborah forced him to make a descent on Sisera, assuring of success. Barak bravely improved his advantage, followed the blow with an undaunted resolution and pursued the scattered forces back to their General's Headquarters at Harosheth and spared none whom God had delivered into his hands. Sisera left his chariot and ran away to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber (4:17). Jael received Sisera but then killed him by driving a nail into his forehead, pinning him to the ground. Here we see that Deborah was a source of encouragement for Barak. In chapter 5, we see that both Deborah and Barak singing a song of deliverance praising God.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What are some of the qualities that Deborah possessed that allowed her to be an effective leader?

2. Find one or two instances in the Bible where God delivered his children from crisis.

3. Name two or three other women who provided leadership throughout history.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Deborah was a strong woman who loved the Lord. We see that women can be used by God to do great things, if they are willing. Women can and should take up leadership roles in the church. We must remember that it is for God's glory and not individual accolades that we undertake such responsibilities.

We also see that great people may not always be self-sufficient. We need to understand what our strengths are, as well as our weaknesses. We must trust in one another and help each other so that God's name is glorified.

Life Response

We must look at the life of Deborah and realize that God can use anyone for his work. We must yield to the will of God and let him work through us, regardless of our gender. Let us also look to others for help so that God's name is glorified.

Memory Verse

Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

Psalms 91:3-4

Prayer

Oh merciful Lord, we thank you for your great care and concern. Help us to be faithful to you and fulfill your will for us. Amen.

Chapter – 17 God’s Chosen One

Theme :	History of Salvation
Aim :	To show how God paves the way for His actions in history
Bible Reading :	1 Samuel 8:4-22;10:1-16
Teaching Aid:	Bring pictures of Kings and/or Bishops in their ceremonial dress

Values for Life

1. God's will might not always correlate to what we want
2. God may raises us to positions, but we must keep our hearts humble.
3. Always seek God’s will for our lives
4. The more we receive, the more that is demanded from us.

Preparation

Kings are crowned through elaborate coronation ceremonies. Each dynasty has a rightful heir to the throne. It is a great honor to be a king but also much responsibility. The Mar Thoma church has a long process in selecting our bishops. Once a bishop is elected, he is consecrated with honor and glory, as well as much prayer. They are consecrated to guide the church.

During the time of Samuel, the people had become dissatisfied. Samuel’s sons were bad Judges. The people saw that other nations had kings and so they cried out for their own. In today's lesson we are going to learn how God anointed Saul as their king.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Israelites demand for a king

The elders approached Samuel at Ramah and asked, "Appoint us a king to judge us like all the nations." They said to him "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." (1 Samuel 8:5) Samuel was disappointed at the request but he prayed to the Lord.

The Lord said, "It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king." (1 Samuel 8:7) The Lord told Samuel to listen to them but to first warn them about the consequences.

The king who was to reign over them would take their sons and make them serve him and his household. Their daughters would have to wait on the king's household. He would take their best fields, vineyards and olive groves and give it to his attendants. Saul is chosen. They would regret for asking for a king in the first place. (1 Sam; 8:11-18) The people refused to listen to Samuel and insisted on a king to reign over them.

Saul is Chosen

Samuel prayed and God led him to Saul. Saul, son of Kish, belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was a tall and handsome man. (1 Samuel 9:2) Saul sees Samuel, on his way to find donkeys that had gone astray. (1 Samuel 9: 1-9). God's choice of Saul

was revealed to Samuel a day earlier (1 Samuel 9: 15-18). Samuel anoints Saul as king of Israel, giving him full assurance that God would always be with him.

Saul came from very humble beginnings. It does not appear that Saul was in any position of honor or trust till he was chosen as the King of Israel. Most people had to work for years to garner any influence but Saul was suddenly elevated to the seat of power. Saul was married and had grown-up children yet lived in his father's house and was subject to him (1Sam. 9:3). Promotion does not come by chance or human probabilities, but by God's grace.

Saul is Anointed

Saul became king of Israel by divine appointment, in private. Samuel anointed Saul with olive oil. Even though Saul lived in Gibeah, not far away from Ramah where Samuel lived, Saul probably did not know Samuel. Saul had always lived away from public eye and had taken so little notice of public affairs that he had never seen Samuel before (1 Sam 9:18)

The anointing of Saul signified the conferring of gifts upon him that were essential for the discharge of his duties connected to his office. God qualifies those he calls, which is good proof of his commission.

By kissing him, Samuel assured Saul of his own approval of the choice. He not only expressed his consent to it but also his complacency in it. It is important to realize that by anointing Saul, Samuel's power was curtailed and his glory and the glory of his family was eclipsed. "God has anointed thee to be king" said Samuel. It was a kiss of respect and allegiance.

Samuel reminds Saul of three things.

- He reminds him of the nature of the great position to which he is called. He is anointed to be the ruler of people. Kingship is of great power and honor. His decisions affect a whole nation.
- He reminds him of the origin of his kingship (1 Samuel 10:1). It is the Lord that has anointed him. Whatever he does as king must be for glory of the Lord.
- Samuel reminds him of the end of Kingship. He should be very careful of this authority. He must take care of it, protect it and manage it as it is God given. Even though he is King, he needs to submit to a higher authority and be accountable to Him.

“God changed Saul's heart” and “the Spirit of God came upon him in power” (1 Sam. 10:9, 10). God strengthens those who are chosen.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Make a list of our Bishops.
2. How was Saul chosen to become King of Israel?
3. How was Samuel unselfish when he anointed Saul?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Saul had a sudden elevation to kingship. He was an extremely humble man. He hid himself among the baggage when Samuel searched for him. We must always be

ready to hear God's calling. It is also important to respect and support those who God has put in positions of authority. As Samuel called upon the Lord, we must look to Him for guidance in support in difficult times.

Life Response

Let us pray for God's guidance in our lives. We may think we are inadequate but God will strengthen those he chooses to do his work.

Memory Verse

But you are a chosen people, a royal priest hood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9

Prayer

Thank you Lord for your care on each of us. Thank you, for you are a God who looks at the heart. Keep us close to you and lead us in your path, which is pure, and without malice. Amen.

Chapter – 18 The Holy Spirit – The Counselor

Theme : The Fullness of Life In Jesus Christ
Aim : To study about the work of the Holy Spirit that controls the universe
Bible Reading : John 14:15-26; John 16:7-14; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

Values for Life

1. The Holy Spirit is as real as God and Jesus
2. The Holy Spirit is at work in the world and in individuals
3. The Holy Spirit serves a variety of functions
4. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God given to those who ask God

Preparation

Many people know that the Holy Spirit is part of the Trinity (God and Jesus being the other two members), but think that the Holy Spirit first shows up in the New Testament. Actually, the Holy Spirit makes an appearance in the Bible right at the beginning when God created the world.

“Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters,”

Genesis 1:2

Clearly, the Holy Spirit has been around for ages...but what is it? And what can the Holy Spirit do for you?

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Names and Symbols for the Holy Spirit:

Throughout the Bible, the Holy Spirit is called by different names and shown by various symbols. Here are a few examples:

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Genesis 1:2 | Spirit of God |
| 2. John 14: 26, 15:26 | The comforter |
| 3. 2 Corinthians 3:3 | Spirit of the Living God |
| 4. John 14:17 | Spirit of Truth |
| 5. John 14:26 | The helper |
| 6. Romans 8:9 | God’s spirit |
| 7. Romans 8:9 | Christ’s spirit |
| 8. John 1:32 | A dove |
| 9. John 7:38 | Water |
| 10. 1 Samuel 16:13 | Oil |
| 11. Acts 2:3 | Fire |
| 12. John 3:8 | Wind |

As you can see, the Holy Spirit has a lot of different names! This is because the Holy Spirit serves many different functions in both the Bible and at present.

What has the Holy Spirit done?

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit helped Samson defeat some of Israel’s enemies (Judges 14:19). In Psalms 51:11, King David acknowledges that it is the Holy Spirit that enabled

him to perform great feats and lead the nation of Israel. The Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah and Ezekiel, were led by the Holy Spirit to deliver God's message to the Israelites, even when it wasn't good news. Perhaps one of the most well-known stories of the Holy Spirit is the Day of Pentecost.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, his disciples gathered together on the day of Pentecost. Suddenly, a violent wind swept through the house they were in and "tongues of fire" came down on each of them. Immediately, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other tongues so that all of the foreigners gathered in Jerusalem were able to hear the message of Jesus in their own language (Acts 2:1-13)!

What does the Holy Spirit do today?

Today, one of the most important things that the Holy Spirit does is reveal Jesus to us. Whether it's by revealing scriptures, working miracles, or simply opening eyes, the Holy Spirit shows each willing person his/her sin and allows them to accept Jesus as his/her savior.

Once a person has accepted Jesus, the Holy Spirit continues to live inside each believer. It's the Holy Spirit that helps you keep your eyes on your own path in the middle of the most important test of your life even when you feel like you're failing miserably. It's the Holy Spirit that helps you keep your mouth shut or walk away when you hear other people gossiping. It's the Holy Spirit that helps you make the right decision when the wrong decision is so much easier or more fun. In effect, it's the Holy Spirit that makes you a Christian and live as a Christian.

The Fruit of the Holy Spirit

In Galatians 5:22-23, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are called fruits. These fruits- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control- are available to all followers of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Now, that doesn't mean that you won't get irritated or angry ever again in your life but it does mean that if you spend time with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will work in your life and refine you into someone more like Christ.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

This activity works best if the purpose is not explained until after the game is finished and all students have had a chance to participate.

For this activity, the teacher will need to blow up one balloon (preferably different colors) for every student.

- Line up students in a row (against a wall)
- Give each student a balloon and have them hold the balloon on their heads.
- During the game, each student must hold their hands behind their backs.
- On the signal to start, they are to let go of the balloons and place their hands behind their backs while keeping their individual balloons aloft by blowing on them.
- The object of the game is to get your balloon to the other side of the room (in as straight a line as possible).
- Once each student has had a turn, have the students return to their seats with their balloons.
- The teacher should explain to the students that the balloons represent themselves and they themselves are the Holy Spirit trying to direct believers towards the goal of sanctification.

Discuss:

- How easy/difficult was it to get the balloons across the room in a straight line?
- How similar or not similar is this game to the Holy Spirit working on believers?
- What makes it difficult to be obedient to the Holy Spirit?
- What are some strategies students can use to help them be obedient to the Holy Spirit?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

From the Bible, we can see the amazing things the Holy Spirit has done for the people of God. The Holy Spirit is still at work today in Christ's church and individual believers. Spend some time this week talking to God about how the Holy Spirit can work in your life. If you are uncertain as to whether or not you have the Holy Spirit, read Luke 11:13 and ask God for the gift of His Spirit.

Life Response

Let us pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance in our lives. May the Spirit work within us so that God's will be done. In this way, let us achieve the fullness of life in Christ.

Memory Verse

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 16:13

Prayer

Father God,

Thank you that we are blessed to be loved by you. Even after letting your Son die for our sins on the cross, you still sought to help us. Thank you, Father that we do not have to walk through this world alone. You have given us your Spirit who is always with those who have your Son in their hearts. Father, we pray that those who do not know your Son will be compelled by your Spirit to know him and that when you choose to use us, we will answer your Spirit's call.

Amen.

Chapter – 19 Victory through the Victor

Theme : Work of the Holy Spirit
Aim : To understand how God manifested His love through Jesus Christ
Bible Reading : Romans 8:31-39

Values for Life

1. God provides man's redemption and salvation through Jesus Christ
2. God will always abide in those that abide in Him
3. In Jesus, believers will find the strength to overcome trials and fears

Preparation

When asked who Jesus Christ is, one gets a variety of answers from different people. Here are a few answers:

1. The Son of God
2. A really, really, really famous carpenter
3. A prophet of the Jews
4. The Savior of man
5. A con-artist

Whatever answer people might give, chances are that most people you know have heard the name of Jesus Christ. Christianity believes that Jesus is choices 1 and 4 (with the possibility of 2 as well). The Bible also teaches that only through Jesus victory is possible.

Which raises the question: victory over what?

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Life and Ministry of Jesus

Back in the day, when the Romans ruled most of the world, in the tiny town of Bethlehem, a baby was born. This in itself was not surprising. What made this birth so astonishing is that he was born to a virgin and angels, kings and shepherds bowed before him. A king was trying to kill him so his father took his family to Egypt. Years later, when God gave them the signal, Jesus and his family moved back to the land of the Jews.

The Bible says Jesus "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52)" during his adolescence. At the age of 30, Jesus left his family and went out into the world to do God's work. In a 3 year ministry, Jesus did many things including miracles, teaching God's word, and dying for the world's sin.

It's this last thing that testifies to Jesus being the Son of God.

Jesus as the Victor

When Jesus was alive and even today, when people die, they don't come back to life. Not so with Jesus. As he promised his disciples (Matthew 20:18-19), Jesus, after being crucified and buried in a tomb, rose from the dead.

Essentially Jesus did what no person has ever been able to do ever- he beat death.

Victory through Jesus

Jesus is the ticket to victory over two major areas: spiritual death and everyday life.

The first, spiritual death is what happens when you do not accept Christ in your life. It is caused by the presence of sin without the cleansing blood of Jesus to cover it. And this means *all*

sins: things that we think that we shouldn't, things we do that we shouldn't, and everything in between. The Bible tells us that all men sin and from your own life. I'm sure you know this is true. That's why we need someone else, a Savior, to give us victory over spiritual death.

Victory over spiritual death comes by simply doing the following:

1. Acknowledging that you are sinner and accepting that nothing you can do will ever be good enough to earn you a spot in heaven.
2. Proclaiming that Jesus died on the cross for *your* sins and accepting that gift
3. Accepting God's forgiveness and believing that you are saved through Christ

After taking that first step and conquering spiritual death, Jesus can help us conquer everyday life and everyday sin. Being a Christian is tough. In fact, it's virtually impossible- if you try to go alone. Luckily, Jesus knew that we need help, so he promised to send a helper, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17).

It's the Holy Spirit that lives inside every person that has given his/her life to Christ and provides guidance and direction. Moreover, God promises that he will always be there for us and that nothing will separate us from His love (Romans 8: 31-39).

Now, this doesn't mean that it'll always be smooth sailing but it does mean we'll never have to go at it alone.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. How do we know that we are really going to heaven?
2. What happens to all the people that were alive before Jesus was ever born? What about all those people that die before they ever hear about Jesus?
3. What are some areas in your life where you want Christ to give you victory?
4. Why does that argument that 'good people deserve to go to heaven' not stand up?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Jesus is the answer to all life's questions. He did what no person had and will ever do: He conquered death. We must ask for the Holy Spirit to guide our lives. We don't have to face life's trials by ourselves. We must acknowledge that we are sinners, proclaim that Jesus died for you and accept God's forgiveness by believing in Jesus Christ.

Life Response

Just as a marathon runner needs a good pair of shoes to win a race so we need Jesus to win the race of life. Take some time to reflect on your relationship with Jesus. Do you have victory in Jesus? Will you spend eternity in heaven? Does the Holy Spirit live in you?

Memory Verse

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Romans 8:37

Prayer

Father God, Thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you that Jesus is our sin offering and that through him we can be with you. Lord, help us to walk in your Spirit and love others as Jesus did. Lord, we ask that anyone here that does not know Jesus as their Savior will seek you in their heart. Amen

Chapter – 20 From Slavery to Brotherhood

Theme: Commitment to Jesus Christ
Aim: To understand that fellowship with Jesus Christ is essential to live in fellowship with others
Bible Reading: Philemon

Values for Life

1. Slavery is a social evil.
2. Onesimus in prison from the house of his master Philemon.
3. Paul requests Philemon to pardon Onesimus and accept him.
4. God's love urges us to pardon the wrong doers.

Preparation

- What does it mean to be a slave?
- Do you know if slavery still exists in today's society?
- How does a person become a slave?

Slavery has been in practice in many cultures throughout history. It was more prominent during the time of the Roman Empire. Under Roman law, a slave was a person (male or female) owned by another. A slave had no rights and was put in place of as mere possession of his master. If a slave ran away or stole something, it was a crime that was punishable by death. A person who was considered a slave could be used and disposed off in whatever way the owner wished.

Back in the day, there was a way in which a slave could be pardoned for his transgressions. An individual could intercede for the slave to be reinstated. A letter, such as the one we will read for today's lesson, is an example of such an intervention and the letter is addressed to Philemon. In today's lesson we will learn about Paul, a disciple who writes a letter on behalf of Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Who was Paul?

Paul was a great Christian teacher and disciple of Jesus Christ. He was in prison in Rome or Ephesus when he writes the letter to Philemon. Paul was in prison because he taught people about Jesus Christ. This letter is considered the first prison epistle. While Paul was in prison, he received a visitor named Onesimus, a runaway slave. Paul writes the letter on behalf of this runaway slave.

Who was Philemon?

Philemon was a Christian who lived in the town called Colossae. Philemon had become a Christian because Paul had taught him about Christ. Philemon was a person of noble stature and great wealth. Being a Christian, he knew the ways of God. Philemon's house was large enough to serve as a meeting place for the church. (v.2). Philemon owned several slaves and he was among the few slave-owners among the Colossian believers. (Col 4:1)

Who is Onesimus?

Onesimus was Philemon's slave, who ran away. He may have either robbed or in some way wronged his master Philemon and thus escaped. He made his way from Colossae to Rome where he found safety among the masses in the city. In his travel he came across Paul who was imprisoned at the time. Eventually Paul led him to Christ (v.10). A strong affection grew between Paul and Onesimus. After Onesimus converted, he had the realization that to return to his master after committing this crime would be detrimental for his life. Paul did not legally own him and he had a responsibility to return Onesimus to Philemon. So Paul writes a letter and decided to send the letter along with Onesimus through a bearer named Tychicus to Colossae. (Colossians 4:7-9; Philemon v 12). Paul knew that it would be safer for Onesimus to be accompanied back home because there were slave traders on their journey.

The book of Philemon in parts:

- In verses 1-3
 - Paul opens his letter saying that he is a prisoner of Christ.
 - He addresses Timothy, Philemon, Apphia and Archippus (Apphia is believed to be Philemon's wife and Archippus their son)
- In verses 4-7
 - Paul addresses Philemon's love and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and to all the people.
 - Paul informs Philemon his great love and appreciation in knowing him.
- In verse 8-20
 - Paul approached Philemon through the love of Christ speaking of Philemon's love and goodness.
 - Paul addresses Onesimus as his beloved brother.
 - Paul desired to have Onesimus remain in Rome with him to aid him in his gospel ministry, but Paul could not retain Onesimus without Philemon's consent.
 - He then proceeds to ask Philemon to accept Onesimus' plea for forgiveness. Paul appeals on behalf of Onesimus, who formerly was useless to Philemon, but who is now useful to both Paul and Philemon
 - Paul also states that if Onesimus owes Philemon anything, then to charge that amount to Paul's account.
 - Paul then continues to say that it would refresh and renew the strength and faith in Christ to see Philemon forgive Onesimus.
- In his closing of the letter, verses 21-25
 - Paul reminds Philemon that it is under Paul's ministry that Philemon was converted.
 - Paul shows confidence in Philemon when he makes a request for lodging at his house when Paul is released from imprisonment.
 - He tells Philemon that he desires to be released unto him and wishes grace and peace upon Philemon.

Who were slaves? Accounts of Slavery in the Bible:

1. Captives in war were made slaves. Gen. 14:21; Num. 31:9; Deut. 20:14; 21:10.
2. Slaves could be purchased from their owners Gen 17:12; 13:27. They could be sold like merchandise from one country to another. Gen. 37:36;39:1
3. Children born to slave parents were slaves. Gen.17:12; 13:27
4. If a convict could not pay compensation, he could sell himself as a slave. Ex. 22:3.
5. Debtors who went bankrupt were often forced to sell their children as slaves, or were taken away by the creditor. 2 Kings. 4:1
6. Selling oneself voluntarily into slavery to escape poverty was common. Lev. 25:39-43.
7. People were kidnapped and sold as slaves. But this was an offense punishable by death. Ex.21:16; Deut.24:7. Joseph's brothers were guilty of such an offense. Gen.37:27-28.

Slavery in the Bible:

Slavery under the Hebrews was not very severe. No Hebrew could become permanently the slave to another Hebrew because he can be free when he pays the debt for which he was sold. It was also true that in the seventh year of service he must be set free whether his debt was paid or not. Gentile slaves were mostly captives, purchased from regular slave-dealers. They could be freed only at the will of the master.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Who were slaves according to the bible?
2. What was the purpose of Paul's letter to Philemon?
3. How did Paul appeal to Philemon through his writing?
4. What did you learn from Paul's letter about forgiveness?
5. How is one supposed to forgive another according to the teachings of Jesus?
6. How can you show that you can be a faithful servant for the Lord?
7. How can you bring to Christ those who are slaves to many evils?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Slavery was a way of life during the early years of the United States. By 1850, two-thirds of slaves in the United States were involved in the production of cotton. During the civil war, President Abraham Lincoln made slavery illegal in the confederate territories with the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. 13th amendment finally abolished slavery entirely in 1865. We must realize that God's love goes beyond the boundary lines of caste, creed, race, culture and religion. All of us are seen as equals and are one in Christ.

Life Response

God tells us to believe and have faith in him. He teaches us to forgive and forget the transgressions of others because we ask him to forgive and forget our transgressions. His son came down to cleanse us of our sins. He was a pure being with no sin, which with his own will took upon our sins and died on the cross for us. We must try to live the life that Jesus lived and in our actions we must strive to show Jesus. In our daily life we must

strive to show compassion and teach others about love. Like Paul we must be concerned with the expression of Christian love through forgiveness.

Memory Verse

“Formerly, he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and me”

Philemon v 11

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for dieing on the cross for us. We ask Lord that you teach us to be forgiving just as you showed us by sending your son to take away our sins. We pray that you will be with all those who are suffering and in pain. Father we pray that you use us for your purpose and your will. In Jesus name we pray. Amen!

Part V God's Work Among God's People

Chapter – 21 *Let Us Rise Up and Build*

Theme : God's Work in History
Aim : To study how God calls us to fulfill the divine work in our community.
Bible Reading : Nehemiah 2:1-18

Values for Life

1. When we face difficulties, God paves the way from darkness to light.
2. When we work for the glory of God, we may be treated with contempt but our perseverance followed by ardent prayer helps us to succeed in what we do.
3. It is God's plan that His children will not fail in their encounter with Satan and his forces
4. Wherever we are, we should be productive members of the community in which we live.

Preparation

What is the significance of August 15?

India became an independent country on August 15, 1947.

Do you know who was in the forefront of the freedom struggle? Mahatma Gandhi. He was the person to instill the spirit of freedom in the minds of the Indian people. He traveled all over India to motivate and mobilize the Independence Movement.

In the history of Israel, we learn of a person named Nehemiah who worked for his people and nation. Today we are going to study about the person who helped the Israelites reconstruct the ruined part of the Jerusalem wall.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Nehemiah, the King's Cupbearer

Nehemiah was a bright young man of the Persian court. He was the Cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. This meant that he certified that the wine served to the king was safe. The cupbearer was also a confidant and counselor to the king. It was a dignified post and Nehemiah was always near the King. His official position as cupbearer made him well respected and influential.

Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king destroyed Jerusalem and took Israelites into exile in Babylon. When Cyrus, King of Persia, came to power in Babylon, he permitted the Israelites to go back to Jerusalem and build their temple (2 Chronicles 36:23-24). It was during this period that Nehemiah worked as the Cupbearer to the King in Susa, the capital city.

Ruined Wall

When Nehemiah was in Susa, the winter capital of the Persian kings, he received a delegation of Jews from Judah. They gave a dismal report of the state of affairs at Jerusalem. The walls and gates were in ruin and were not reconstructed. On hearing the miserable condition that Jerusalem had fallen into, Nehemiah fasted and prayed. His

prayer included confessions of past sin and an appeal to God to hear the prayer of God's servant.

Nehemiah was sad on hearing the condition of Jerusalem. He was gloomy in the presence of the King. The King asked him the reason for his despair. The King asked what Nehemiah's desire was and learned that he wanted to visit Jerusalem and see what he could do to rebuild it. Nehemiah asked boldly for permission to go and for letters of introduction to be given to various officials whose help he would require, as he started the reconstruction work.

Nehemiah before the King

Nehemiah reached Jerusalem after a long journey. He waited in Jerusalem for three days. He needed some rest. He wanted to make ceremonial visits to men of the King. Following these preliminary visits, he was ready to make a personal survey of the situation. He decided to do it by night in order to give no indication to his enemies to stir up trouble. He would probably have ridden on a mule to inspect the ruined walls. The various places mentioned - the valley gate, dragon well and dung port – had been for ages matters of dispute among archaeologists.

Nehemiah at Jerusalem: Taking stock of the situation

Nehemiah got all the leaders together and told them of the information he gathered and urged them to unite in a great effort to rebuild the city walls to protect themselves from their enemies. He exhorted them to “rise up and build”.

The enemies whom he must now confront were Samballat (a Samaritan), Tobiah (from Ammon) and Geshum (an Arabian). These opponents were a group of mixed nationalities, but possibly likely to be enough to stir up trouble. In the face of danger Nehemiah set up certain measures to defend those who worked on rebuilding the wall. Armed men were placed among the laborers. The workers themselves labored hard with one hand while holding a weapon in the other. A special alarm system was set up to rally the people to any place of attack along the wall. He also ordered the people outside the city to come within its walls in the event of an attack by the enemy. As a leader of the people, he set an example of devoted service and hard work (Chapter 4). His motivating power and organization skills helped him to get the co-operation of the people. As a result, the rebuilding of Jerusalem was able to be completed within 50 days.

The Renewal of the Jews

Nehemiah not only brought about the rebuilding of Jerusalem but the renewal of the Jews. He made a list of the clans of Israel, with the number of those from each clan that returned from exile. But those who did not have pure blood were not considered. He asked people to be loyal to the Temple of Jerusalem and the Holy Book 'Torah'. Mixed marriages were prohibited.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What are the responsibilities of a “Cupbearer”?
2. What measures did Nehemiah institute in order to protect the laborers?
3. Which King destroyed Jerusalem and who allowed the Israelites to go back?

4. How can we be productive members of our society?
5. If your church disappeared :
 - Would the local community realize that it was gone?
 - What could the church do to help the local community and ensure that it was an integral part of it?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Nehemiah's abiding faith in the Lord, his prayerful life and his dedication to the cause for which he was called, enabled him to carry out his work successfully. God, in His divine purpose calls each and every one of us to be co-workers with Him. Do we listen to his call? Do we have the desire to be His co-workers? Are we bold enough to ask for assistance in order to do God's will?

Life Response

Let us strive to do God's will. Let us work to rebuild his kingdom. Are you willing to work for his glory?

Memory Verse

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."

Nehemiah 2:17

Prayer

Father, we thank you for all the blessings you showered in our lives. Help us to fulfill your will through our lives. Though difficulties may arise, help me see your light and work through them. In your name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 22 Man and Woman – Co-workers with God

Theme : Wider Fellowship
Aim : To study about the equal partnership of man and woman in Christian ministry
Bible Reading : Romans 16:1-16; Galatians 3:26-29

Values for Life

1. To understand the status of women during the Old and New Testaments
2. To know that Jesus Christ loved and respected women
3. To recognize that women played a key role in the early church
4. To realize that God wants man and woman to enjoy equal status

Preparation

Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the most influential first ladies of the United States, committed her life for achieving gender equality. She was elected chairperson of the United Nations Human Right Commission (1946) and helped to draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Jesus interacted with men, as well as women. Mary and Martha of Bethany were very good friends of Jesus. Another instance is that of Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman. It was a time when women were not of equal status with men. As we turn through the pages of history, we can see many instances where God used women to do his work. God used Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India to help the poor. Both men and women are co-workers with God.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Women in the History of Israel

Before the Babylonian exile in 587/586 B.C., women in Israel enjoyed a status comparable to that of men. Even though Israel lived in a patriarchal world, its society reflected a faith that recognized women to be equal in the eyes of God. Women were understood (in the 10th century B.C) to be a necessary complement of men in mutual companionship (Genesis 2:18; Matthew 2:14). This is evident by the great women in the Old Testament pre-exile.

Name	Position	Passage
Miriam	Prophetess	Exodus 15:20
Huldah	Prophetess	2 Kings 22:14-22
Deborah	Prophetess and Judge	Judges 4,5
Jezebel	Queen	1 Kings 19
Athaliah	Queen	2 Kings 11

They were never excluded from the worship of God. For example, men and women were called together to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16:13, 14). However during and after the Babylonian period, women were treated as second class citizens. They were excluded from worship. Jesus, a revolutionary in His time, included women as a part of his ministry. St. Paul also affirmed this attitude by saying

“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27,28)

Women in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God had a team of men and women working together to make history. Adam and Eve were members of His first team. Here are some other men and women teams that worked with Him:

1. Miriam, Aaron and Moses were used to liberate the people of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 15:20, 21, Numbers 12:1-16)
2. Shiphrah and Puah were used by God to save the male Hebrew children (Exodus 1:5-20)
3. God used Rahab the prostitute and Joshua to inherit the Promised Land (Joshua 1:24)
4. Deborah was one of the Judges of Israel whom God used in his ministry (Judges 4:4-15)
5. Ruth and Boaz stand as an effective pair of people who were involved in the ministry of salvation (Ruth 4)
6. Esther and Mordecai were used by God to save his people from Haman’s cruel plan to kill the Israelites (Esther 4)

Women in the New Testament

In the New Testament, Mary and Joseph were used by God to be the earthly parents of Jesus. Paul had a number of female co-workers: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, and Julia to name a few (Romans 16:1-16). Jesus himself had a team of women disciples: Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Cuza, Susanna and many others (Luke 8:1-3).

Women played a leading role in the early Church (Acts 5:14). For example, after Philip preached the Good News both men and women were baptized (Acts 8:12). They also did acts of charity. Tabitha, a disciple, helped the poor (Acts 9:36). Women also suffered imprisonment for their faith (Acts 8:3, 9:1, 2). Women were known to prophesize (Acts 21:8, 9) and to teach others (Acts 18:25, 26)

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Name a few Prophetesses from the Old Testament.

2. Name some teams of men and women that did God’s work.

3. What role did women play in the early Church?

4. In Galatians 3:26-29, Discuss the following three aspects:
- How does one become a son of God? (v26)
 - Paul says that all are one in Christ, breaking down barriers between whom? (v28)
 - If you belong to Christ, who are you heirs of?(v29)

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Men and women are equals in today's society. They are equal partners in doing God's work in His world. We cannot think of a society without women. Worship becomes more meaningful when all God's creation, men and women worship together. We are all created in his image, male and female alike.

Does God have women disciples now? In the Mar Thoma Church there is the Sevika Sangham, an active organization providing services for the church and community. God needs a team of women and men to announce and bring good news to people in words and actions.

Life Response

Let us have a partnership, men and women, to execute the mission of our Church. Let us work together to spread the message of Jesus Christ to all we meet.

Memory Verse

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:27-28

Prayer

Father, we thank you for creating men and women. Help us to see each other as equals. Help us to work together for you and to share your love with others. In your name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 23 Salvation – God’s Gift

Theme : **Foundations of Faith**
Aim : **To study the meaning of salvation**
Bible Reading : **Ephesians 2:1-10**

Values for Life

1. Salvation is free through faith in Jesus Christ, not earned.
2. Repentance leads to salvation.
3. We come to feel that Jesus Christ has fulfilled His promise of salvation.
4. Salvation is possible only when we believe in Him and witness for Him

Preparation

Imagine that one day that you and your friends were in a candy store. Your friends pressured you into stealing some candy but you were caught by the owner. You were then arrested and brought to court to face the judge. Luckily, your father is a judge and was overseeing your case. After all the information was presented, your father determined that you were guilty. The penalty for stealing was a \$50 fine. You begin to tell your father how sorry you were and for letting him down. Your father comes from behind his desk and gives you \$50 to pay the fine.

Stop for second and now imagine that the punishment for stealing was death. You tell your father how sorry you are and if there is anything you can do to be spared. Your father says he is a just judge but the penalty must be paid. After being sentenced, your father comes down and walks away with the officers to pay the price of death instead of you.

From ancient times, human beings have believed in God and have worshipped Him. Various religions evolved out of the different teachings of a higher being. All religions aim at the concept of salvation. Of all the major religions, Christianity is the only one where God came down as man and was crucified so that humankind could be saved.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Repentance Leads to Salvation

As Christians, we have tremendous hope for the future. We have the gift that is given to us, the gift of repentance. What does repentance mean? It means to feel truly sorry for one’s wrong doings and to turn from one’s sins. It is only through repentance that we receive salvation, which is freely offered to us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation means “deliverance from dangers or evil”. It also means “deliverance from guilt and the power or penalty of sin” (Eze 36:29, Ps 34:6). When is it that we seek God’s deliverance? In times of trouble? Should we wait until the last hour to seek deliverance?

During the Gulf War, there was a prisoner of war from US Army who did not know how to pray. When he realized that things seemed hopeless and that he could be

killed at any moment, he cried for help to God. It is at this moment that he realized what prayer meant and this was the turning point of his life.

If we wait till the last hour to seek God's help, it might be too late. We may not get an opportunity to call upon God. God has offered us His salvation. It is a gift that He offers freely. How can we attain salvation? Repent. Repentance prepares a man for the pardoning of his sins. Only through faith in Jesus Christ are our sins forgiven by His grace.

Salvation

We all know the story of the prodigal son. After his misdoings, he was repentant. When he came back, his father pardoned him and received him whole heartedly. He was given the best clothing, shoes and ring was put on his finger. He was given everything he wanted. A great feast was arranged in his honor. The experience of salvation is quite the same (Luke 15:11-31).

We read in Luke 19:1-12 about another wealthy man whose name was Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and was known to the people as a sinner. People despised him. Jesus went to his house and stayed with him. Zacchaeus repented his sins, Jesus told him that he was forgiven and from that day salvation was bestowed on him.

How do we enjoy the gift of salvation? God sent His only begotten son to us. He lived here as one among us. He loved us so much that He died on the Cross for us. Thus he delivered us. The resurrected Christ promised us His presence (Mathew 28:20) and eternal life.

Here is a story that shows why God revealed Himself as a human being. One day a man was watching a sparrow making its nest. Each time, the sparrow went out to bring some leaves or hay as material to make its nest. The man felt sympathy for the bird and brought some hay and leaves and placed it near the nest. The sparrow was frightened at the sight of the man and flew away leaving its nest. If it were another sparrow that brought the materials, the bird would not have been frightened. This is the lesson we learn from the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Salvation only through Jesus Christ

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). Peter made this declaration before the Jewish leaders and the elders after receiving a vision of the resurrected Christ. Before the vision Peter told the frightened disciples to get back to fishing. But the vision strengthened him to make this declaration. Can we make this same declaration? In Romans 10:9 we read, “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” We must remember the Jesus paid the ultimate price. The wages of sin is death but through Christ Jesus we have life. Let us be part takers of this salvation bestowed on us by the grace of our Lord.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What is salvation?

2. How did Zacchaeus experience salvation?

3. What are the conditions for salvation?

4. Fill in the blanks
 - For it is by _____ you have been saved, through _____ —and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by _____, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9
 - _____ is found in no one else, for there is no other _____ under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

Bible Lesson for Our Times

It is important to realize that salvation is not earned but a gift from God. We must repent and turn away from our sin. We must proclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord and believe that his sacrifice was made to save us from the penalty of sin. His blood has washed our sins away so that we can be acceptable in the sight of God. We have new life because of the sacrifice of Christ. Let us walk forward in life with the confidence that Jesus is Lord and that he paid our price.

Life Response

Let us repent from our sinful ways and acknowledge the sacrifice God made through Jesus. When we have the understanding of salvation, we can lead others also to this wonderful experience.

Memory Verse

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8, 9

Prayer

Father, we thank you for giving us salvation through your son Jesus Christ. Lord, forgive me of my sins and help me to turn away from them. Help me to experience your salvation. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 24 Discrimination-Hindrances to God’s Work

Theme :	Hindrances to God’s Work
Aim :	To study how we have to overcome all kinds of discrimination within our communities.
Bible Reading :	Acts 10

Values for Life

1. God reveals to those who are faithful.
2. The vision of Peter and Cornelius.
3. All are equally important to God

Preparation

Who are some of the peers in your school that you find difficult to get along with? Do you keep away from them on the basis of religion, race or financial status? God does not want us to have this type of attitude. God created all human beings in this world as equals.

There is discrimination all around us in our society. Whether it is based on race, economic class, or gender, discrimination and pride are hindrances to doing God’s work. It is unfortunate that we encounter discrimination even within our Church. We should try our best to eradicate discrimination from our society. We must emphasize a ‘oneness’ in Christ, irrespective how different a person is. We should love our neighbor as ourselves, not just those neighbors that look or act like us. Today we are going to learn about Peter, a Jew, who accepted a Gentile into the community of believers.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Discrimination – Historical

Cornelius was a Roman centurion of Caesarea in Palestine, who belonged to a class of families known as ‘God fearer’ because of their attachment to Jewish religious practices. The city of Caesarea was the beautiful seaport rebuilt by Herod the Great, in honor of Augustus. Cornelius was a Roman citizen but was deeply impressed by the Jewish religion. He was the first gentile convert of Christianity. His whole house (family members including slaves) believed in the one true God, and his family members regularly attended service in the synagogue. He also gave to the poor and prayed regularly. Cornelius had a vision from God that told him to bring Peter from Joppa to his home.

Discrimination – In God’s View

Peter also had a vision. The simultaneous visions of Peter and Cornelius were not mere coincidences according to Luke. Each vision emphasized and clarified the other. Peter saw in his vision a certain vessel descending from heaven, a great sheet knit at the four corners containing all sorts of four-footed beasts of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, fowl of the air and asking Peter to eat. But when Peter refuses to eat because he thinks it is unclean a voice says, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” (Verse 15) This happened 3 times.

3. How does our community discriminate? What can we do to put an end to such discrimination?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We must not discriminate against anyone. It is important to remember that the same God who also created us, also created all people on this earth. We must reserve judgment to God. Our duty is to treat everyone with respect and help all those who need it, regardless of race, religion and economic status. We are all different but created equal in the sight of God.

Life Response

Let us work to stop discrimination. Whether it is in our schools, church or family, we must be an example and share God's love with everyone irrespective of their outward appearance.

Memory Verse

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.
Acts 10:34-35

Prayer

Father, we thank you for giving us life. Lord, forgive me of my sins of discrimination and help me to turn away from such hate. Help me spread your love to all whom I meet. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 25 Facing With Courage

Theme :	Response to Hindrances in God’s Work
Aim:	To show that a true Christian is courageous even in the face of death
Bible Reading:	Acts 6:8-15 & Acts 7:1-60

Values For Life

1. Stephen, who was chosen to look after the distribution of the funds, was full of the Holy Spirit and faith.
2. Stephen faced hindrance in God’s ministry
3. The courage to face and overcome difficulties is a wonderful experience in Christian faith.
4. Believe and Pray- the answer is sure.

Preparation

- What does it mean to stand up for God?
- How can one become witnesses for God’s work?
- Can you name others in the Bible who were persecuted for their faith and belief in Christ Jesus?

As Christians we are asked to follow Jesus’ way of living and teachings. It is sometimes hard to lead a Christian life because of the trial and difficulties we face in our day to day lives. We face many problems in our life that can lead us astray. In many countries it is forbidden to read the Bible or believe in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but yet people still go forth and spread the word of God. Many are persecuted and many are killed because of their faith. Let us now look into the Bible and learn about Stephen who was persecuted for his faith and his belief by the Jewish people of that time.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Who was Stephen?

Stephen was a courageous disciple, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit. He was one of the seven men who were appointed to look after the distribution of funds in the early church (Acts 6:1-6). The need for these people came because of the complaints of the Greek speaking Jews called the Hellenists. They complained that the widows were not receiving their fair share of the relief. Thus Stephen and the others were elected to issue equal distribution of the relief.

The Conspiracy

Stephen’s ministry did not only benefit the poor people but all people who listened. He did great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose from those in the Synagogue of the freed men. They began to argue with Stephen but they could not stand against his wisdom or the spirit which led him to speak. So they secretly persuaded some men to say they heard Stephen speak lies against Moses and against God. They seized him and brought forth false witnesses who testified that they heard him

speak against the laws of the Holy place. They testified that they heard Stephen speak, “Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs that Moses handed down to us” (Acts 6:14).

Let us divide the passage in three sections

1. *Acts Ch 6: 8-15*

Committed Christians

Stephen was a committed man and the Jews did not accept him or his beliefs. They refused to accept him because they were envious of his wisdom. They felt belittled and threatened by his presence. They plotted against him and a conspiracy arose to demolish him and his teachings.

A Thought to Ponder

What would happen if the people believed the teachings of Stephen?

The Jewish laws and the bearers of the Law would be disgraced and people would not follow their way of thinking. Jesus did not come to diminish the laws of Moses, but he came to uphold the laws with his teachings of Love and Forgiveness. His teachings were of an active love for one another.

2. *Acts Ch. 7:1-53*

Courage of Stephen

Stephen in his speech speaks of God’s glory and how it impacted the lives of many of their forefathers. He speaks of Abraham and how God through trials and tribulations, enabled Abraham to persevere. He also speaks of Abraham’s faith in God and his promise which God made with Abraham. A covenant was made between God and Abraham which was the covenant of circumcision. Then Stephen continues to speak of the famine which struck Egypt and Canaan and it was through Joseph, that the house of Jacob survived the famine.

Stephen continues to go down the lineage of events that shaped the lives of the people. He spoke of the Egyptian King after Joseph who oppressed their forefathers. But by the grace of God, a deliverer was born named Moses. Moses was given the privilege to be raised not as an ordinary child, but as a prince in the house of Pharaoh. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of Egypt and was powerful in speech and action. Stephen speaks of how God revealed to Moses of the oppression of his people. After the 40 years, God appeared to him within burning bush. God chose him as the deliverer of God’s people. Stephen continues to speak of the wonders and miracles that God did to deliver his people through his servant Moses. Even in the midst of miracles and wonders there was trials and weaknesses, but God still saved his people.

Then Stephen proceeds to speak about how the Jewish people rebelled against the will of God. He spoke of all that God had done for the Jews and yet they were not adhering to the teachings of his word. Towards the end of his speech, he calls the people “Stiff necked with uncircumcised ears and hearts’ accusing them of resisting the Holy Spirit. Stephen described the Jews who were listening to his speech as being stubborn people, deaf to God’s message and also the people who did not obey God’s law though it

Bible Lesson for Our Times

In today's society there are so many temptations, but through prayer God calls us to be strong and courageous. It is also through the Holy Spirit that the Lord God guides us to do his will. We must pray continually that the Holy Spirit will guide us to witness for God and spread the Good News. The Spirit will help you to face whatever difficulties that may cause you to stumble in your walk with God. Stephen was a faithful and prayerful man. Let us follow his example.

Life Response

God tells us to believe and have faith in him. He teaches us to pray and ask for his guidance when we are faced with struggles. It is through God we are given courage to face the battles which we have to fight each day of our lives. As Christians, we have a duty, a responsibility to practice and spread the word of God. In many countries it is considered a crime to believe in God and so they are put to death for their beliefs. Christians have been persecuted for hundreds and hundreds of years and it still goes on even today.

Memory Verse

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him”

Philippians 1:29

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this life you have given us. We thank you for your son who died on the cross at Calvary for our sins. Help us Lord to be strong and courageous to witness and spread your word. We pray for those of your servants who minister your word and yet are being persecuted. We pray for them. In Jesus name we pray Amen.

Part VI Our Mission in God's World

Chapter – 26 Prayer - Power for Our Mission

Theme : Personal Values
Aim : To show the importance of prayer in our life
Bible Reading : Mathew 6:5-15; Luke 11:1-4

Values for Life

1. The Lord's Prayer is an example for us to follow in our daily life.
2. Our prayers will eventually be answered, though sometimes late.
3. Prayer is essential for a successful life.

Preparation

We begin our day with prayer. Don't you do so? How many times do you pray each day? When do you pray? For what purpose do you pray? Wherever we are and whenever we desire, we can pray to God. God has given us the right to do so. Usually we pray when we are in trouble. God expects His people to pray in sorrow and in happiness. Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Today let us learn what prayer is, how we should pray and how to build up a life of prayer.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Prayer Builds up Relationship

When we pray, we come into close relationship with God. In the Bible, prayer is pictured as worship. In prayer we praise God, confess our sins before Him, and ask God to meet our needs. We pray to God because we have received Him in our life as our Lord and Savior. Sometimes the answer to our prayer may not be as we hoped.

Prayer and the Holy Spirit

Prayer is the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14:14-16). In the Old Testament there are 85 prayers besides the 60 prayers found in the Psalms. In sincere prayer, we surrender ourselves to the will of God. Such prayers will be answered (John 14:13, Mark 11:24). Some like to pray in public. Public prayer is essential because it is all inclusive. But public prayer is not enough. We must have personal prayer. We come to God with as much simplicity and innocence as a child comes to his/her father.

How to Pray

Jesus taught His disciples about prayer (Mat 6:5-8). In response to the request of the disciples, Jesus taught them how to pray (Mat 6:9-15, Luke 11:2-4). This is known as the Lord's Prayer. This prayer can be meaningfully uttered only by a true disciple. The first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer suggest the glory of God. The next three petitions are related to our needs. We pray for our daily food, we pray for the forgiveness of the sins we commit every day, and pray for safe-guarding us from temptations. In this beautiful prayer, we surrender our whole self to God.

4 Does God always answer our prayers? Why or why not?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

The Lord's Prayer is a starting point in our prayer life. Here is another way to pattern your prayer.

A – Adoration (Praise God for who He is. Acknowledge Him as the Almighty.)

C – Confession (Acknowledge your sins before God)

T – Thanksgiving (Thank God for all that He has given you.)

S – Supplication (To ask God humbly for what you and others need.)

We must remember that prayer is a time of communication with our Father. We must come humbly to Him. He knows everything in our heart. It is a time to acknowledge His sovereignty over our life. Let it be a time of meditation and renewal.

Life Response

Let us learn from our Lord. Let us come humbly to His feet. Are we willing to kneel before Him quietly and speak to him? Are we willing to submit our life into his hands?

Memory Verse

"So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Luke 11:9-10

Prayer

Father, we thank you for our lives. We thank you for meeting all our needs. Please forgive us of our sins. Help us to forgive those hurt us. Let us look to you for guidance and strength. May Your will be done in our life. Amen.

Chapter – 27 Vision and Mission

Theme : Out Reach
Aim : To show that vision leads to mission
Bible Reading : Isaiah 6:1-13

Values for Life

1. To understand how people receive God's call
2. To learn how a vision from God is an eye opener
3. To see how Isaiah responds to God's call
4. To open our hearts and confess our dependence on him.

Preparation

From the beginning, we see how God dealt with individuals. First God spoke directly to people. Then he sent prophets and angels as His messengers.

Sadhu Sunder Singh was a high caste Hindu. He hated Christians, burnt bibles and persecuted Christians. One night, he had a vision in which he met Jesus face to face. He professed he was a Christian and his family threw him out of their home and village. He held his faith dear to his heart and became a great missionary of Jesus all over India, Nepal and Bhutan. He was a living witness.

We all know of the vision Paul had on his way to Damascus and his subsequent transformation. Once known to persecute Christians, he is now known as the Missionary to the Gentiles. Today we will look into the Old Testament into the life of Isaiah and learn of his vision.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Vision – A call from God

Isaiah was a Jewish Prophet of the 8th century B.C. The meaning of the word 'Isaiah' is 'Yahoveh is Salvation'. Isaiah, the son of Amos, belonged to the royal family. He was called to be a prophet in the year King Uzziah died. In Isaiah 6 we read about his visions of God, himself and society. Through these marvelous visions, he was called to be a prophet. He had already been a prophet for some time and this vision opened a new period in his ministry. This vision was of great importance because it was a guiding force in his ministry through out his prophetic mission.

Vision Involves Worship

Isaiah was in the temple of God when he fell into a spiritual trance. He saw God seated on a high throne, with His robe filling the whole temple. Isaiah saw Seraphs also in attendance. Each one had six wings, with two covering its face, two covering its feet and the other two used for flying, ready to do God's will. They were calling out to each other, "Holy, Holy, Holy! The Lord Almighty is Holy! His glory fills the world!" They chanted the glory of Jehovah. Such is God's majesty that even the Seraphs incessantly chanted His glory. At this, Isaiah became aware of his own uncleanness before the Lord.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

God needs people to preach and live a holy life in this corrupted world. The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few. Take it as a challenge and commit your life into the Almighty's hands. Humble yourself and submit to the Lord to be used for His mission.

Life Response

Let us praise our God for He is great. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord and become available for His mission.

Memory Verse

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

Isaiah 6:8

Prayer

Thank you for all the opportunities we have to learn your word. We commit our lives to your holy hands. Cleanse us that we may lead others to your cleansing stream. Help us to see us as a part in making this world a better place. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Chapter – 28 Family – God’s Purpose

Theme : Role of the Family
Aim : To study how God’s purpose is fulfilled through families
Bible Reading : Luke 1:5-26

Values for Life

1. To understand that our families are God's gift
2. To study how Zechariah and Elizabeth were a model couple
3. To understand that in a family, parents and children have their certain duties and responsibilities
4. To realize that God’s blessings will be on those families who put their trust in Him

Preparation

You probably heard the saying “A family that prays together stays together.” A body is made up of different parts- head, hand, legs, etc. Each part has a specialized role. In the same way a family is made up of different members – father, mother, son, daughter, etc. It is important to realize that each person has a different role as well. Today we will learn about a family who loved the Lord and what God expects from different members of a family.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The Plan and Purpose of God in Family

God has His own plans when He joins a man and woman together to create a family. They must know God’s purpose for them. They form a separate unit in fulfilling God’s purpose. When God gives them children, they must be brought up in the fear of the Lord.

Zechariah and Elizabeth, being from priestly families, were a faithful couple, observing all the Lord’s commandments. They were old but did not have any children. God sent Gabriel to Zechariah to let him know that Elizabeth was to give birth to a son. He would go on before the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah.

A son was born to the couple and they named him John. ‘John’ means “God is grateful.” He was filled with the Holy Spirit from his very birth. Zechariah and Elizabeth were given proper instructions on bringing up the child. His parents raised him in faith. It was through this upbringing that John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus.

Relations within a family are explained throughout the Bible. The Ten Commandments even gives reference to how children should treat their parents. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12) In the same way, parents have certain responsibilities toward their children. We read in Proverbs, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6) A parent’s love is very strong, sacrificing anything for the sake of their children. Parents struggle to provide a comfortable life for their children. Zechariah and Elizabeth lived good lives in God’s sight and obeyed all the Lord’s laws and commandments (Luke 1:6). That is why

Zechariah received the vision and the promise of God (Luke 1:11-13). John was brought up according to the laws of the Lord. Jesus says about John, “Among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than, John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

God in the Family

The apostle Paul gives instructions to parents as well as children on how to behave. Apostle Paul writes:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:1-4

Parents must love them and instruct their children in the ways of the Lord. By following these commandments, God’s purpose for each member of the family is fulfilled.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Who did God send to Zechariah to let him know that he was going to have a son? What did they say?

2. How is the name “John” appropriate to Zechariah and Elizabeth’s son?

3. What does Paul say about parents’ responsibility towards their children?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

Zechariah and Elizabeth provided a healthy spiritual family life in which John the Baptist grew in. Today parents are more concerned about the material comforts of their children than about their spiritual growth. It does not matter what you have or where you have been but where you are going. It is important that we recommit our lives to God’s purpose. By living in God’s light today, we are setting up a solid foundation for the rest of our life. .

Life Response

As children, let us respect our parents for this is the Lord's commandment. Let us follow their instructions and walk with the Lord. Let us uphold his commandments in our homes, schools and church.

Memory Verse

Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table.

Psalms 128:1-3

Prayer

O Lord, we thank you for our families. We thank you for our parents love and care. We especially thank you for your son, Jesus Christ. Help us to walk according to your ways. In your precious name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 29 The Purpose of Mission – God’s Glory

Theme : Lifestyle – Self-emptying
Aim : To study that the purpose of our life is to glorify Jesus Christ
Bible Reading : Mathew 3:1-12; John 1:29-34

Values for Life

To repent from our sinful nature
 To identify with the qualities of John the Baptist
 To use our opportunities for the glory of God

Preparation

The purpose of mission is the glory of God. In the last lesson we have learned that John the Baptist was the gift of God to an elderly couple Zechariah and Elizabeth. He dedicated himself to God leading a very pure life.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

John’s Mission

The prophecy in Isaiah 40:3-5 was fulfilled through John. John grew to manhood in the wilderness of Judea (Luke 1:80) where he received his call (Luke 3:2). His ministry is dated as the fifteenth year of the rule of the Emperor Tiberius; Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judea; Herod was ruler of Galilee and his brother Philip was ruler of the Territory of Iturea and Trachonities; Lysanias was ruler of Abilene and Annas and Caiaphas were High Priests (Luke 3:1-2). This would place the period around A.D. 27.

John would easily stand out in a crowd. John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey as food. His food was sweet, but his words were bitter. But these bitter words produced sweet results.

John’s Attitude

John’s attitude to the established order in Israel was one of condemnation. He said, “the axe is laid to the root of the trees”. He denounced the religious leaders as a “brood of vipers” and said that there was no meaning in their claim to be descendents of Abraham. He cautioned them to bear fruits that were consistent with repentance.

A New Beginning

The time had come to prepare the people for the coming Messiah. John knew that his mission was to “make straight the way for the Lord” (John 1:23). He was quite aware that he was the forerunner of Jesus and pretended to be nothing more than that.

John’s Ministry

John’s ministry was not confined to the Jordan valley alone. In John 3:23, we read that he left the Jordan valley for a while and conducted the ceremony of baptism in Aenon near Salim, where there was abundant water. At that time it was a Samaritan territory. After this ministry, John rebuked Herod for taking his brother Philip’s wife Herodias as his own wife. Subsequently, John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Mathew 14:1-2).

5 What was John's mission?

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We must each work to glorify God through our lives. We must repent from our sinful ways and seek strength from Jesus Christ. We must humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord. We must listen more closely to the will of God and less to our own desires. We must learn to be bold in order stop the injustice around us. It is important that we ask God for his guidance that we may live a life that is acceptable to him.

Life Response

Let us make a pledge to use our lives for God's glory. Let us use the talents that God gave us to do his will. Let us repent and turn away from the sin that binds us.

Memory Verse

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.
1 Peter 4:11

Prayer

Father, I thank you for my precious life. Lord, forgive my sins. Help me to repent and turn away from my sinful nature. May I glorify you through my life. In your name we pray, Amen.

Chapter – 30 Mission – Living For Others

Theme : Service
Aim : To understand that Jesus Christ is the Good shepherd
Bible Reading : John 10:1-18

Values for Life

1. To understand the qualities of a good shepherd
2. To identify Jesus Christ as our good shepherd
3. To realize that each one of us has a calling and a mission

Preparation

Father Damien was a missionary from Belgium who started his work in the Hawaii islands. Many tried to discourage him but he was firm in his decision. There were many lepers at the time in Hawaii. They were deported to the Island of Molokoi. Father Damien had much sympathy for these outcasts of society. They were in miserable condition – sores all over their bodies, some missing limbs. Father Damien cared and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ with them. After sixteen years of service with the lepers, he was diagnosed with leprosy. Not disheartened, he continued his service until his eventual death. Father Damien was the first to start missionary work among the lepers. Father Damien is one of the best examples of a disciple of our Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ who laid down his life for us.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Shepherds in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the Israelites were blessed with cattle. A person's status was measured by the amount of cattle. The shepherds used to travel from one place to another with their cattle finding new pastures. Their life was so unsafe that they had to often fight with wild animals in order to safeguard their herd. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and David were all shepherds. The Israelites used the image of a good shepherd to describe God. His chosen people, the Israelites, and people all over the world were His sheep.

The Qualities of a Good Shepherd

For a good shepherd, his sheep are more important than himself. There is a very close relationship between the shepherd and his sheep. They know his voice. He walks in front of the sheep to see if there is any danger of wild animals or dangerous terrain. He leads them to good pastures. In contrast, a hired shepherd doesn't have these special qualities. His concern is for himself, running away when wild animals approach.

Shepherd and the Sheep

God chose Moses and David as leaders of the Israelites. They were very good shepherds. Through them God, the Big Shepherd, wanted to lead people. In Psalms 23, the close relationship between the shepherd and his sheep is described. Though God, the good shepherd wanted to lead His people, they went astray.

Bible Lesson for Our Times

We must look to our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ for direction and help. We must learn to hear his voice in our daily lives. Our lives may become overshadowed by things around us. We may lose focus and become astray. He will lead us and give us rest. Rather than following our desires, we must follow the Shepherd who loves us enough to have given up His life for us. In turn, we need to share His love with other sheep we meet.

Life Response

Let us follow our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Let us care for and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

Memory Verse

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
John 10:11

Prayer

Father, I thank you for dying on the cross for me. I am sorry with all my heart for turning away from you. Lord, forgive my sins. Help me hear and listen to your voice. Use me to help others I come into contact with. In your name we pray, Amen.

Members of the Grade Seven Curriculum Committee

1. Rev. Koshy Mathew, NJ MTC
2. Mr. Tom Philip, Convener, St.Peters MTC
3. Mr. Samuel Abraham, St.Peters MTC
4. Mr. Sam Chakalamannil, NJ MTC
5. Ms.Shiny Kuruvilla, Philadelphia, MTC
6. Ms.Reni John, St.Peters MTC
7. Ms.Ancy Samuel, St.Peters MTC
8. Mrs.Grace Thomas, St.Peters MTC