

Mar Thoma Sunday Schools

Diocese of North America & Europe



Curriculum

BEING GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S WORLD

Grade Nine

(Samjam Curriculum -Intermediate Vol. III)

Published By
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2006



MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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

Foreword

Dearly beloved in Christ,

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

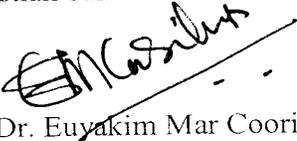
The overall theme is “Being God’s People in God’s World”

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

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

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

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



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



MAR THOMA SUNDAY SCHOOL DIOCESE OF NORTH AMERICA & EUROPE

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

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

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

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

Thomas Koshy
Secretary (2002-2005)

M.C.Varghese
Secretary (2005-2008)

July 5, 2006

Mar Thoma Sunday School
Diocese of North America & Europe

Notes to Teachers on Teaching in 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:** This is the body of the lesson. A few ideas are presented, one in each paragraph.
Main Ideas:
10. **Bible Learning:** The ‘how’ of teaching is covered here. The methods of teaching differ for each grade or age group.
Strategies & activities:
11. **Bible Application or Bible Words for Our Times:** Lessons are related to the realities of our contemporary world.
12. **Life Response or Words for My Life:** The lesson leads to personal commitment or life decisions.
13. **Memory Verse:** NIV is used for most lessons.
14. **Prayer:** Conclude the class with prayers given at the end of each lesson or extempore prayer.

Dr.T.M.Thomas

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PART 1
GOD'S BEAUTIFUL WORLD
CHAPTER 1
CREATION GLORIFIES GOD

Lesson Theme: God's Creation

Lesson Aim: To understand that God created this universe and that all creations glorify God.

Bible Reading: Psalm: 104

Values for Life:

- *God is our creator*
- *Creation depicts God's majestic beauty, His awesome power, His grace and mercy and the Laws of God*
- *Our goal is to participate in God's work, to sustain His creation and to make everything beautiful*

Preparation

Everyone is awed at the sound and sight of the Niagara Falls. At what or at whom do we awe at; the beauty of the falls or the one who made the wonderful falls?

Thoughts on the splendor and beauty of nature and the universe, the complexity of the human body and the existence and diversity of mankind, have always lead us to the question on the origin of creation, and the creation order. Many societies tell stories of creation because people want to know how the universe started. Where did the Milky Way, the Rock of Gibraltar, the Oceans begin? Where did humans come from and, perhaps most importantly, why are we here?

According to our Christian faith, we believe that God is the creator of this universe and we are created in the image of God. So, it is possible for a believer to pray to God and through this, feel His presence. In Psalm 104, the psalmist firmly proclaims that, our God created the heaven and the earth. Biblical authors believed that the world was divided into three compartments-the heavens, the earth and the water. They believed that these three levels were the handwork of God. We need to be like our Lord, in our attitude and lifestyle, but then we need to remember that we can never become God

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- a) God chose to reveal Himself to man. He chose two ways: General revelation (History and Creation) and special revelation (Jesus Christ and Bible). Numerous references to God's creative act are present in both the Old Testament and New Testament.
- "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". Genesis 1:1*
"God created the heavens and stretched them out". Isaiah 42:5
"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." Psalm 33:6
- In Acts 14:15; we read that Paul and Barnabas are instructing the people in Lystra to *"turn away from the worthless things to the Living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them"*
- b) In the first part of Psalm 19, the Psalmist explains the beauty of creation. The order that is present in the creation is the handwork of God. The second part of Psalm 19 is about the Laws of God. The psalmist says that the Almighty God has borne the whole earth in the palm of his hand. The way he has taken care of this world is really wonderful. The mighty power of God, which is present in everything, is something that is to be glorified. Psalms 8, 9 and 104 explains creation, as a mighty work of God. The universe is neither formed by accident or self evolved, but created by the wonderful hands of our God. Creation is an ongoing process since God continues to work through the created order. The Psalmist compares this universe to that of a temple that is filled with God's presence. So he sings:
- "Praise the Lord my Soul!*
O" Lord, my God, how great you are! Psalm 104:1
- c) Psalm 104 is a meditation Psalm of God's Majesty, Providence and Glory, a beautiful poem revealing God to all who wish to meditate. Martin Luther calls Psalm 104 –"Praise of God from the Book of Nature". It seems the psalmist is making an effort to perceive God through his faith experience; he comprehends God enveloped with light, wearing a garment of majesty, honor and glory. He is the designer and architect of this universe. The earth and all that is on it has been positioned by God. He ensures that birds have trees to nest upon and animals have water from the springs and rivers to refresh upon. He makes grass grow for cattle and plants for man to cultivate - bringing forth food from the earth. Moon and sun is set in position to calculate month and time. Psalm 104 explains how God is involved both in the past and in the present.
- d) Psalm 65 portrays God, as the one who continues to bless the earth, and this is seen in the blessings we receive from God every day. God by His grace and mercy created man and made him owner of everything. God made man the crown of his creation and put him in charge of the whole created order (Psalm 8). At the same time the Psalmist also wonders why God takes so much pain and consideration to human being who is just mortal. (Psalm 144.3) God also gave responsibility to man, not to rule, but to take care of His creation.

Bible Learning Strategies and Activities

- What are the attributes of God that we can learn from the world that we live in?
- Discuss the relationship between man and the world around him.
- What is man's responsibility to creation?
- Why should all creation glorify God? (Jeremiah 9.24)

Bible Application

God created humanity in God's own image and entrusted the Earth and its creatures to people with the expectation that humans would be good stewards and caretakers. We ought to take some time to see and appreciate God's wisdom in creating the universe. The way God suspended the earth on its axes, causing weather and seasons. The creation enables man to use his productivity and creativity to the utmost.

1. What do you think God might be saying about the way people are treating creation today? Give some examples of actions that you think cause God pain and others that make Him happy.
2. What activities can you organize as a group to show responsible care for the Earth and the creatures and people who live on it?
3. How do you see God's creative work being carried out in this world now?

Life Response

1. What are you currently doing to care for God's creation? What could you be doing to be a better steward (caretaker) of the people, plants, animals, air, water, and rocks of God's good earth?
2. What is our attitude when we enjoy the things and facilities of the modern scientific advancement or God's providence for us? How do we express our attitude?

Memory Verse

"I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him as I rejoice in the Lord." *Psalms 104:33-34*

Prayer:

Heavenly Father we thank you for revealing Yourself to us, unworthy, as we are, you chose us and redeemed us. You alone are worthy of all glory, honour and praise. Help us to glorify you with every fiber of our being in every moment of our life.

CHAPTER 2

PLANTS: A TREASURE

Lesson Theme: God and Nature
Lesson Aim: To study about God's blessings, found in the creation of plants
Bible Reading: Exodus 15: 22-25, Genesis 1:11-13

Values for Life:

- *Plant life is absolutely essential to maintain a balance in the eco-system, regulate the level of carbon dioxide and ensure the presence of sufficient oxygen in our atmosphere, prevent soil-erosion and regulate the atmospheric temperature*
- *By creating such a valuable plant kingdom, God had showed His concern for human life*
- *It is in God's plan to see to it that man take good care of the beautiful world that He has created for mankind*

Preparation:

How would you like a mystery investigation of the nature around you? All investigations begin by looking closely at the common things around. When that makes sense, you begin to observe things that are away or at a distance. Whatever you observe you will learn that very specific laws govern all of God's creation. Most scientists recognize that nature operates in an orderly fashion according to a well-designed plan.

William Carey, one of the pioneer missionaries to India, preached the gospel, translated the Bible to the major languages and dialects of India and established educational institutions for the future of India. Besides, he found time to gather information on native Indian birds and beasts. He also collected and classified specimens of animals, vegetables and minerals. He arranged for seeds, bulbs and plants from Europe for cultivation in India. On the land near the mission station, he established a huge garden. He raised his own prize cabbages and tried out on an experimental basis crops like coffee, sugarcane and cereals, hoping to provide a means to feed India's starving millions. In all, William Carey planted and cultivated over 250 different kinds of plants in India. He was especially overjoyed when he finally received a shipment of daisy seeds from England; how beautiful the English daisies looked, and how homesick he felt! William Carey started an Agricultural and Horticultural Society to help improve Indian fields and gardens. In his diary he wrote: "I hope it will ultimately be of great benefit to the country; my heart is wedded to India." As part of his ministry in India he imported gardening tools and farming Implements from England to help the local farmers. He enjoyed serving and praising God through the Plant Kingdom because he saw God's love and tender care in all His creations.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

a) Importance of Plants:

- Virtually the Animal kingdom depends on the food energy trapped by plants through photosynthesis
- Plants maintain the oxygen content in the nature
- They are used to make soil more fertile
- They regulate the amount of Carbon dioxide
- Plants regulate the atmospheric temperature
- They are directly or indirectly sources for most fuels
- To a good extent plants are medicines
- They prevent soil erosion
- They are used to make houses and furniture
- They beautify nature

b) Plants are an emblem of life, peace, prosperity, friendship and victory. When Mephibosheth's servant meets David, he presents David with cakes of raisins, summer fruits and wine as a symbol of peace and friendship (2 Samuel 16:1.)

c) By creating such a valuable plant kingdom God had showed His concern for human life. But we have a responsibility to take care of the valuable treasury of plants. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis. 2:15).

d) In the book of Joel we read the Lord's message to Joel about an environmental catastrophe that had never happened before in their time or the time of their fathers. When the people of Palestine opposed the will of God, he punished them by sending an invasion of locusts and a devastating drought. Swarm of locusts devoured their crops, grapes for making new wine were destroyed, and armies of locusts destroyed their grapevines and chewed up their fig trees. Fields became bare and corns were destroyed, olive trees were withered. Pastures and trees were dried up as though a fire had burnt them. The cattle bellowed in distress, as there was no pasture. The wild animals cried as the streams became dry. (Joel: 1-3)

God tells the people of Palestine to order for a fast and call an assembly and repent. He warns them to turn back to the Lord. We read in the later chapters of God's promise to bless the people.

e) The first commandment that God gave to man was to take care of this nature. Let us remember that this was given many years before the Ten Commandments were given. Thus it was in God's plan, to see to it that we take good care of the beautiful world that He has given us.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read the following bible references and find out how plant life has been intriguingly woven through the Scriptures. You may be surprised to find out that, often an analogy has been struck between plants and the Kingdom of God and faith values.

- Genesis 2: 9
- Revelations 2:7
- Jeremiah 2:21
- Psalms: 128: 3, 144:12
- Luke 17: 6 -8

Bible Application:

- Visualize living in a world without any form of vegetation. All you have around you are high-rise apartments with all the mechanized facilities for a comfortable, luxurious life. Sounds great! But only for a short while, soon you'll feel you are in a concrete jungle living a robotic life.
- In the recent decades there has been tremendous awareness created on the use and abuse of our eco-system. Discuss with your classmates the extent of the abuse. Are we trying to maintain it as God commanded or are we stripping it and leaving it barren and empty? Remember worlds biggest desert Sahara was once a fertile land!

Life Responses:

1. Receiving and giving of bouquet endears both the receivers and givers heart, wouldn't it be nice to be able to enjoy the beautiful flowers of the fall during the cold, barren months of winter? You can do just that if you pick some *plentiful fall flowers* with tough stems such as goldenrod, milkweed and Queen Anne's lace and then let them dry in a dark, dry place such as a garage. As soon as you return home from gathering your flowers, remove the leaves from the stems. Tie a string around the stems and hang the flowers upside down in bunches (less than ten in a bunch) from a nail on the wall. You may want to protect them with a paper bag. Be sure not to use a plastic bag, because it will retain the moisture from the flowers and they will not dry properly. In about a week, your bouquet should be ready to display. Wasn't that a satisfying experience?

2. Discuss the present measures adopted by international ecologists to protect that which is left of our planet earth and to repair the damage done? Do I have a role to play?

1 Corinthians 4:2.

Memory Verse:

‘Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.’ Exodus. 15:25

Prayer:

Heavenly Father the creator of this majestic world, we thank you for all its beauty. Help us to follow Your first command; that is to tend and keep the earth in an honourable manner. In Jesus name we pray-Amen.

CHAPTER 3

THIRST FOR GOD

Lesson Theme: All creation groans for the Creator

Lesson Aim: The ultimate quenching of thirst occurs only when we turn to God.

Bible Reading: Psalms: 42, 43

Values for life:

- *The ultimate goal of every human being should be to reach God's presence.*
- *" Since man is made for God, there is no rest for him until he finally rests in Him".
St. Augustine*

Preparation:

In the 1980's, Jay Haizlip became a household name to families and he has now been skateboarding for 27 years. Jay is born on the 28th of October 1963 in Georgia, Atlanta. As his fame and fortunes mounted, he turned to cocaine. Jay had a natural flair for skateboarding, even though he did not aspire to become famous. He soon found himself at the top, a "pro" board master, making lots of money and winning contests and prizes. He used his big money to finance his drug habit. His habits and lifestyle eventually took away all he had, his fame and family and he reached a point where he thought of suicide daily. God was after Jay, and so finally he found the Lord who cared. While working as a car Salesman, Jay came to know more about God from a person whom he met as a business client. The client told him how God changed everything for him, from the disastrous plight of an alcoholic, frequently wrecking cars while drunk. This man invited Jay over for a time of prayer. Jay recalls, " I didn't have any wild, demonic manifestations or anything like that, but I just felt all the hurt leaving, all the pain leaving, all that junk. And then as we were kneeling there praying, the man asked God to fill me with the Holy Spirit. I didn't even know who Jesus was; much less the Holy Spirit, and then all of sudden Jesus just baptized me in the Holy Spirit while I was sitting there. I knew that I was changed. When I stood up I told him, 'Whoa man, something's happened to me'.

Though his skateboarding competition days are over, his life with Jesus had just begun. Jay's thirst for fame, money and self-gratification only led him to suicidal tendencies, but when he allowed God to take control of his life, he experienced true quenching.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Psalmist in Solitude:

Psalms 42 and 43 were originally a single psalm, written by the sons of Korah. Later the Psalm was separated, due to some unknown reasons. It is the cry of despair of a man in exile. This cry of despair can be divided into 3 sections i.e.: 42: 1-5, 42: 6-11 and 43: 1-5.

This Psalm can be called the Psalm of solitude. It gives a message of hope to people who are desperate and lonely. Psalmist through his own experience is testifying that God alone can give hope and relief to the lonely people. Human being must be ready to seek God. Thus the Psalm reflects the thirst of the human soul for the presence of God.

Obstacles that come in the way, in our thirst for God's presence:

The Psalmist seems to be facing obstacles in his life. He might be in a state or condition that prevents him from going to God's temple and experience the presence of God. The experiences that come in life when his friends ask him where is your God, which makes him laughing stock before his friends and his neighbors. It might be that the Psalmist was suffering from some disease or facing some similar hardships.

A Spiritual Thirst for God

Psalmist says that his spirit thirst for God and this thirst are compared to the thirst of a deer that is longing for water in the wilderness. Compare with Psalms 63.1. The word "spirit" does not mean something that exists separately from the man, but it represent the fullness of his person. The self that lacks God's presence always thirsts for his presence. Only God can quench this thirst in man. Just like a man who cannot survive without air and water, man needs the presence of God for living an abundant life.

Thirst for The Living God:

Just like the deer that gets refreshed after a drink from the cool stream, the presence of the living God is always refreshing to human beings. When we say living God, it means that God is always active among us.

Worship in the Church along with the fellow believers is a way one can experience the presence of God. Thus feeling the presence of God is not just a personal experience to the Psalmist, but it is a collective experience for the whole congregation.

The ultimate goal of every human being should be to reach God's presence. In Psalm 63.1 David also describes the same desire. All human efforts that are done without God will be in vain. The whole world is thirsting for God. It is the duty of we Christians to show to the world, this eternal stream that will quench the whole world.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

- Share stories of some of the obstacles that come in the way, in our thirst for God's Presence:
- What is our understanding on "A spiritual Thirst for God":
- Discuss how can we quench our thirst for the Living God. (e.g. Worship, Bible Study, Prayer)
- Thirst for God Satisfied: Search and find promises concerning satisfaction from the following references

- | | | | |
|---|--------------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | Psalms 63:5 | 4 | Isaiah 58:11 |
| 2 | Psalms 107:9 | 5 | John 4: 14 |
| 3 | Mathew 5:6 | 6 | Revelation 7:16 |

Bible Application:

- Have you experienced the pain of abandonment, loneliness or not being cared for? If yes discuss your feelings. If not try to step into the shoes of the millions around the world who have nobody to call their own. What might be some of their experiences?
- Do you think after going through this lesson you could make a choice? What is the choice you'd like to make today that could bring a turn around in your life?

Life Responses:

- Do you feel there is a thirst within you, in spite of having all that you might want to have? Psalms 42:1
- What are the differences between the quenching of the thirst, temporarily and permanently? What method did you apply? Discuss.

Memory Verse:

“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for the living God.” Psalms 42: 1-2a

Prayer:

Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled. Lord help me to only thirst for your righteousness always. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

THE WIDOW AND THE ORPHAN

Lesson Theme: **The Crown of Creation**

Lesson Aim: *To show that God takes care of the poor and the downtrodden especially the widows and orphans*

Bible Reading: **1Kings 17: 8-24**

Values for Life:

- *Food, clothing and shelter are required for human existence in this world. "My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory." (Philippians 4:19)*
- *When things go wrong, we should not be worried, nor despair, instead let us stand steadfast in our hope in our God who is our refuge and strength, the One who has promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Hebrews 13: 5, John 14:18*
- *True faith involves taking care of the orphans and the widows. James 1:27*

Preparation:

George Mueller had joyfully dedicated his "whole life to the object of exemplifying how much can be accomplished by prayer and faith." When he had moved to Bristol in 1832 to take the pulpit of Gideon chapel, he and his wife Mary decided not to accept any salary from the congregation. They wanted to depend on the Lord for their daily needs, and they accepted only unsolicited freewill offerings. Mueller's journal is full of the amazing ways the Lord directed funds to them throughout his sixty-six years of ministry. Humility came to mark Mueller's life, for he depended on God for everything, viewing himself as a tool in the hands of the Master Workman.

By 1829, Mueller had left his native Prussia and gone to London to train as a missionary to the Jews. However, in England the Lord directed him along. Bristol would be the center of his ministry. As work among the poor in Bristol grew, Mueller believed he should open an orphan house. Within a year, one hundred orphans were being cared for; by 1870, the orphanages had multiplied and two thousand children were being cared for. The history of the Bristol orphanages is page after page of answered prayer. Nothing was too small to bring to the Lord in prayer, for nothing was too small to be under God's care. In his prayers, Mueller would confidently set his need and his case before God. It was this unshakable faith in God's providing hand, which made the Bristol orphanages so unique. Once, some leaders visiting the orphanage asked the matron of the home, "Of course you cannot carry these institutions without a good stock of funds. Do you have a good stock?" The matron quietly replied, "Our funds are deposited in a bank which cannot break." Tears came to the eyes of the visitors, who gave a donation to the work - a very timely gift because at the moment there were no funds on hand! The orphanage never accumulated a

surplus of funds, but daily relied on the Lord for their provisions. George Mueller died in Bristol at the age of 93. Though much money had passed through his hands he did not accumulate wealth for himself. His life demonstrated that extraordinary ministry could be accomplished through the combination of tender compassion for the hungry and homeless children, unshakable faith in God, and practical action to meet needs.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

In the Bible we find a God who is merciful to the poor and the downtrodden, especially to the widows and the orphans. Even the members of the early church realized this truth that was often stressed by Jesus Christ, and showed a keen interest to the needs of the widows and the orphans. In today's part of our study, we find how the prophet Elijah becomes a co-worker with God, through which the need of a widow is taken care of.

God Protects

Elijah was the prophet who came from Tishbe in Gilead, and his name means, "The Lord is God." He is also known as the prophet of reformation, who performed mighty deeds, while proclaiming that Lord is my God. Indeed we see him taking a bold stand for God and confront King Ahab with his sins least caring about the consequences. He prophesized that there will be drought all over the land, as a punishment from God, because of the sins committed by King Ahab and his family. Right enough he has to run for his life; imagine trying to escape political authorities who have placed a ransom for his life and to top it there is a terrible drought in the land. Just as his name states Elijah relied on The Lord his God. For a while he drank from the brook of Kerith and was fed by the ravens (remember ravens are scavengers).

Blessing through Obedience

When the water from the brook dried out, the Lord God leads him to Zarapheth, to a widow who was preparing the last meal for her son and self, as the drought had left them with meager food supply.

On Elijah's asking, the widow willingly shares all that she had with this man of God. There is no form of frustration or resistance seen, she could have whined about her plight, instead she shined at this time of her test, she was willing to go through the inconvenience and make a sacrifice for a Godly man. What was the outcome of her willingness? In Luke 4:25-26 we see Jesus praising this widow's willingness to share. Her willing spirit brought forth blessings, her dough and oil never ran out and throughout the drought and they had sufficient to eat.

God wants the widow, the orphan and the wanderer to have food to their fill. Deut 14:29

"Therefore seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." Matthew 6:33.

Blessing through Faith

The widow's only son falls ill and finally dies, even when Prophet Elijah is present in her house. In her moment of grief she utters something that is heartbreaking for the prophet. Instead of seeking help from the prophet, she starts to blame the prophet for her son's death. Prophet Elijah carried the boy's body close to his chest and prayed fervently. God heard the prayer of the prophet. The boy's life returned to him and he lived. Thus the name of the prophet is included in the list of the people who are called the warriors of faith.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

- How did God protect Elijah and the widow during the time of drought?
- Check out the following references and make a list of widows mentioned in the bible: 2 Samuel 14:15, 1 King 11:26, Mark 12: 42, Luke 2:37,
- The widow's obedience and willingness was tested maximum when she herself was at the very edge of her life. Often times our obedience too is tested when the going gets tough. Her sacrifice brought forth blessings - Was she blessed all at once or did she experience blessedness everyday? We see she got enough flour and oil for **each day**. The Israelites, during their journey through the wilderness received manna every single day. Not once we read of God failing to provide. God will never fail to provide for His own. In Matthew 6:20, 26 Jesus clearly states that our minds ought to be focused on things of greater value not on what we eat, drink or wear.
- The widow and her son no longer starved; does this mean that they lived happily ever after? Disaster strikes even deeper; the son falls ill and eventually dies. In spite of witnessing miracles almost on a daily basis, the widow falters in her human frailty and accuses Elijah for the child's death. Don't we need to be watchful over how we conduct ourselves during trials and struggles? Refer: I Thessalonians 5:18, Hebrews 14:23, John 14: 18

Bible Application:

Discuss and reflect:

- In whom does our security lie, do we try to hoard treasures for a secure future? Are we willing to share whatever we have with those less fortunate than us?
- Do I have the confidence that God will provide for my needs; each day as it comes-How does Jesus teach us to ask for our needs to our Heavenly Father? Matthew 6:11 " Give us this day our daily bread."
- In those days prophets were not to go near dead bodies, however he rises above social norms and takes the widow's dead son to his room and prays fervently. Are we willing to break social barriers to reach out to the un-reached? Do we allow social status and earthly standards to hinder us from being effective instruments for His divine purpose?

- Organize a trip with your Sunday-School teacher to the closest Children's Aid Center; Christmas season would be ideal. Plan your trip well in advance, here are some tips:
 1. Practice a few carols that you could sing and teach the children at the center.
 2. Purchase gifts for the children you are visiting; let the funds be raised from your allowance. Books and CD's from a gospel store would be just right.

Life Responses:

- Elijah prophesied and spoke out boldly against the sinful practices of King Ahab and the community? What is our stand today when we witness ungodly practices? Are we concerned, indifferent or bold enough to speak out under the influence of the Holy Spirit?
- How can we make wise choices and be a better example of a Christian - may be these simple steps could help.
 1. Stay in touch with good Christian influences always
 2. Don't allow temptations and peer-pressure get the better of you
 3. "Remember the decisions you make tomorrow are made in the heart today."
Eastman Curtis author of Extreme Talk for Teens.

Memory Verse:

"Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this; to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep one-self from being polluted by the world".
James 1:27

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, grant me a sensitive heart to recognize the needs around, a willing spirit and bless me to be an effective instrument to reach out in Your love -Amen.

CHAPTER 5

APOSTOLIC CREED

Lesson Theme: Science and faith
Lesson Aim: To study about apostolic creed
Bible Reading: Acts 2: 14-42

Values for Life:

- *Creed is the articulation one's faith. A collective proclamation of faith strengthens the church and passes it on to others who are new to the church as well as to the next generations*
- *The belief in one God was the heart of the Jewish faith, and this is defined as the first one, in the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 6:4 "Israel, remember this! The Lord-and the Lord alone- is our God" – is generally accepted as the faith proclamation of the Jews.*
- *Proclamation of the Lordship of Jesus in the New Testament: The Apostolic Creed is a summary of the teachings of the disciples and also the New Testament. In other words, it explains the basic doctrines of Christian faith, that too, in a very simple language.*

Preparation:

“Mission Statement” is a familiar phrase for those who have attended leadership training seminars or camps. A group or organization summarizes their beliefs, values and goals in a mission statement.

When Church grew as a community, it became essential to define its faith. This became necessary because different interpretations made by different individuals with matters concerning faith came about. In the history of the Church, there are mainly three creeds that became popular- The Apostolic creed, the Nicean Creed and the creed of Athanasius. The Apostolic creed is the oldest of these creeds. The Nicean Creed and the Creed of Athanasius are basically interpretations and explanations of the apostolic creed. The Catholic Church, the Anglican Church and many of the Protestant Churches use the Apostolic creed in their liturgy. But the Eastern Churches uses the Nicean Creed as the basis for the proclamation of faith. Most of us are familiar with the affirmation of faith or Nicean Creed, recited during our Sunday Worship services. All these creeds contain different aspects of the Christian faith and all of them starts with our faith in God the creator and proceeds with our faith in resurrection and eternal life.

Until the seventeenth century, it was believed that the apostolic creed was written by the disciples on the day of Pentecost. But there is not sufficient evidence to substantiate this belief. The Theologians have differences of opinion as far as the origin of this creed is concerned. It is now generally believed that it was written somewhere between the third and the sixth century.

From the beginning, the Church was faced with the concerns to preserve the Apostolic faith against distortions. The concern was to keep both dimensions of the original affirmations, namely, the fullness of humanity of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, and the fullness of divinity manifested in Him. Failure to maintain faithfully both these two dimensions resulted in interpretations, which the early Ecumenical Councils rejected as heresies. (Several teachings, known as adoptionism, Arianism, Docetism, Gnosticism, Appollinarianism, Eutechianism, Nestorianism were rejected as contrary to the faith given to the Apostles)

Later when heretical teachings created conflicts, several Councils were met and formulated faith to safeguard the right faith. Most prominent among them is Nicean Creed of 325. AD. There are differences between these various creeds.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The New Testament proclaims the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In Mathew 16:16, Peter proclaims his faith in Jesus- “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” In Luke 9:20, Peter’s proclamation of faith is recorded as: “You are God’s Messiah”. In John 20:31, we see another dimension of the same proclamation. While in the Gospel of Mathew 10:32 the need for witnessing Jesus as our Savior is explained as the proclamation of our faith.

The Apostolic Creed contains a brief summary of the teachings of the apostles that we see in **Acts. 2:14-42**. Chapter 2 is an account of that great day of Pentecost when the early church was formed. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. In verse 14 onwards, we read about Peter’s bold witnessing of the gospel, his call to turn away from sin and accept Jesus Christ. The shortest and primitive form of this Creed is “Jesus Christ whom you crucified is risen”.

Church Fathers revised the primitive form of the Apostolic Creed with adequate explanations and the faith affirmation in it with regards to God, is as under:

“I believe in the almighty Father the God who created the heavens and the earth, in His only son and our Lord Jesus Christ. He was born of Holy Spirit through Virgin Mary; he suffered under Pontius Pilot; and died; and was buried. He stepped down to hell; he was resurrected from the dead on the third day; ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand side of his Father. And He will be coming back to judge everyone, both living and dead. I also believe in the Holy Spirit”.

Apostolic creed can be divided into three parts. The first part proclaims our faith in the creator, God the Father, His Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. The second part emphasizes the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The third part deals with our faith in the Holy, Catholic Church, in the redemption of sin, resurrection, and eternal life. (Holy Catholic Church means the universal church based on the faith in God)

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

- What is the New Testament basis for all the creeds? (Acts. 2:14-42)
- Find out other creeds or affirmations of faith that are explained or given in the Old Testament.

Bible Application:

The Apostolic creed was the most precise creed that was available or ever written. It proclaims the truth with regards to salvation through Christ. John Calvin once quoted Martin Luther and said, “ It is rather impossible to summarize Christian faith, other than the Apostolic Creed. “ This in not the word of God, on the contrary, is the human response to the divine revelation.

The Apostles' Creed continues to be used today much as it was in the past: as a baptismal confession; as a teaching outline; as a guard and guide against heresy; as a summarization of the faith; as an affirmation in worship. It has maintained in modern times its distinction as the most widely accepted and used creed among Christians.

Life Response:

1. Discuss the circumstances that lead to the formation of the creeds? Do you think it is important to affirm our faith in the postmodern world?
2. We are thankful to the efforts of the early church leaders for keeping the purity of our creed from distortions. Let us proclaim our faith through our life and convey the understanding we received from the creed to others.

Memory Verse:

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witness of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God , he has received from the father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. Act 2: 32-33

Prayer:

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we praise and adore you. Help us to live on in your faith - Amen.

NOTE: There is a lesson in the Book “The Mar Thoma Church: Our Foundation and Vision” dealing with our Christian Faith and its Foundation (Lesson 5 pp 138-144) Study it along with this lesson.

*PART II***GOD'S WONDERFUL PEOPLE****CHAPTER 6 GOD OUR SHEPHERD****Lesson Theme:** Family**Lesson Aim:** To understand how Jesus becomes the Good Shepherd in our family**Bible Reading:** Psalm 23**Values For Life:**

- *To know that the Lord is our good shepherd and we are his sheep.*
- *To understand the need to depend on the good Shepherd:*
- *To realize the importance of having Jesus as the head of our family*

Preparation:

Psalm 23 is written by David, the most renowned king of Israel. He took care of his father's sheep while he was a young man. So, David knows very well the role of a good shepherd and compares it to the way our Lord and heavenly father guides and protects us from our enemies. In many other parts of the Bible, we can find the same idea of God as Shepherd (Psalms .79:13; 80:1). Just like the shepherd takes care of the needs of the sheep, our Lord the Good Shepherd provides us with food, water and life. He also looks out for our safety and protects us from all evil. Based on his personal experience, the psalmist is fully aware of God's providence in all walks of his life. This psalm does not focus on the animal-like qualities of sheep, but on the discipleship qualities of those who follow. Those who are willing to accept God as their shepherd will find pleasure in worshipping and adoring Him. God will provide them with His goodness and mercies all through their lives.

In the 15th chapter of second Samuel there is recorded the instance in David's life when his own son rebelled against him and toppled him from the throne. David was forced to flee into the Judean wilderness with his family and servants, and for a period of time he was unable to reclaim his throne. His life was in jeopardy and he was hunted and hounded for a number of months. Perhaps, because so much of his early life had been spent as a shepherd in that same wilderness, the circumstances recalled his shepherd life. The images in this psalm are drawn right out of his experience as a young shepherd.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

- The relationship between God and David was a very personal one. The God that he portrays before us is not someone who stays far away from us, but one who is actively involved in all our

affairs. The psalmist received comfort and peace from God whenever he needed it. God who created men is also interested in all his affairs (Matthew 6:31 -32). Our God is sufficient to take care of all our needs and in providing the best for us. The only thing we need to remember is that we need to submit our needs completely to him in faith. Just like the sheep depends on the shepherd for it's needs, we also need to depend on the good shepherd completely to get our needs satisfied (Isaiah 40:11). Our shepherd knows the "green pastures" and "quiet waters" that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently. Rebelling against the shepherd's leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests. We must remember this every time we are tempted to go our own way rather than the shepherd's way.

1. Human life is an experience of the Hills and Valleys, Light and Darkness, Happiness and Sorrows. We need to remember that our refuge is in the Shepherd and not in the people or the green pastures and quiet waters. It is possible that we might encounter such problems in our lives. Some people resort to intoxicating drinks and drugs to escape from their troubles. But the psalmist assures us that only the Good shepherd can lead our lives to quiet waters. To receive this peace and comfort we have to surrender ourselves completely to His hands. People who accept God as their shepherd will find pleasure in worshipping Him and in the process God will provide them with His goodness and mercies all through their lives. One who can experience the presence of this good shepherd can easily overcome the dark experience that happens in his or her life.
2. The rod of the shepherd is used to protect and also to punish the sheep. Usually the rod is provided with a pointed iron tip that can be used against enemies. But with the curved end of the staff he directs the sheep to the right places. Many a times we are not able to take right decisions. We often face moral instability in our lives. When we wander away from the right path, the good shepherd can lead us back to the right path. When we are faced with a decision to choose the right path, the good shepherd can help us if we seek Him.
3. In ancient Near-Eastern culture, during a banquet, it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. Hosts were expected to protect their guests at all costs. God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. Family is the basic unit of the church and society. Through mutual love and care for each other, the family becomes stronger. This can happen only if Jesus becomes the head of our family. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide us, protect us and comfort us through our life's experiences and to bring us safe into his house forever.

Bible Learning : Strategies and Activities

1. Read Psalm 23 and list 5 attributes of a good shepherd that you will find in our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. What are the promises in verse 5 - 6 that are given for those who accept Jesus as their good shepherd?
3. Create a post card with Psalms 23 written on it and use it as a bookmark.

Bible Applications:

We all need a decisive word from someone who knows the way. Now, the Lord knows the way. But the question arises -- "How can I discover his will for my life?"

First, submit wholeheartedly to the leadership of the shepherd. This is the basic attitude that we must maintain. Unless we are willing to admit that we don't know the way through the wilderness, and to submit to his leadership, we will never find the way. We must be willing to say, "I will go anywhere. I will do anything. I will carry any load, live anyplace you want me to live, do anything you want me to do." Once we are willing to say that, then God can reveal his will.

The second thing we must do is to obey what we know now to be God's will for us. If we are disobedient to our parents, we cannot expect God to give us wisdom concerning our next step. We sometimes discover that things don't work out as we had anticipated. But even at that point we can't second-guess God. We cannot say that he did not give us wisdom.

Life Responses:

- We are the sheep and Jesus Christ is our Good shepherd. Therefore we have the responsibility to live on the guidance, directions and disciplining of the Shepherd. On the other hand we have the responsibility of the Shepherd also (John. 21:15-18.) to guide, direct and lead the flock around us. What can you do and how can you live as a Sheep as well as a Shepherd in the North American context of pastures of pleasure and affluence?
- We are all anxious about our future. Decisions that we make today not only impact our own lives, but also on the lives of everyone with whom we are associated. How do we know that we are making the right choices in our lives? Sometimes, decisions can be crucial, and frustrating. In circumstances like this, where do you turn for help? Would you be willing to trust the good Shepherd for guidance?
- Can you think of a situation in your family, which has helped you to testify that God is the head of your family?

Memory Verse:

He tends his flock like a Shepherd; He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. Isaiah 40:11

Prayer:

Lord Jesus you are our true Shepherd sent to us. Help me to discipline myself as your sheep. Enable me to live as your shepherd. I ask this prayer in Jesus' powerful & unique name. **Amen.**

References to the background of Psalms 23: Read 2 Samuel Ch: 15 -18

CHAPTER 7

Ezra - A Wonderful Man of God

Lesson Theme: Oneness of Humanity

Lesson Aim: To understand the importance of respecting people of different faith

Bible Reading: Ezra 4: 1 -16

Values for life:

- *Value judgement: God uses even people of other faiths to fulfill his mission*
- *People of different faiths can also bring peace and reconciliation to the weak and oppressed people of the society*
- *God keeps his promise by bringing the Israelites back to Jerusalem for re-building the temple*

Preparation:

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a well known civil rights leader and social reformer in the 1950's and 60's, did something that changed the way America viewed and treated a group of its citizens, who were historically faced with racist and restrictive laws as part of their daily living. As he grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, he saw the afflictions to his people by a society separated by race. He desperately wanted to see a change. His educational preparation was coincidental to the awesome task before him, but it served him well in his role as a crusader for the injustices forced upon his fellow African-Americans. In his leadership capacity, King, the Boston University Ph.D. in Systematic Theology, was searching to answers to this dilemma. He consumed and consulted the views of the world's philosophers, theologians, social, and moralistic thinkers as he contemplated the outcome of this racial cauldron. That comfort came when he read the teachings and works of Mohandas Gandhi of India. Dr. King studied Gandhi's 'non-violence' movement and the ways it lifted India from under the British system of domination - and he related those views to his people.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. rose to fame when he came to the assistance of Rosa Parks, the black seamstress who refused to give up her seat on a segregated Montgomery, Alabama bus to a White passenger. In those days American Blacks were confined to positions of second-class citizenship by restrictive laws and customs. To break these laws would mean subjugation and humiliation by the police and the legal system. His vision and leadership was holistic and ground upon the principles of non-violence. The power of his message and the appeal of his movement brought thousands of people of goodwill, both Black and White, to his camp. His life was in constant danger, as well as the lives of his family and those who worked in his movement. At the age of thirty-five, Martin Luther King, Jr., was the youngest man to have received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Within a span of 13 years from 1955 to his death in 1968 Dr. Martin Luther King was able to expound, expose, and extricate America from many wrongs. His tactics of protest involved non-violent passive resistance to racial injustice. Hope in America was waning on the part of many Black Americans, but Martin Luther King, Jr. provided a candle along with a light.

Dr. Martin Luther King's struggle to liberate the African-American's from their bondage once again proved that God is in control of history. In the same way, there are many leaders in the Bible who devoted their life for achieving freedom for the oppressed. For example: Ezra, Nehemiah and others.

Bible learning: Main ideas

The book of Ezra:

This book carries the name of its author, one of the most famous of Old Testament scribes. The name “Ezra” simply means, “help”, probably implying that he received help from God.

The book of Ezra narrates facts about one of the most important events in the history of the Jews since the exodus from Egypt – their restoration to Jerusalem from Babylonian captivity.

The book is a personal account of the two stages of their return and is therefore can be divided in two sections:

1. The first restoration (*Ezra 1-6*)
2. The second restoration and matters of revival and reform (*Ezra 7-10*)

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are believed to have been one book at an earlier time, with most likely Nehemiah being the earlier part of the book. Even though the book of Ezra is included in the Bible before the book of Nehemiah, the restoration of the Temple might have happened after the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah came to Jerusalem when Artaxerxes I was the emperor of Persia, while Ezra came to Jerusalem during the time of Artaxerxes II.

Return of the Jews from captivity and reconstruction of the Temple:

God uses the Persian emperor Cyrus to bring Israel home from their exile in Babylon. The Jewish leaders and the people decided to rebuild the Jerusalem temple destroyed by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. As soon as the word got around that they are rebuilding the Temple, the "people of the land" came to offer their help (Ezra 4:2). They reasoned that since they, too, worshipped the same God, they should have a stake in building the new temple. However, the Jewish leaders rejected their offer of help because they wanted to build the Temple for the God of Israel by themselves as commanded by King Cyrus.

Once their offer to help is rejected, the people of the land became formidable adversaries of the Jewish people and tried all possible means to stop the construction of the temple until the end of King Cyrus. The interruption finally ended in 520 when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah convinced the Jews to resume the re-building. The temple was completed in 515 B.C.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Who was Ezra?
 - Ezra was a priest, a descendant of the chief priest Aaron (*Ezra 7:5*).

- Ezra was also a scribe – a teacher or interpreter of the Law of Moses and other Old Testament scriptures. He was therefore very knowledgeable in the Old Testament laws and scriptures (*Ezra 7:6*).
- Ezra had obtained a remarkable position in the Persian King Artaxerxes's court as a very young man. So, he was sent to Jerusalem on a royal commission by the order of the king (*Ezra 7:1*). His mission is clearly outlined in verse 7: 25 *"And you Ezra, in accordance with wisdom of your God, which you possess, appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates - all who know the laws of your God. And you are to teach any who do not know them"*.

2. Ezra's Mission: (7:12 – 26)

According to the royal letter issued to Ezra, his mission was to:

- *Collect gold and silver and sacrificial offerings from Babylon and deliver it to the God of Israel whose dwelling is in Jerusalem*
- *To appoint magistrates and judges to administer justice to all the people of Trans-Euphrates*
- *To teach his people in Jerusalem the Laws of God*

The Emperor himself made all arrangements for Ezra's travel. He was also permitted to take with him all the Jews who would like to return to their homeland (*7:13*). Ezra rejected the military escort that was offered to him for his trip to Jerusalem. Instead he proclaimed a fasting prayer before his travel (*Ch.8: 21 -24*) to humble himself before God and ask for a safe trip to Jerusalem. He believed that God would protect everyone who sought after Him. After four months of tiresome journey, Ezra reached Jerusalem. Upon his arrival, he handed over all the valuable gold and silver to the Temple authorities sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel and presented the royal orders to the king's representatives.

3. Ezra's prayer and people's confession: (Ch. 9 – 10)

Upon Ezra's arrival in Jerusalem he got word that the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighboring people with their detestable practices. They had intermarriages with the local people and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. When Ezra heard that the Jewish leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness to God, he was appalled. Ezra tore his tunic, fell on his knees with his hands spread out to the Lord and prayed for his people's sin. Then he called a meeting of all the people in a square before the house of God and started to preach to them about their sins and asked them to separate themselves from the people around them. People repented of their sinful ways and turned back to obey the Lord.

Bible Application:

- Cyrus, a non-Jewish emperor, freed the Jews in exile in Babylon and allowed their return to their homeland. It is interesting to note that God used a Gentile emperor to help the return of the Jews from captivity and to rebuild the Temple and the wall around Jerusalem.

- God used the power of king Artaxerxes to restore the Jews in their homeland. Is it fair to make value judgements on the good works done by the people of other faiths? In this time when community rivalry is on the rise, the example shown by Artaxerxes and Cyrus, is worth emulating
- The personal character of Ezra stands out as pure and noble in all scripture references to him. His intense devotion, earnest prayers trust in God, spirit of humility, and strength of character, all commend him as a great man of God. The life of Ezra should be a real role model for us.

Life Response:

- Ezra had prepared and set his heart to seek the Law of the Lord and to do it and teach in Israel its statutes and its ordinances (*Ezra 7:10*). In the context of North America what are the areas you do feel the responsibility of restoration?
- Are you equipped to affirm our faith and practices in a multicultural society where Christian values are being eroded? Relating to the role of Ezra what can you do as a Child of God to help maintain our identity both individually and corporately?

Memory Verse:

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. John 17:11

Prayer:

Heavenly father we pray for harmony among all people. We also pray for people who work for bringing peace and reconciliation in this world. Please help every one to live in friendship and joy.
Amen

CHAPTER 8

FAITH EXPERIENCED

Lesson Theme: Revelation of God in History

Lesson Aim: How we can experience God's revelation in our lives.

Bible Reading: *1 John 1:1-4*

Values For Life:

- *To learn who our true God is and how we can enter into a fellowship or relationship with Him.*
- *A true fellowship with God has the power to transform, redeem, recreate and remodel our personality and identity*
- *Learn how to experience the living presence of God in our lives*

Preparation:

What is Christian Life? Is it concrete or intellectual? Is it fictional or real?

Katherine Hankey was born in 1834, the daughter of a wealthy English banker. Though the members of her family were prominent members of the Anglican Church, they were always associated with its more evangelical faction. Her father was one of the influential members of the Clapham Sect. (a group that influenced the upper class because the activities of this group centered in the elite suburb of Clapham in Southwest London). Early in her life Katherine caught this same evangelical concern from her father. She began organizing Sunday school classes for rich and poor throughout the city of London. These classes had profound influence throughout the city with a large number of the young students in turn becoming zealous Christian workers. Kate also did considerable writing, including such works as Bible Class Teachings, a booklet on confirmation, as well as a number of books of verse. All of the royalties received from these publications were always directed to some foreign missions project.

When Katherine was only thirty years of age, she experienced a serious illness. During a long period of recovery she wrote a lengthy poem on the life of Christ. The poem consisted of two main sections. The first section of the poem was entitled "The Story wanted." It was from this part of her poem that she later adapted the words for another of her familiar hymn texts, "Tell Me the Old, Old Story." This hymn has since become one of the church's classic children's hymns. Katherine, really experienced the 'presence of the living Christ' in her life situations. She saw, touched and listened to the living Christ who helped her compose several beautiful Christian hymns. She really experienced the dynamic fellowship with God in her life.

Bible Learning Main Ideas:

False spiritual teachers were a big problem in the early church. Since a complete New Testament was not available to the believers during that time they could not read and understand the word

of God. Therefore, many churches fell prey to pretenders or false teachers who taught their own ideas and advanced themselves as leaders. The Epistle of 1 John is believed to have been written by Apostle John, the son of Zebede. John wrote this letter to set the record straight on some important issues, particularly concerning the identity of Jesus Christ. Because John's letter was about the basics of faith in Christ, it helped his readers reflect honestly on their faith. It is quite natural to claim that the beloved disciple was an eyewitness to the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry.

Communion with the Father and Son

In his epistle, John explains as who the true God is and how we can enter into a relationship with Him, resulting into a new identity and the transformation that occurs in one's life. The Apostle does this by sharing his own experiences, and also by inviting us to enjoy this unique fellowship with God.

Benefits of our fellowship with Christ.

1. Experiencing the gift of Salvation by the Grace of God

It is the revelation of God through Jesus Christ that made it possible for us to have fellowship with Him. Our knowledge of God was made clearer through Jesus Christ. It is through the Son, that God offers salvation, and hence one needs to understand that no one can receive Salvation, through his/her own deeds or efforts. God gives us the Salvation experience through His Grace and through our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "It is by god's Grace that you have been saved (Eph. 2:1-10)". Every believer should inherit the right to be ' the children of God' and also be 'filled and led' by the Holy Spirit. If one fails in this Divine Purpose, he/she is expected to confess his /her sins and come back to God's Saving Presence and live in the glorious hope that nourished in the fellowship with God.

This communion with God makes us mature as children of God. One of the outward expressions of this maturity is "Divine Love". John says, " See what love the father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1-3). St. Paul says that we should be children of light, producing the fruits of light such as goodness, righteousness and truth (Ephesians 5:9 -10)

2. Experiencing the living presence of God in our lives

Faith in God and also in His everlasting presence is something that we need to experience. Even though it is not possible for us to experience the physical presence of Jesus Christ, we will be able to experience of the presence of Jesus in the same way as the disciples experienced, after the ascension of Jesus.

We know the examples of king David (Psalms 34:8), Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego experienced the presence of God in the middle of a burning furnace (Daniel 3:23-25).

Once an atheist was addressing an intellectual audience. In the course of his powerful presentation, he tried to prove that God does not exist and also challenged the audience to prove him wrong. After a moment of silence, a recently converted Christian, stood up and took an orange from his coat's pocket, peeled it and started to eat it. He then asked the speaker if he could tell if the orange was sour or sweet. To this query, the speaker replied that he couldn't say that unless he tasted the orange. At that point, the man shot back, and said that it is the same with the existence of God, unless one does not experience the presence of God, how can one prove that God does not exist.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What does it mean to have fellowship with Him?
2. What are the qualities that should be inherent in a Christian?
3. How can we experience the Love and Fellowship of God in our daily lives?

Bible Application:

In our daily lives we have so many things pulling us in different directions. We sometimes feel lost and overwhelmed. However, this is not what Christ wants for any of us. The apostle John is a disciple who knew Christ well. He is telling us that we can all have that close intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. We have the witness of men who had direct and personal contact with Him.

Life Response:

The book of 1 John is a book of love and joy. It explains the fellowship we have with others and with Jesus Christ. It differentiates between happiness and joy. True joy is something we all seek. We all want it. 1 John tells us exactly how to get it. We take the words written by John and we apply them to our daily lives. Why? We long for true love, commitment, fellowship, and joy.

1. Is there anything special in the life of a saved child of God?
2. Are you living with faith in God or are you living in fear of your circumstances?
3. How do you witness the presence of Jesus in the society you live?

Memory Verse:

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7

Prayer:

God, we thank you for the spiritual light you have given us. Help us to live according to the light you gave us. Help us continue the fellowship with God. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

CHAPTER 9

AMOS

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|-----------------------|--|
| Lesson Theme: | Response to God's Revelation |
| Lesson Aim: | To study the prophet's faithfulness and obedience to God's call |
| Bible Reading: | Amos 7:10-17, 9:1-15 |

Values for life:

- *God denounces social injustice, religious hypocrisy and moral laxity among his people.*
- *Anyone who tries to overrule God's plan and justice will have to face God's punishment.*
- *Ritualistic worship without righteousness and justice is futile.*
- *Amos was burdened to speak against the social evils although his livelihood was secure and his life was at risk.*

Preparation:

Dolores Huerta was born in Dawson, New Mexico in 1930. Her passion for justice and equal opportunity makes her one of the century's most powerful and respected labor movement leaders. In the 1950's after graduating from Stockton College, Dolores began teaching in a farm workers' community. As she witnessed the heartbreaking hunger of her students, she knew she needed to take direct action to eliminate the brutal conditions of poverty that defined their lives and their aspirations.

To confront these problems, she used the American traditions of organizing, lobbying, registering voters, and encouraging people to participate in democratic reform. In 1962 along with Cesar Chavez, she co-founded what would become the United Farm Workers Union (UFW).

Dolores, a child of migrant workers and a practicing Christian has devoted her life to organized, non-violent efforts to improve wages and working conditions for migrant Hispanic laborers. Her eleven grown children credit their mother with inculcating in them a sense of civic duty and inspiring them to succeed in their varied professions. She is also a role model for her fifteen grandchildren, encouraging each of them to act with purpose and to believe in the possibility of what their work can accomplish. There are people who lived with a passion for justice and took courageous action to confront social evil. One such person lived in Israel many years ago and his name was Amos.

Prophet Amos was called by God to speak up against social evils in his time and reminds us that religious practice without just behavior offends God. He cautions us that God will judge those who "trample on the needy and do away with the poor of the land".

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Who was prophet Amos?

Amos means “carrier” or “burden-bearer”. He was neither a prophet by profession nor a prophet's son. He was a shepherd and pruner of sycamore trees. While he was tending his flock in Tekoa, God called him to prophesy to Israel (Amos 7:14-15). The call probably came through his visions described in ch.7:1-9, 8:1- 3 and he went to prophesy in Bethel as directed by God.

Amos is known as the prophet of righteousness and justice. It is believed that among the prophetic books in the Bible, the book of Amos was written first. Through an analysis of the socio-economic problems of the time, the prophet tries to instill a sense of moral responsibility in the people. The subject of this prophecy is common to all ages and all people.

Bible Background

Amos lived and prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, around 750 B.C., a time of affluence and luxury. At that time, Uzziah was the king of Judah. After the reign of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two. The southern kingdom which was ruled by the descendants of Solomon (Judah) and the northern kingdom was ruled by the descendants of Jeroboam I (Israel).

The reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II had brought peace and prosperity but also much evil, injustice, and poverty. Some people lived extravagantly, with fine homes, rich food, elegant banquets, and much leisure. This lifestyle brought with it corruption, repression, bribery, immorality and inequity. The side effects of this affluent system was growing sector of landless poor, slaves and day laborers whose poverty subsidized the wealthy elite. Although many wealthy people were devout, joining in religious ceremonies, paying tithes and offerings, and performing ritual sacrifices, corruption had penetrated the religious system and some rites were licentious and idolatrous. Amos denounced all these through his messages (Amos 5:10-12; 8:4-6).

Amos's message for Bethel (Israel)

Amos was compelled by his visions to speak against the religious hypocrisy and moral laxity all around him. His visions described in ch.7 -9 were: locusts, devouring fire, a plumb line, a basket of summer fruits and of the destruction of Israel. Amos responded to God's call to go north to Bethel, Israel's chief religious shrine, to preach God's judgement and confront the evil head-on. His message was this: The day of the Lord is coming. It will not bring the blessing that you expect but terrible judgement - defeat and conquest by the Assyrians, destruction and exile. Your only hope is to repent, return to God and faithful living, and restore justice to your society. If these conditions are met, God may show mercy on a remnant. Amos's mission was to get beneath the surface of Israel's complacent assumption that their affluence was evidence of God's blessing.

Amos thunders at Israel. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed? To “walk with God” requires a harmonious relationship with Him. (Amos 3: 3). He warns them not to put confidence in natural defense when defeat and dangers are so apparent. “Woe to them that are at ease in Zion”.(Amos 6:1)

Almost immediately Jeroboam ordered him to leave the country, but before going, he gave the false priest Amaziah his sentence of ruin. Amos spoke with courage and conviction condemning the sins of Israel.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Let two students role play the conversation between Amos and Amaziah (Amos 7:10 - 17)
2. Divide the class in to 3 - 4 groups and let each group read aloud Amos's prophecy regarding the destruction and restoration of Israel (Amos 9: 1 - 15)

Bible Application:

1. Discuss the parallels between Amos's time and ours with regard to evidences of greed, hypocrisy, luxury, abuse, corruption, exploitation, fraud, and signs of God's judgement.
2. Name five world leaders who have tried to tackle world hunger, poverty and injustice. What do these persons have in common with Amos? How were they doing God's will?

Life Response:

1. Have you participated in any projects to help the economically poor people in your city? Discuss five ways you can contribute to eliminate poverty and homelessness in your community?
2. Like Amos, we are called to be God's ambassadors to proclaim the Good News of His Salvation. He is counting upon us to accomplish His purpose for the lost world. Just by getting concerned about the problem of the world does no good unless we take action as Amos did. Name some of the inequities in your country where you can make a difference.

Memory verse:

" But let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream" (Amos 5:24).

Prayer:

Lord, help me to bear your image to the world in which I live so that people can enjoy your presence and righteousness and justice. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

CHAPTER 10

WEALTH AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Lesson Theme: Modern Human Ventures

Lesson Aim: To study that Wealth is God's gift and it is our duty to utilize it responsibly

Bible Reading: Mark 10:17-31

Values for Life:

- *Need to overcome the temptation to acquire wealth*
- *No one can serve two masters*
- *Affluence is not a sign of God's blessings*

Preparation:

"I see life as both a gift and a responsibility. My responsibility is to use what God has given me to help his people in need" - Millard Fuller

Millard Fuller was born on January 3, 1935 in Lanett, Alabama. From humble beginnings, Millard Fuller rose to become a young, self-made millionaire. A graduate of Auburn University in Alabama and the University of Alabama Law School, he and a college friend began a marketing firm while still in school. Fuller's business expertise and entrepreneurial drive made him a millionaire at age 29. But as the business prospered, his health, integrity and marriage suffered.

These crises prompted Fuller to re-evaluate his values and direction. His soul-searching led to reconciliation with his wife and a renewal of his Christian commitment. The Fullers then decided to sell all of their possessions, give the money to the poor and begin searching for a new focus for their lives. This search led them to the Koinonia Farm, a Christian Community located near Americus, Georgia where people were looking for practical ways to apply Christ's teachings. With Koinonia founder Clarence Jordan and a few others, the Fullers initiated a ministry in housing. They built modest houses on a non-profit, no-interest basis, thus making homes affordable to families with low incomes. Millard Fuller is the founder and president of Habitat for Humanity International, a worldwide, ecumenical Christian movement. The Mar Thoma church observes October 3rd as World Habitat Day.

Millard and his wife were awarded the 1994 Harry S. Truman Public Service Award, and he also has received the Martin Luther King, Jr. Humanitarian Award. He continues to receive many honorary doctorates and achievement awards for his outstanding leadership and contributions toward meeting the goal of eliminating poverty and housing shortage worldwide.

It is in the human nature to acquire worldly possessions. However, is it fair to say that money is not essential for living? Probably not, because it is not a sin to become rich, but what is sinful is our attitude towards wealth. When people become wealthy, they often forget God and starts "worshipping" money. This results in alienating themselves from the values of the kingdom of God. Today's story reminds us that if we cannot overcome the temptations for acquiring wealth or if we are not willing to share our riches, then we may not find meaning in life.

Bible Learning: Main ideas

In Mark 10: 17 -31, we read about a rich young man who is very keen to inherit eternal life. Let's examine some of the personal characteristics of the young man.

1. He has a shallow and dual personality

The young man's approach to Jesus calling him a Good Teacher is an example of what we would call a politically correct attitude. He is eager to learn, so he runs; he is humble, so he bows; he is respectful, granting Jesus the highest accolade of "Good Teacher"; and he asks the right question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

This young man had enough wealth and has been observing the Jewish law from his childhood. But he did not have a personal relationship with God. He had immense wealth but definitely no peace. He is looking for an 'easy way' to inherit the kingdom of God. However, we learn that he is not willing to give up his earthly possessions even for eternal life.

2. He observed the law

Jesus responds to the man: *"Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments, 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" (10:18-19)*

Before directing the man back to the Ten Commandments, Jesus confronts him with the blunt enquiry, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone." The question had set the tone for his answer, which backs the man into a corner. Now he will be forced to rethink everything about his life, the commandments, God and the Messiah. The young man who before this meeting with Jesus had his life neatly arranged, is about to have it all unravel before his eyes. With that question probing his heart, Jesus quotes six of the Ten Commandments, all of which address the man's responsibility to his neighbor, to preserve his life, home, possessions and reputation--commandments he well knows. Now the young man confesses to Jesus that he has kept all these commands since his childhood.

According to the young man, doing only those rules that the law permits is what is meant by obeying the law. Usually we refrain from doing unlawful things not because we don't like it but to escape from punishment. But this is not the right attitude. Many a times we obey the rules that the church or the leaders tells us without actually believing in it. Just like this man, we also have the same self-righteous attitude. We proudly says that we are Syrian Christians and that we

practice all that has been told us without questioning nor understanding what we are doing from a young age. Let's examine ourselves and see whether we are just indulging in ritualistic prayers and worships rather than having a true relationship with God.

3. He goes back disappointed

Jesus identifies his one weakness. He was a man of means, but sadly, his money had stolen away his affections from God. The man was guilty of violating the second commandment; other gods had replaced his love for God. And though he might have had an outstanding reputation in the community and synagogue, at heart he was an idolater. In order to deal with that idolatry and to attain eternal life, Jesus tells him to sell everything and give it to the poor, and then, "come, follow me." This was a basic invitation to discipleship, the identical one that was given to the twelve. And notice that it demanded the same loyalty to Jesus that the Law gave to God in the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Deut 5:7).

This invitation causes his face to fall and his heart to grieve. It is only after his response that we learn from Mark that he was a man of means. Instead of heeding the call, like Peter, Andrew, James, John and Matthew, this young man went away grieved, bound up by his many possessions which possessed him. Even though the young man was not honest before Jesus, He still loved him (v.21).

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Why did the young man address Jesus as a "Good Teacher"?
2. What did the young man want from Jesus?
3. Why did the young man go back in grief?
4. What was the young man's attitude towards wealth?
5. Write an essay on wealth and poverty in the world today. Give examples from the Bible and Christian leaders

Bible application

The young man went away grieved because he had great possessions. Are we willing to deny ourselves, our ego, our position, our possessions and follow Jesus who called us to be the light of this world. We are expected to have a life with Him daily, fulfilling the purposes of our Creator. But just like the rich young man, we have lost our focus and are trying to have the best in both worlds.

Life Response:

1. Can you call Jesus "Good Lord", even when he allows suffering and trials in your life?
2. Jesus says in *Luke 9:23* – If any man wills to come after me, let him deny himself, take up the cross daily and follow me. What does the cross mean to you?

3. Sometimes like the young man in the passage, we want to follow Jesus for our own personal gain - for example; to get fame and fortune, to keep us from getting into trouble etc., But are you willing to give up our own personal pride and comfort and enter into a personal relationship with Jesus?

Memory verse:

Jesus looked at him and loved him, " One thing you lack", he said, Go sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me". Mark 10:21

Prayer:

Father God, I thank you for the good things in my life. Help me to acknowledge it as your gift always. Enable me to share it with others and to have treasures in Heaven. Help me Lord to always be alert of your calling and to do your will. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Part III

GOD'S PURPOSE FOR GOD'S WORLD

Chapter 11

CAPTURING THE CITY OF JERICHO

Lesson Theme: The blessing in Obedience

Aim: To learn that God always takes care of His people.

Bible Reading: Joshua 6: 1 – 26

Values for Life:

- *The ways of God are not the ways of man. What man thinks impossible is possible with God.*
- *God expects obedience and complete trust in Him.*
- *To rely on our abilities, talents, wealth or possessions, is futile and dangerous. Without the protection that God offers, nobody will be secure*

Preparation:

Have you heard about or experienced a miraculous escape from death? One such story is the life of Brother Andrew. First published in 1967 and still available, the story of 'God's Smuggler', Brother Andrew as an evangelist and supporter of the communist churches since 1955, is now legendary. His work began with a passion for God's book, smuggling bibles into the 'outer periphery' - where some religious freedom still remained: Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and East Germany. His technique, incredible though it may seem, was to just pack the bibles as ordinary luggage then pray that the border guards would not see them. It worked. He trained partners and build a team of workers. The hardest places to penetrate were the 'Inner Circle': Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Russia. He found ways to succeed in all of them except in Albania, and later China. The fact that conditions are so vastly changed in these lands is at least in part due to God's Smuggler.

When we follow God, we need to trust that He will take care of all our needs. Trust is revealed through obedience. God wants us to obey Him and obedience has great rewards. Let us look to the Bible to see one example of how the Israelites obeyed God's simple solution to a great problem and thereby experienced deliverance from their enemies.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

THE RUINS OF JERICHO



The ruins of Jericho (top). Situated in the desert of Judah, near an oasis some 656 feet below sea level, Jericho grew up around a powerful spring. In the seventh millennium the small Neolithic village developed into a thriving city. The flimsy huts were replaced by round houses build of mud bricks, on stone foundations with floors well below the level of the ground outside. The spectacular fortifications were built later: a stone wall five feet thick reaching a height of over sixteen feet was built within a deep trench.

Thought by archeologists to be over 10,000 years old, Jericho is the oldest known walled city in the world. When Joshua and the Children of Israel entered the Promised Land for the first time, those walls came "tumbling down". *"When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city"* [Joshua 6:20].

Although archeologists have not yet uncovered remains of the famous walls of that time, Tel Jericho ([Tel es Sultan](#) located in the modern city) includes the ruins of a large circular tower and fortifications that indicate Jericho's importance.

- When the Israelites entered the Land, the whole nation was camped just two miles away at Gilgal on the flat plain beside the Jordan River. From there, they could look up at the seemingly impregnable walls of the city. The people of Jericho could also observe the camp of the Israelites. The residents of Jericho had heard of the Israelites' miraculous departure from Egypt forty years before. They would have been very impressed with this extraordinary event, since Egypt's power had dominated them for many years. They were also very much aware of Moses' victories over the formidable Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites across the river (Josh 2:9-11).
- On God's command, the people, priests, and warriors marched around the city of Jericho once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. The priests carried the Ark of the Covenant, signifying the presence and power of God who would give the victory. With a shout from the people and the blowing of rams' horns by the priests, the walls fell and the city was taken.
- After Jericho fell, Joshua pronounced a curse on any who would rebuild the city, a prediction that was fulfilled in the days of Ahab (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34).

After going through the Bible reading for this lesson, see if you can answer the following questions.

1. Why did the King of Jericho close the walls of his city?

On their way from Egypt, the Israelites reached the banks of the river Jordan. Just like what happened at the crossing of the Red sea, God also dried the river of Jordan and the people crossed the river through dry land. When the King of Jericho heard about what the Lord had done, he closed the walls of his city. No one was allowed to go in or go out.

2. What did God tell Joshua to do in order to capture the city of Jericho?

God made a very simple way. All the Israelite armies were asked to march around the city once a day for six days. The procession included the advance guard followed by the seven priests each carrying a trumpet, followed by the priests carrying the covenant box, and finally the rear guard. On the seventh day, Joshua and his soldiers were to march around the city seven times, while the priests blew their trumpets. Following this, the people were asked to shout loudly. This would bring down the walls of Jericho.

3. What happened after the Israelites obeyed the master plan?

The walls of Jericho fell down and the Israelites captured and killed their enemies.

4. Why was Rahab and her family spared?

Rahab had hidden two spies that Joshua had sent to Jericho. Rahab and all her family were spared of their lives because she took part in God's mighty plan.

5. How did Joshua respond to God's plan?

Joshua obeyed the plans that God outlined without questioning or reasoning its intelligence. He trusted God and His plan however simple it seemed.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Action Game: Into the City – a take off on Musical Chairs:

Set up a circle of chairs, one per child, each chair facing outward, Leave a gap between 2 chairs to be the city gate.

Tell the children:

- That inside the chairs is a city.
- The chairs around it are the city walls.
- The gap between the 2 chairs is the city gate.

Each child sits in a chair until you play some music (or sing part of a song).

The children must march around the city while the music plays.

The object of this game is to get into the city through the gate, not to find an empty chair.

Stop the music and the child nearest the city gate gets to go "into the city".

Repeat until every child makes it into the city.

Bible Application:

You are now going to do a group activity. The class is to be divided into groups, with a minimum of three students per group.

The materials required are:

Marker pens (one per group and of different colors)

Chart Paper/Bristol Board (one per group)

Adhesive Tape

The chart papers have to be taped to different walls in the classroom. Each chart paper will be titled with one of the topics mentioned below. A marker pen has to be assigned to each group. Each group has will be given 1 to 2 minutes to write one opinion to each topic. After the allotted time, the groups will change positions (move clockwise) till all the topics have been covered by each group. The class will then collectively discuss the various opinions and comment/reflect on the answers.

The topics to be discussed are as follows:

- Do you think the fall of Jericho really happened in history? Why/ Why not?
- Give another biblical example of a blessing received due to obedience.
- What are the "towers" that challenge you today?
- Give one example of obedience to God in day-to-day life.

- Your friend tells you that it isn't cool to go to church and attend Sunday school? What can you tell your friend in response to that statement?

Life Responses:

1. Have you ever experienced a miracle in difficult situation? Do you know of anyone who has? What lesson did you learn from it?

2. How did Jesus show obedience to God?

2. Have you made a commitment to follow Jesus? How can you show obedience to Jesus?

Memory Verse:

“Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stands guard in vain”. Psalm: 127: 1

Prayer:

Lord, we thank you that we can come to you when we face difficulties. Jesus obeyed you always, even obeyed to die on the cross. Help us to be obedient so that we will receive blessing from you – Amen.

CHAPTER 12

SURRENDER TO GOD'S WILL

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| Lesson Theme: | God in Fellowship with Human Being |
| Lesson Aim: | Even though God has given us the free will, human life becomes fruitful only when we surrender ourselves to the will of God |
| Bible Reading: | Luke 1: 26 - 38 |

Values for Life:

- *Surrendering to God's will: This may sound impossible to do but nothing is impossible when we respond to God's call (Luke 1:37)*
- *Understanding God's Grace: God's unmerited favor does not mean worldly blessings. Sometimes we may have to pay a heavy price to experience God's Grace in our lives*
- *Unexpected calling: When we receive an unexpected calling from God to do an impossible task, are we willing to submit ourselves to his call for the Glory of his Kingdom?*
- *Trusting God: When God calls us to do something important, it is natural to feel a little bit scared. God understands our reaction, and will point us to a way that can help us find strength. Our fears could turn in to Faith when we trust God.*

Preparation:

Have you heard about Mother Teresa? Have you ever wondered why an Austrian Nun wanted to go to India and work among the poorest of the poor in the city of Calcutta? When you read her story we learn that after joining the Sisters of Our Lady of Loreto in Ireland, in 1928, she began her journey to India where she would continue her training towards her religious vows. Soon after, on January 6, 1929 she arrived in Calcutta, the capital of Bengal to teach at a school for girls. While in Calcutta, she was moved by the presence of the sick and dying in the city's streets.

On September 10, 1946, on the long train ride to Darjeeling where she was to go on a retreat to recover from suspected tuberculosis, something happened. She had a life-changing encounter with the Living Presence of the Will of God. Mother Teresa recalls: "I realized that I had the call to take care of the sick and the dying, the hungry, the naked, the homeless - to be God's Love in action to the poorest of the poor. That was the beginning of the Missionaries of Charity".

Answering to God's call, enabled Mother Teresa not only to start the order of Sisters of Charity world-wide, but through their missionary work thousands of sick and dying people were picked up from the streets of Calcutta and given a home to die in an environment of kindness and love

thereby fulfilling Christ's command: *"Whatever You Did Unto One of the Least, You Did Unto Me"*

In the previous lesson we studied about Rahab who took part in God's mighty plan to help the Israelites. Today we are going to study about another woman who surrendered herself to the Will of God and for His mighty redemptive act.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. *In the Bible, we find that on many occasions, God sends his angels to convey an important message to his people. What was the purpose of angel Gabriel's visit to Virgin Mary?*

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to be married to a man called Joseph. The angel came to Mary and said that God has been gracious to her and that the Lord is going to bless her.

2. *What was Mary's reaction to the angel's message?*

First, Mary was **Scared** (v. 29- 30). She was frightened and wondered at the Angel's message. She could not understand why "God has greatly blessed her." She thought she was just another ordinary girl. It is then that the angel tells her about the good news of the Messiah becoming her son.

Mary was also **Doubtful** when she asked the angel, "How can this be? (v.34) Not only was she not married, but she may also have found it hard to believe that someone like herself could be chosen for such an important job. So she argued with the angel to confirm what she had heard. The angel not only clarifies her doubt, but also tells her about the good news of how Elizabeth a relative of hers is pregnant now and that she is an example to Mary, as to how God can do impossible things possible.

Finally, Mary was **Obedient**. Despite her fears and doubts, she says, "Here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word (v.38).

3. *Why did the angel tell Mary about Elizabeth?*

God wanted Mary to know that she need not be afraid about what is going to happen to her because a miracle is going to happen to Elizabeth also. Mary could draw some courage from Elizabeth because she could understand what Mary was experiencing.

4. *How does Mary's story help us understand God's Grace?*

Grace means God's unmerited favor or blessing. By human standards what was the blessing that Mary received? It was something really great to become the mother of Jesus. But think of the price that she would have to pay for getting pregnant before being married. Society would look down on her for getting pregnant before being married.

According to the Jewish laws, the punishment given to such women is stoning to death. She may have to even flee from Judea to avoid shame and agony. She might even lose Joseph. Soon after the birth of Jesus she had to flee to Egypt to escape from the Herod's army. Later she had to witness the death of her own son on the cross. Mary's life was full of tribulations and suffering.

We need to remember that God's Grace does not mean that we will always have worldly blessings. God's grace is God's strength that is given to the child of God when he/she is weak, since God's strength is made perfect only in weakness.

5. *What lesson do we learn from Mary's response to God's calling to take up the cross?*

We should learn to confront our doubts and start trusting our God. Our Lord always gives answers to our rightful doubts and questions, but then he also expects his people to stand firm and also grow in faith in the living Lord.

When the Angel conveyed God's plan to her, the way Mary responded should be a model to all Christians. She surrendered completely to God's will, even after realizing the heavy consequences that she may have to pay for it.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

A. Role of Angels: Search and find the reference to Angels in the following instances:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. <i>Genesis 24:7</i> | 2. <i>Exodus 23:20</i> |
| 3. <i>Judges 6: 11 - 12</i> | 4. <i>Mathew 2:13</i> |
| 5. <i>Mathew 28: 2, 5 - 7</i> | 6. <i>Mark 16: 5 - 7</i> |
| 7. <i>Luke 2: 8 - 14</i> | 8. <i>Luke 15: 10</i> |

B. Short Answers:

1. Why do you think God selected Mary to be the mother of Jesus? Discuss

2. "Nothing is impossible with God". This is an assurance to the faithful servants of God. Do you agree or disagree? Illustrate your response with two examples.

Bible Application:

1. What would you do if God called you to a difficult - perhaps impossible --task? Would you first consider all the options? Would you simply say no? Or would you say, as Mary said. "Let it be with me according to your word"? Let's answer:
 - What might happen to Mary if she says yes to God?
 - What might happen if she says, "I need to think about it" God?
 - What might happen if she says no to God?
 - Have you ever felt a calling to do something that would benefit others? If so, what was it? How did you respond?
2. Are you open to new experiences or would you rather stay within the comfortable boundaries of your own home and family? When it comes to experiencing life, many people fall in to one or two categories - **Open** - willing to try new challenges, meet new people, and so on) or **Closed** - unwilling to move outside a certain comfort zone

Life Response:

- Do you believe in the power of prayer? Have you ever experienced the power of God in facing difficult situations? How do you experience God's presence in your daily life to lead a victorious life?
- God also believes that in each one of us there is something good and something that can be used to help others. When God calls us through various ways, what is our response to this calling? What is our attitude when we received something that we do not deserve? Can we have the humility to say "I am the Lord's servant; may it happen as you desire". May be you have already experienced an example of this kind of trust in your dealings with other people. Has someone - perhaps a teacher, a friend, or a parent - asked you to do something that you thought were beyond your abilities? When you hesitated or protested, that person gave you a wonderful compliment and encouraged you to accept the task or assignment. How did you feel? Did you go ahead and do it? What happened?

Memory Verse:

"I am the Lord's servant, " Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said". Then the angel left her. Luke 1: 38

Prayer:

Lord, the source of all blessings, help us to submit ourselves to your eternal will - Amen.

CHAPTER 13

RELATIONSHIP BROKEN

Lesson Theme: Broken Relationships

Lesson Aim: To show that selfishness and envy break relationships

Bible Reading: Genesis 4: 1-15

Values for Life:

- *Home is the first school for children and hence the family relationships should be filled with love and care*
- *Malice in heart ends in murder*
- *The inclination to worship God is universal, seen everywhere*
- *In all ages there have been two types of worshipers such as Cain who was a casual worshiper and Abel a worshiper who offers his best*

Preparation:

Why did 9/11 happen in America? Why is there war and destruction in this world? There is always conflict and we see both good and evil existing all around us. We have the freedom to choose either good or evil, but then we face the consequence of what we choose. Since God symbolizes love, he expects us to live in love and in harmony with others, and if love is to last, there should be mutual care and acceptance.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas***1. The first parents***

Cain was the first-born and Abel was the second son of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's instruction. Cain and Abel were born after their parents had been put out of the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve were alienated from God as a result of their sin, it also resulted in the alienation of man from nature and his fellow beings. Home is the first school for children and hence the family relationship should be filled with love and care. Only when we obey and live according to God's will, our lives would become meaningful and happy. The first family lost this meaningful relationship and also happiness, as a result of their disobedience.

2. The life styles of the two brothers

Cain and Abel accepted two different life styles. Cain became a farmer where as Abel became a shepherd. Back then, there were two choices of a career – you either worked with plants (growing and harvesting) or animals (raising or hunting). Millions of people today continue in these two vital professions – we could not survive without them. Although they were brothers, their characters were different. Cain was rude and wouldn't hesitate to do anything that he liked, but Abel was quiet, mature and always trying to please God. He was also hardworking and thankful to God. Cain knew about this and was conscious of his weakness, which prompted him to be jealous and insecure.

3. The offerings to God

When the day came to make an offering to God, Cain and Abel brought their tribute. Abel brought some of the very finest from his flocks, while Cain deliberately brought an average-quality offering from his crops. Cain could have done better, but he chose not to for some reason. Perhaps he thought that the all-knowing God would not notice. God accepted Abel's offering with favor, but He rejected Cain's offering. It wasn't due to a preference of meat over vegetables, but rather that Abel had brought the best that he possibly could, and had done it willingly. Cain knowingly brought not his best, and even then brought it grudgingly. The very same offering would have been accepted if it had been the best that he could do, and if he had offered it with the right attitude. Abel was cooperative and generous; Cain was selfish and miserly. Abel expressed humility, sincerity, and obedience through his sacrifice and God accepted it. Abel offered in faith and Abel did not.

4. What did Cain do to Abel?

Even though the rejection was his own fault, the incident made Cain very jealous and angry with Abel, entirely without cause. Cain was angry since his offering was not accepted by God while Abel's was. Cain allowed his jealousy to turn to anger, and then his anger to hate. Instead of bringing himself up by doing better next time (as God plainly explained to him in Genesis 4:7), he chose to take Abel down – he committed the premeditated murder of his own righteous brother. Cain indulged malignant anger against Abel. He harboured an evil spirit of discontent and rebellion against God. Cain killed Abel in a very cunning manner.

5. How did God respond to Cain?

Questioned by God to the whereabouts of his brother, Cain answers definitely that he knows not and asked God whether he was his brother's keeper. To avenge the blood of Abel, God pronounces a curse against the first homicide. The attitude shown by man and God are entirely different. God expects us to take care of our brothers instead we are becoming more and more self centered and narrow minded.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Cain was a farmer. Abel was a shepherd. List few jobs listed in the Bible.
2. Was Abel's obedience based on faith? (a) Yes (b) No [Hebrews 11:4]
3. World has become a global village. How do we respond to the question Am I my brother's keeper?
4. What if nobody's watching? Use this activity to help the students understand that God always knows what is on our minds and in our hearts.

Ask the students what they would choose to do in the following situations.

- You are watching TV and a show you are not allowed to watch begins. If nobody's watching, do you watch the show or turn the channel?
- You are listening to the radio and a song with a bad language is played. If nobody's watching, do you turn to another station or listen to the song?
- You are playing with your friends and they want to play a mean joke on a neighbor. If nobody's watching, do you do what your friends want to do or talk them out of playing the mean joke?

Bible Application:

There are people of different talent and background in our society. One must respect others despite their differences.

Abel described as "righteous" in the New Testament. He didn't live very long in his life. With whatever he had to work with, he had made his best possible effort – exactly what God expects of us today.

Life Response:

Abel was diligent in his worship of God. How do you worship God?

Cain had a problem with jealousy, anger and denial. Do you have these problems? How do you deal with it?

Memory Verse:

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness". Romans 1:18

Prayer:

Thank you Lord for all your blessings. Help me to be humble and not be a victim of my pride and prejudice.

CHAPTER 14

GOD IS IMPARTIAL

Lesson Theme: Reconciliation

Lesson Aim: To realize that we have to love and accept one another in the same way God loves and accepts us through Jesus Christ.

Bible Reading: Acts. 10: 1-36

Values for Life:

- *When we accept and love one another, we would be inspired to work for the good of others.*
- *God's message of love and salvation is for all people regardless of race, creed or status in life.*

Preparation:

You may have heard of people like Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi who faced opposition, persecution, often torture, and through relentless struggle won freedom from oppression and equality for their people. You have studied about Mother Theresa who worked among the poorest of people in the slums of India. Albert Schweitzer was another such person who left the comfort zone of his own home and country to administer to the needs of the underprivileged in the wilds of Africa. These people lived and worked towards improving the plight of others. By their actions, we realize that they loved and accepted others as God loved and accepted us.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas:

The lesson is about two different persons: Cornelius and Peter

1. Cornelius:

Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, was sympathetic to the Jews among whom he was stationed and he worshipped one God. He was a Gentile who joined in the prayers of the synagogue and gave alms to the poor, as the Jews were taught to do. However, he remained uncircumcised and did not observe any of the Jewish dietary regulations. Cornelius was believed to be the first Gentile who accepted Jesus Christ and he later became a Bishop of the Church of Caesarea.

2. Peter:

Simon Peter, the leader of the disciples was a traditional Jew, fully observant of all the Jewish laws and traditions. The traditional Jewish Christians did not consider the Greek Christians who did not undergo circumcision as their equals. Under these circumstances, Peter would not have considered Cornelius, a Roman soldier, to be his equal and therefore, would not have eaten with him, especially since Cornelius was uncircumcised.

3. The Visions:

While Cornelius was praying one afternoon, he saw a vision in which an angel of God directed him to send for Simon Peter who was staying at the home of Simon, a leatherworker, in Joppa.

The next day, Peter had a vision, as he was about to pray. In his vision, he was asked to kill and eat animals and birds, which were considered unholy to the Jews. This happened three times. While he was wondering what the vision meant, the men sent by Cornelius arrived.

4. The Mission:

Peter accompanied the men to Caesarea where Cornelius had gathered a group of like-minded friends and Peter preached to the group, resulting in the Holy Spirit coming upon all of them. Peter baptized them all.

Peter realized through his vision that it was permissible for him to eat “unclean” foods and likewise, no person should be considered unclean either. This vision led Peter to change his attitude towards the Gentiles. He acknowledged that God had made everyone pure through the blood of Jesus Christ and that what God had created is not unclean.

From this lesson, we realize that God has made everyone in His image and all people have been made pure through the blood of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should not discriminate against anyone, based on religion, race, color or caste. Through Jesus Christ we are all one and equal with one another.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Using a map of the Middle Eastern region of the first century, locate the journey of Peter to Caesarea.
2. Discuss the cultural and religious backgrounds of Peter and Cornelius.

Bible Application:

1. Vision to Mission

Peter’s vision changed his mission, resulting in the ministry among the Gentiles. God knows our attitudes and our shortcomings but he still loves us and uses us. Do we have a vision?

2. Prayer leads to vision

Both men spent time in prayer and it was through their time of prayer that they received their vision.

Do we have praying habit?

Is our praying, a habit or is it a time of communication with God?

Can we find time in our busy schedules to talk and listen to God?

3. Our mission today

God may not talk to us through visions or dreams, as he did to Cornelius and Peter. God talks to us through the Word of God, through others and through our day to day experiences. Can you recall any incident where you felt God was speaking to you? (Through the healing of someone you know?)

4. Reconciliation between peoples – the Need for Today

Cornelius and Peter belonged to two different races, different cultures and of different educational and work backgrounds. Yet they were brought together for the growth and extension of God's Kingdom.

Today we live in a pluralistic society, made up of people from all parts of the world and from all walks of life. Discuss the pros and cons of being part of this society. (Refer to "Clash of Civilizations" by Samuel Huntington.)

What is our attitude towards people who belong to other social, economic and cultural backgrounds?

Life Response:

- Let us evaluate whether we love and accept others as children of God? What prevents us from treating everyone equally? Our prejudices? Our fears?
- What can we do, to show the love of God to others in our neighborhood, our environment?
- What are the ways by which God calls us today? Are we responding to the mission?

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:

Lord, we pray that we can love and accept those who are different from us. Help us share your love with others who are less fortunate. Amen

CHAPTER 15

RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH FAITH

Lesson Theme: **Eternal Purpose in Life**

Aim: To realize that we are all made righteous in the sight of God through our faith in Jesus Christ

Bible Reading: **Romans 3:21-31**

Values for Life:

- *Salvation can be attained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- *God has made all mankind righteous through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.*

Preparation:

Ancient Greeks based their life on the path of knowledge, while Indians based their life on the Vedas. Jews lived according to the Laws of Moses. The Jewish teachings were based on 1) a concept of one God, Monotheism, 2) religious rituals and traditions like circumcision and 3) moral teachings which instill social responsibilities.

The Jews believed that salvation was based on how one obeyed these laws. The other religions may not have such clear-cut laws but most people of the world believe that one would be held accountable for all the good or evil deeds that one had committed. We find people of all faiths trying to achieve salvation through good works. However, is it possible for any human being to lead a completely blameless life? No.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Paul's Letter to the Romans.

Paul, the writer of the Letter to the Romans was a highly trained Jew, with a very clear understanding of the Law, traditions and Israel's history. But after his vision of the risen Christ, while on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians, Paul's entire being was centered on God's grace and love. His teaching and preaching were based on righteousness through faith and not on the works of the Law (Gal. 2 :16)

2. Salvation:

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome in the winter of AD 55-56, to lay the foundation of the gospel he preached. Paul asserted that salvation is for everyone who has faith and that we

shall have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). Martin Luther and all other reformation leaders proclaimed this message of Paul. We together with all the reformation churches believe in this message.

3. Righteousness:

The lesson describes seven special features with regards to God's righteousness.

1. God's righteousness revealed (V. 21)
2. It is given to every one who believes
3. The Laws of Moses and the Prophets are witnesses to it. (V.22)
4. We are in need of this righteousness, since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (V. 23)
5. It is freely given (V.24)
6. It is proclaimed by God (V.25)
7. It sanctifies all those who believe in Jesus Christ (V.26)

Paul gives two meanings to the word righteousness:

- 1) To be considered innocent and
- 2) To be made free.

Righteousness is not something that God bestows upon mankind because He is indebted to man. On the contrary, man is indebted to God. God showed his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8). No human being can stand righteous before God by trying to do good deeds to sanctify himself. It is only through Christ's death on the cross, that the power of sin and death is broken. God pronounces the guilty person innocent, through faith in Jesus.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Talk about societies and religious groups, which believe that they have to do penance here on earth to attain salvation. Discuss aspects of mutilation of body and self-flagellation, sacrifice of animals and humans. Students can do research on other religions, even Christianity, to find out more examples.

2. Discuss the reason why Paul wrote the letter to the Romans.

Paul's Letter to the Romans was written to prepare the way for a visit he planned to make to the church at Rome. Paul wanted to explain his understanding of the Christian faith and its practical applications in daily living. Paul was also attempting to allay the fears and suspicions that he had rejected the teachings of the Torah and observant Jews by emphasizing the continuity of God's saving plan and activity in history. He provided many Old Testament quotations to support his position.

Paul emphasized that Christ's death terminated the Mosaic (ceremonial) law, that by the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death and forgiveness of sins through baptism, mankind is incorporated into Christ and Christ lives in us.

Bible Application:

1. God's justice proclaimed that all men are sinful and therefore liable for judgment, but through Christ, mankind received grace. We learn that salvation cannot be earned through our good deeds, but only by accepting the sacrifice that Jesus paid on the cross.

How are faith and deeds inter-connected?

Compare this lesson with James 2:14-16

3. What do you think Paul would say of people who do good deeds but who do not believe that Jesus died for their sins?

Life Response:

Have I truly accepted God's love and grace? Do I still try to attain salvation through my own efforts, or have I put my faith and trust completely on Jesus?

Memory Verse:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith –and this is not from yourself, it is the gift of God". Ephesians 2:8

Prayer:

God, we thank you for the free gift of salvation that you have given us through Jesus Christ, your son. Help us to proclaim this gospel to others, for your glory. Amen.

PART 1V

GOD WITH GOD’S PEOPLE AND GOD’S WORLD

CHAPTER 16

EARLY CHURCH – WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Lesson Theme: | History of Religions |
| Lesson Aim: | To understand how women were effective participants of the Early Church |
| Bible Reading: | Luke 8: 1-3; Mark 15: 40, 41; Philippians 4: 2-3; Romans 16: 1-3, 6, 12-15 |

Values for Life:

- *Respond to God’s Calling: Be willing to respond to God’s Great calling*
- *Faithful followers: Be faithful followers of Jesus in every walk of our life*
- *Sufferings and Sacrifices: Be willing to suffer and sacrifice for Jesus*
- *Service and Love: Be prepared to serve and love others.*

Preparation:

Florence Nightingale, the daughter of the wealthy landowner, William Nightingale was born in Florence, Italy, on the 12th of May 1820. She was an English nurse who was the founder of modern nursing. At the age of seventeen, she felt herself to be called by God for an unnamed great mission. By the age of twenty-five she told her parents about her desire to become a nurse. Though it was unacceptable to her parents at first, in 1851 Florence’s father gave her permission to train herself as a nurse.

Florence’s life was dedicated to the care of the sick and the wounded in war. During the Crimean War of 1853, when thousands of British soldiers were struck with cholera and malaria, Florence Nightingale volunteered her services and was eventually given permission to take a group of thirty-eight nurses to Turkey and serve them. She was known as the “The Lady with the Lamp” because she believed that a nurse’s care was never ceasing, whether night or day. She taught that nursing was a noble profession and she made it so.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas**Fellowship of Women during Jesus’ Public Ministry**

During the time of Jesus’ public ministry, there were some women who followed Him, served Him and cared for His needs. Some of them were healed and even delivered from evil spirits.

Chief among these women were Mary Magdalene, who followed Jesus. Also mentioned in the Gospels are Mary and Martha of Bethany; Mary, the mother of Jesus; Joanna and some others (Mark. 15:40-41; Luke. 24:10). Even Pilot's wife talked good about Him. There were women at the foot of the Cross, witnessing His death, burial and resurrection. They also joined the disciples as they were praying at the Upper Room waiting upon the Holy Spirit. Nothing could stop them from following Jesus and they were faithful followers of Jesus.

Fellowship of Women in Early Church

Let us learn today about some Women of the Early Church whom Paul greets in his epistle to the Romans (Romans 16).

1. Women who suffered a lot for the Lord

Phoebe

Phoebe means "One who Shines". She was a 'Deaconess of the Church' at Cenchreae that lies on the eastern side of Corinth (Romans.16: 1). This woman helped many in their needs, including Paul. Phoebe worked hard for Jesus and endured a lot of sufferings and sacrifices. Paul acknowledges her role as very valid and hence calls her 'helper', which shows her commendable leadership and talents. Therefore, Paul is recommending everyone to accept her whole-heartedly in the name of Jesus Christ, since she is worthy of honor.

Priscilla

Priscilla was a Greek lady who worked tirelessly for the Kingdom of God along with her husband, Aquilla. They were co-workers of Paul for Christ Jesus. Paul used to stay with them during his missionary journeys. They used to have Fellowships in their house and they had even risked their lives for Paul. Paul is reminding everyone to be thankful to them.

2. Motherly Affection

Rufus' Mother

Rufus is the son of Simon from Cyrene who carried the cross of Jesus (Mark 15:21). Hence Rufus' mother is considered as the wife of Simon. Paul reminds everyone that this woman served him as his own mother. Thus through her service and love, Rufus' mother also became a fellow worker of God's Kingdom.

3. Women who worked hard for the Lord

Persis, Tryphena and Tryphosa (Romans 16:12)

These three women worked very hard for the Lord faithfully. Tryphena and Tryphosa were sisters and members of the family of the Emperor. Paul specially mentions about women who toiled hard for the Lord.

Mary, Euodia and Syntyche

Mary labored so much with Paul (Romans 16: 6). These women worked hard side by side with Paul and Clement in preaching the Gospel (Philippians 4:2-3). Thus even from the first century, women took active participation in the leadership of the Church. It should provide ample encouragement for women to play a key role in the Church of the twenty first century.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. With the help of suitable visual aids (pictures or drawings), the teacher could discuss the role of women in early church and link it to the activities of women in the present day church.
2. Divide students into four small groups of two or three and assign one woman of early church to each group. Discuss in their groups for a specific time and present to the whole class.

Bible Applications:

1. Why do you think that the women of early Church were faithful followers of Jesus Christ?
2. How do you react to others who are different from you in gender or ethnic background? Are you willing to treat others as Jesus expects you to do so?
3. Do you think that you are a faithful follower of Jesus Christ? If not, how would you make alterations in your daily life style to do something for our Lord and Savior daily?

Life Responses:

1. What do you think about the role of women in the modern church? Find some activities of your church where women are active participants.
2. Find out the involvement of different women groups in various churches in your area.

Memory Verse:

The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Romans 8: 16 – 17

Prayer:

Lord, Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for loving and treating every one equal. Please help us to be your faithful followers – Amen.

CHAPTER 17

GOOD NEWS FOR THE OPPRESSED

Lesson Theme: History of Salvation

Lesson Aim: To study that we have a Savior who brought Good News for the oppressed and the poor.

Bible Reading: Luke 1: 1 – 56

Values for Life:

- *Redemption of mankind from sin: Jesus the only son of God was sent to the world to die on the cross so that whoever believes and accepts Him will have eternal life.*
- *Help the poor and the oppressed: As our Lord had shown us, we should be willing to help the poor and needy around us.*
- *Pray for our enemies: We should be able to love and pray for our enemies.*
- *Trust in the Power of God: Trusting in the Power of Almighty God would enable you to strengthen yourself to overcome any bitter or unpleasant situations in your life.*

Preparation:

El Salvador, which means “The Savior” in Spanish, is a country located on the Pacific coast of Central America. A long history of injustice and years of civil war have left deep wounds in the hearts of people of El Salvador. Archbishop Oscar Romero strongly denounced injustice, violence and oppression prevalent in El Salvador. Romero was born in a poor family in 1917. At the age of 12, he left school, and pursued his career as a carpenter’s apprentice. However, he could not continue with the apprenticeship for long since he decided to learn Theology. After his Theological studies in Rome, he returned to El Salvador in 1944 and became very active as an administrator and an inspirational minister and preacher.

Romero was ordained as a Bishop in 1974 and was appointed as Archbishop in 1977. Though the authorities and the establishment of the country warmly welcomed him, soon there was turmoil in the country. A Jesuit priest was shot dead and that was a turning point in Romero’s life. He began to concentrate on issues of violence, poverty and human right’s violations. He called upon people to repent and submit to God. His calling was even directed to the members of the army. But he could not survive long. On March 24, 1980 Romero was assassinated while celebrating Holy Communion at the Hospital Divina Providencia, a home for poor, terminally ill cancer patients. He had to suffer a cruel death because of his denunciation of violence and oppression. His message of hope and encouragement, few minutes before his assassination was really inspirational and it is as follows:

“Those who surrender to the service of the poor through the love of Christ will live like the grains of wheat that die. It only apparently dies. If it were not to die, it would remain a solitary grain. The harvest comes because of the grain that dies”.

Bishop Romero was a Savior to the oppressed people of El Salvador. Oscar Romero known as the “Bishop of the Poor” was a surprise in history. Through today’s lesson let us learn what the Bible teaches us about the oppressed and the poor.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. God’s longing for fellowship with his people

Throughout the Old Testament, we could experience the desire of God to have fellowship with humanity. Adam and Eve were created and placed in the Garden of Eden to have fellowship with God daily. However, disobedience separated them from God and as a result, sin entered into this world. Over and over God was revealing his love and mercy to restore his people through his chosen vessels. Abraham, Moses, Samuel and Jeremiah are a few among them. God’s own chosen people rejected Him, worshipped idols, displeased God and went away from the greater plans of Almighty God. Jesus illustrated this obviously through the Parable of the Vineyard (Mtt.21:33-46).

2. Redemption of mankind through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross

To deliver humanity from the bondage of sin, God decided to send His only son, Jesus Christ to this world just as an ordinary human being. Jews expected a messiah but they could not accept Jesus Christ, the real messiah as their expected messiah because they expected a political messiah of Crown and staff of power and throne. But Jesus was a messiah of love and power of Holy Spirit not to capture but to die on the cross. He died on the Cross and resurrected on the third day. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life” (John 3:16). But the hopes of the Jews were totally different from what we Christians believe. They are still waiting for a Messiah who will deliver them from their enemies and enable them to have a peaceful and prosperous life there after.

a) Jesus, a gift from Heaven for the poor and the oppressed

Mary’s song of Praise reveals Jesus as a gift from God for the poor and oppressed. Isaiah 61: 1- 4 proclaims the Good News for the poor and the oppressed. It is the great love of Jesus that has drawn many to serve the poor and lonely. In this respect we should remember the many activities offered by the Mar Thoma Church to the poor and needy. People like the destitute, the disabled, the mentally ill and the alcoholics rejected by the society are being taken care of by our church.

b) A Messiah who prays even for the enemies

Jews who were expecting the Messiah to be born as a King could not accept the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born in a manger. It was quite unusual for a **King** to be born in such a lowly circumstance. Jews were waiting for a Messiah **who** would fight for them and defeat their enemies and establish the Kingdom. Instead Jesus came to this world with the message of Peace and Love. He preached the great message of loving one's own enemy. For Jews their policy was "Eye for Eye". But Jesus prayed even for those who killed him (Lk.23:34).

c) The power that works above all social systems of the world

Israel was under the reign of the Roman rulers at the time of the birth of Jesus. During that period it was an extremely unacceptable social set up that was prevalent in Israel. Jesus through his teachings brought in the principles of equality to all. Thus the power of Jesus worked above all the evil social systems of the world helping many to lead a better life and enabling them to attain eternity.

Kagawa one of the great social leaders of Japan dedicated his life to uplift the poor and needy of Japan. In one of his messages in USA, he preached that Christians should be like a blazing fire. One of the viewers in his meetings responded by saying that it is this blazing fire that has helped her to lead a better life. Millions of human beings have experienced this awesome power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and were saved from being perished in this world.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

- **Divide the class into three groups of 2 to 3 students. Assign each group one of the following tasks:**
 - 1) The significance of the birth of John the Baptist
 - 2) The uniqueness of the birth of Jesus
 - 3) Mary's song of Praise

Students have to discuss in their groups their assigned topic. After a specific time limit, each group has to present to the class their task in an appropriate manner.

- **Ask two volunteers to read aloud today's Bible portion and the teacher discusses the lesson along with the students.**

Bible Applications:

1. How and where was the relationship between God and humanity broken? What was the greatest performance of God to restore this broken relationship?
2. What is the hope of Jews regarding the coming of the Messiah? Why were the Jews unable to accept Jesus as the Messiah?

3. In Mary's Song of Praise, she is singing: "He has brought down mighty kings from their thrones and lifted up the lowly". Explain in your own words what does it mean to you and apply it giving an example from daily life.
4. Give two examples where Jesus shows his compassion and love towards the poor and helpless during his Ministry.

Life Responses:

1. Do you think that as a Sunday school class you could organize some activities to help the poor and oppressed in your society? List any two ways in which you will help a child who has lost his parents.
2. Research on some of the assistance provided by local churches to help the poor and oppressed particularly by the organizations of your church. As Sunday school students, how would you help them?

Memory Verse:

" I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." Isaiah 61:10

Prayer:

Lord enable us to assist the Church in their mission to proclaim the Good News to all, to free the captives and to heal the oppressed. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 18

WORSHIP

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Lesson Theme: | Fullness of Life in Jesus Christ |
| Lesson Aim: | To worship the Lord in Spirit and Truth is an integral part of our Commitment to our Lord |
| Bible Reading: | Hebrew 9, John 4: 21 -24 |

Values for Life:

- *Importance of Worship: We are called to adore and pay reverence to God Almighty, and it is our obligation and privilege to do so*
- *Worship is our Gift to God: It is an expression of our response to God for what God has done in our life*

Preparation:

Worship means service, adoration, reverence given to, homage paid to Glorify God. Worship is a tribute to God for who He is and for what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. It is acknowledging the worth of God and hence confessing the place of God in life. It is through worship that the life and witness of the Church is maintained and the community is united and built up.

Origin of Worship: In the ancient times, worship was the response of man to the mighty and unknown powers of the environment or nature. Since the environment had a great influence on the lifestyle of man, he worshipped various forms of deity out of fear and reverence for the transcendent who is considered mightier than him. In the Old Testament, we learn that the Israelites were even afraid to pronounce the name of the God.

Mankind learned the existence of Eternity only through the self-revelation of God. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the final disclosure to mankind. This led to a drastic change in human knowledge about God and gave rise to new dimensions in expressions and understanding of worship.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. *In the Old Testament, there are instances of individual worship, but the main emphasis is the worship in congregations. The following bible references will support this:*

- *Genesis 24:26*
- *Exodus 33: 9 -34*
- *Psalms 42:4*
- *1 Chronicles 29:20*

In Israel, the public worships i.e., prayers and praises were an expression of their love and gratitude to God. In fact, worship offered at the tabernacle and temple were the highly developed form of public worship.

2 **Synagogue worship:**

The Jewish patriarchs believed that the Lord could be worshipped wherever He had chosen to reveal Himself. In Israelite history, when the sanctuary was destroyed, they developed the form of synagogue worship, consisting of:

- **The "Shema"** - The Jewish confession of faith, which is recited every morning and evening by all Jewish men and is included among the passages inscribed in the Phylacteries (two small leather boxes worn during morning prayers by Orthodox and Conservative Jews after the age of 13 years. Each box contains strips of parchment inscribed with verses from the Scriptures.
- **Prayers**
- **Scripture readings**
- **Exposition**

3 **New testament Worship:**

The first followers of Jesus continued to worship in the Temple and in the synagogues. Gradually, these Jewish Christians separated from the Jewish institutions of worship into their own assemblies. However, the writers of the New Testament used and adapted worship themes from the Hebrew Scriptures. The content of early Christian worship focused on Jesus. The Christians gathered to celebrate his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming on the day of the Lord. The result of the worship was the formation of a new Community with a different culture, practice and life based on their faith in God (Early Church-Acts. 2:42-47; 4:32-36). St. Paul also gives the reciprocal relationship of worship with day today life (*Eph 5:19 –20; Col 3:16-17*).

4. **Acceptable form of worship:**

Worship in Spirit and Truth: *"God is Spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)*

Jesus in his encounter with the Samaritan woman opens up a dialogue and gives a new insight to what true worship is all about. He exposes the hollowness of worship that was totally dominant on the cultural practices and also cults and stresses on the fact that worship included a corporate dimension, since Jesus came to redeem the whole world. Worshipping God "in spirit and truth" means filled with Holy Spirit or fully under the control of Holy Spirit and completely in the path of truth. This worship is not mere superficial expressions of emotions or some polished appearance. True worship transforms life and renews people

demanding a deeper or serious involvement from the participants. Worship makes our life a living sacrifice (Rom.12: 1-2).

Need for Corporate worship

In worship we discern the will of God and surrender ourselves for others' sake. This is what Jesus did. Worship made him more and more close and sincere to the Father and that He proved by giving himself completely for the good of others. The depth of worship deepened His Commitment and made Him more committed to the Community. That is why Jesus regularly attended corporate worship. Worship is expressing or assuring our faithfulness to God's faithfulness. These are community related responsibilities and hence must be done in a Community.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

A. Find examples of acceptable worship and unacceptable attitudes in worship from the following references:

9. *Genesis 4:3 -7*

10. *Exodus: 32*

11. *Romans 12: 1- 2*

12. *Romans 14: 17 -18*

13. *Hebrews 12:28 -29*

14. *Hebrews 13:16*

Bible Applications:

1. Often man uses religion as a hideout from his personal situations. These people may be active church goers, participate in the administration of the church, lay ministrants, choir members, knowledgeable in the bible, lay leaders etc., However, they may become stumbling blocks for others to participate in the true worship of God. List 3 possible ways you can address this situation, if it is true for your church.
2. Based on what you have learned about acceptable form of worship, is the language of worship a major concern for you?
3. What about the place of using written liturgy in worship? Discuss its place and importance.

Life Responses:

- What role can you play in making the worship service in your church more meaningful and acceptable to God?
- Worship can be a ritual. How? Discuss
- How important it is for you to attend church service? If you have a major exam on a Monday, would you be tempted to skip the Sunday service?

Memory Verse:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship”. Romans 12:1

Prayer:

Lord, help us to worship you in spirit and truth and continually offer a sacrifice of praise. Amen.

CHAPTER – 19

*LEADS TO THE TRUTH***Lesson Theme: Work of the Holy Spirit****Lesson Aim:** To study how the Holy Spirit leads us to the truth.**Bible Reading: John 16: 4 - 15****Values for Life:**

1. “He that yieldeth to the Holy Spirit will have the privilege to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life. Revelation” 2:7
2. Holy Spirit alone reveals Divine Truth to all who desire the truth. (Jesus)
3. Holy Spirit convicts each man of sin and convinces him of salvation through Christ.
4. The Holy Spirit is the promised comforter. Acts 1:8

Preparation:

Almost all life on earth needs some sort of support to grow and nurture. For the farmer to be able to reap a good crop he has to tend his field and watch until the harvest is ready. Babies from the time of their birth until maturity, parents dote over to ensure they get the best emotional, physical and intellectual nurturing.

When a person is born into the Kingdom of God he/she too needs extensive spiritual nurturing. Jesus knew this need and hence made the provision available to all those who desire to accept him as Lord and Savior. Jesus at the time of ascension and also during his public ministry assured the disciples about the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to his disciples that the Spirit would lead them, guide them and comfort them in all their life. Jesus assures them that He would be their abiding guest. John 14:16

Bible Learning: Main Ideas**Holy Spirit – In Old Testament**

The Hebrew word for Spirit is ‘Ruah’ and the corresponding Syriac word is ‘Ruha’. Ruah or Ruha is more than its literal meaning ‘wind’. It means a wind or spirit or breath that creates life. Generally the act of Spirit is testified as empowering or as sometimes destructive. The Spirit also anoints or equips God’s chosen ones for His divine service. Anointing or pouring of Holy Spirit is manifested when a believer heeds to *the call* and presses on in the mission no matter what.

Holy Spirit –In New Testament

The New Testament word ‘Pneuma’ (Greek) is used to refer the Spirit. But the other word emphasized for Holy Spirit is ‘Parakletos’ which means a Counselor or an Advocate. It could be

understood further as one who is called in, to do something or to render a service or to vivify (vitalize).

Work of the Holy Spirit

Life always calls us into battle and the one who makes us able to stand up to the opposing forces is the Parakletos, the Holy Spirit, who is none other than the presence and power of the risen Christ. In John 14: 6, 26, Parakletos is a person who is called in to help in a situation with which a man by himself cannot cope. In the Gospels, Parakletos is the Spirit of Truth and power of Righteousness. Thus the function of the Holy Spirit is to fill us with that Spirit of power and courage that would make us able to triumphantly cope with life.

Holy Spirits works in different ways:

- He will lead us to experiences that are joyful. [Ps: 23: 2]
- He will enable us in taking the right decisions. [Ps: 25: 9]
- He will be our leader and will lead us into the end of life. [Ps; 48: 14]
- He will give wise counsel in the midst of uncertainties [Ps: 42: 6; Ps: 73: 24]
- He will lead to all truth. [John: 16: 13]. Here Truth is Jesus Christ (John. 14:6.). Leading to Truth means guiding and equipping in and for Jesus Christ.
- The work of Spirit in creation. [Psalms; 104: 30; Genesis: 1: 2; Job: 26: 13]
- The work of the Spirit in equipping for service. Certain elected servants of God enjoyed the power of the Spirit to do special tasks and also conferred upon them skill for their duty, craftsmanship. [Exodus: 31: 3. Leadership, Judge: 3: 10; Judges 14: 6, physical powers]. He is the renewing and reforming Spirit
- The work of the spirit in inspiring the prophets. [Am: 7: 14; Jeremiah: 31: 33; Hosea 9: 7; Is: 63: 10, 11]
- The work of the Spirit in producing a moral living. [Ps: 51; Ps: 139: 7]
- The work of the Spirit is foretelling as well as forth telling. [Is: 11: 2 – 9; 42: 1 – 4; 61: 1, 2; Ezekiel: 36: 26, 27; Joel: 2: 28]

Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church

The Holy Spirit is the Lord and giver of Life. Holy Spirit inspires every righteous desire and every effort after truth and love. The Early Church understood (experienced) the work of the Holy Spirit as Gifts and Fruits (1Corinthians.12: 7-12; Ephesians.4:11-16; Romans.12: 6-8; Galatians. 5:22 -23). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is ever present in the lives of people challenging them for Himself. By the same power, God brings them to Himself through Jesus Christ, so that they may acknowledge their sin, receive His forgiveness and becomes His children and heirs of eternal life. Through the communion of the Holy Spirit the members of the Church receive the new power to grow into the likeness of their Lord, to pray, to resist sin, to love one another, and to labor and for the coming of the Kingdom with sincerity and selfless sacrifice.

Learning: Strategies and Activities

Holy Spirit is a person in the Triune Godhead. His power, presence, guidance etc can be experienced when we choose to surrender our lives to Jesus. He is one in the Holy Trinity. In the New Testament we come across several of the Holy Spirit's office and works.

- *The Abiding Guest.* John 14:16
- The Teacher and Remembrancer. John 14: 26
- The Testifier. John 15: 26
- The Reprover, The Guide, The voice of God, The Prophet, The Glorifier, The Exhibiter of Jesus. John 16:7-8, 13, 14, 15
- The Spiritual Dynamo. Acts 1:8
- God's Children. Romans 8:16
- The Solicitor. Revelation 22:17

Bible Application

- Let us confess our sins and lead a life worthy to God so that the Holy Spirit can work in us.
- How do we experience that Holy Spirit is working today in our Church and in our Parish?

Life Responses

1. What is the comprehensive meaning of "Holy Spirit"? Discuss.
2. What does Bible say about the working of the Holy Spirit?
3. If Holy Spirit has to work in us, how do we prepare our lives for that?
4. How would you feel that the Holy Spirit working through you?

Memory Verse:

“And I will ask the father and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever”.
John 14: 16

Prayer

O God we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us to lead a life that will help us to be an instrument in the hands of the Spirit.- Amen.

CHAPTER 20

A SOLDIER FOR CHRIST

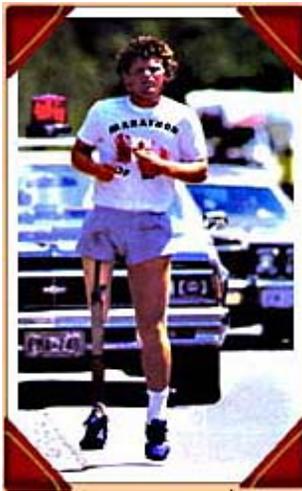
Lesson Theme: Commitment to Christ:
Lesson Aim: To understand that commitment to Christ will involve suffering and hardship
Bible Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:10-13, 2 Corinthians 6: 3-10

Value for Life:

- *Suffering in a Christian's life is a part of his/her commitment to Jesus Christ*
- *A follower of Christ should cultivate qualities of purity in life, love, kindness, strength, forbearance, integrity, righteousness and knowledge of God*

Preparation:

"How many people do something they really believe in?" "I just wish people would realize that anything's possible if you try. Dreams are made if people try."...Terry fox.



A natural athlete, Terrance Stanley Fox was born on July 28, 1958 in Winnipeg, Canada, to Rolly and Betty Fox. Terry's parents remember him as a determined little boy who never liked to miss a day of school. In grade 12, he shared the Athlete of the Year Award with his friend Doug Alward and graduated from Port Coquitlam High School with distinction.

Terry wanted to be a physical education teacher and enrolled in Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Vancouver. But his studies in kinesiology were interrupted by his diagnosis with osteogenic sarcoma - a form of bone cancer - as a result of which his right leg was amputated six inches above the right knee. While in hospital, Terry was so overcome by the suffering of other cancer patients, many of them young children that he decided to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research. He would call his journey the "Marathon of Hope".

Terry learned how to use an artificial leg, and three weeks after surgery, he was walking. After 18 months and running over 5,000 kilometers (3,107 miles) to prepare, Terry started his run in St. John's, Newfoundland on April 12, 1980 with little fanfare. He ran 42 kilometers (26 miles) a day through Canada's Atlantic Provinces, Quebec and Ontario. Then, on September 1st, after 143 days and 5,373 kilometers (3,339 miles), Terry's relentless pace was cut short due to the progression of cancer to his lungs. Terry's health worsened as the year went by. The tumors had spread to his abdomen. By February 1981, he had raised \$24.17 million for cancer research, equaling Canada's population of 24.1 million at the time. Terry passed away on

June 28, 1981 at the age of twenty-two. Today, his heroic perseverance is commemorated through numerous awards, research grants, and annual fund-raising runs held in 60 countries in his name. Terry Fox became the first Canadian to be featured on a commemorative circulation coin. Even through his suffering, Terry Fox was committed for the cause of raising funds for cancer research and persevered.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Christians have a unique approach to suffering. God identified with humanity in our suffering. He sent His only begotten Son to suffer and die on the cross. Paul willingly chose to suffer for Christ so that he may be glorified with Christ. Suffering for Christ is a means to experience the power of living Christ (1Peter.4: 12-16; Mathew.5: 10-11)

Paul in his letter to the Corinthians tried to explain the hardships he suffered for Christ and exhorts the church to follow his exemplary life. For Christ's sake believers may be called to endure:

Persecution: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for they will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven* [Matthew 5:11, 120]. In our suffering we are called to be patient and when someone curses us we are to bless him or her. In the sight of the world, Paul lost all his prestige and status; he had renounced everything worldly – birth, race, learning, position, etc.

Loss of life (Death): Those who give up their life for me (Christ) will have eternal life [Matthew 10: 39b]. Paul assumes that God allows him to go through these trials because in his weakness is Christ's strength manifested. The truth of this paradox is well elaborated in 1 Corinthians 4:1-10.

Renounce worldly comfort, loss of reputation: Those who forsake all that is worldly shall receive a hundred fold and shall receive everlasting life [Matthew 19:29]. He must suffer great things for me [Christ -Acts 9:16]. We are fools for Christ sake but we are wise in Christ [1 Corinthians 4:10]. Experiences of sorrow and joy in Christian life are not contradictory, they are complementary, because only in our sorrow would we experience the joy of Christ. We would be able to comfort those in pain if we are able to identify with them in their pain.

Suffering for Christ teaches us certain life lessons:

Purity: We are called to be holy because we worship a Holy God. Our commitment to Jesus involves a good reputation and witness for which the purity of body, mind and spirit are essential.

Love: Paul declares all gifts however excellent are nothing without love [1 Corinthians 13:13]. Divine love is always tolerant and patient, willing to love the unloved and goes to the extreme of self-denial.

Truthful Speech: Truthful speech is essential for a successful Christian ministry. The primary condition of effective preaching is that people should know that the preacher's statements could

be trusted. In telling people what Christ means to him, it is important to be strictly honest. Truthful speech is important to the fellowship among believers. (Mathew 12:37).

Strength: Paul exhorts to all those who are engaged in Christ's mission to be strong in the Lord, for His power is your might. God's power is mightier than any physical force [2 Timothy 2:1]. *Not by might not by power, but by the spirit says the Lord [Zechariah 4:6b]*

Righteousness: Righteousness is the right relationship with God and hence with fellow human beings and environment. It is the courage to stand for what is righteous. It is the commitment to fight for Divine Justice without counting its cost. Thus righteousness is a mark of a soldier for Christ.

Kindness, Discernment, integrity, forbearance and fear or knowledge of God is also part of the life of a soldier for Christ.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and discuss how Paul and his fellow workers endured hardship for the love of Christ?

- (1) What is Paul's attitude toward sufferings?
- (2) What lessons does suffering teach us, in our life of faith journey?

Bible Application:

When a decision is made to follow Christ, we would experience strength in our weakness. *My Grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness, most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest in me* [2 Corinthians 12:9].

Life Responses:

- Have you experienced suffering in Christian life?
- How can we turn crisis to opportunities?
- Research on one contemporary missionary and write an article on the persecutions faced by him/her.

Memory Verse:

"For I am convinced that neither death or life, neither angels nor dreams, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor death, for anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love Christ Jesus our Lord." **Rom 8:38-39**

Prayer:

Lord, help us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. Enable us to put on the whole Armour Of God and get on track as the imperishable crown awaits us. Amen

PART V

GOD'S WORK AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE

CHAPTER – 21

Faithful Co-worker

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Lesson Theme: | God's work in history |
| Lesson Aim: | To show faithfulness is essential to us when we work with others for God |
| Bible Reading: | Acts16: 1-5; 2Timothy 1:5-7, 2:1-6, |

Values for Life:

- *Understanding the value of a good friendship bond such as the one demonstrated by Timothy & Paul*
- *Understanding that as a Christian, we are a living witness in our daily lives- the importance of our faithfulness.*
- *Understanding that we can endure all hardships with Christ.*

Preparation:

Have you heard of Jackie Robinson?

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "colour barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. One day while playing in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered.

Then shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

Would you have done that if you were Pee Wee Reese? Do you think that Pee Wee Reese did not catch some grief for what he did? Of course he did. But he was not going to allow a co-worker / friend and teammate to face that kind of persecution alone.

This lesson is about Timothy and his relationship with Paul. We will see how Timothy stood by Paul faithfully – in fact, Paul considered Timothy his young partner in ministry, his co-worker. Paul challenges him to be strong in Christ's Grace and to guard the gospel entrusted to him. Paul warns Timothy of the hardships he will face being a Christian soldier but he has set the example for Timothy.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. ***Who was Timothy; what was his family background?*** (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim 1:5)
Timothy was a young man of faith from Lystra whose father was a Greek but whose mother Eunice & grandmother, Lois were of great faith.

Timothy was a man of God with

1. Strong faith, prayer and sincerity
2. Readiness to suffer for the sake of Christ and Gospel
3. Good training, testimony and reputation

2. ***When did Timothy become Paul's companion?*** (Acts 16:1-5; Acts 14:8-22)
Timothy joined Paul's missionary group when Paul visited Lystra on his second missionary journey. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his mission travels as his co-worker and he asked Timothy to join him. Timothy was like a son to Paul and continued to accompany and work with him during the rest of Paul's life.

Paul in his first missionary journey might have come to know the family of Timothy at Lystra. In his second missionary journey Timothy became all in all support and faithful co-worker.

3. ***How did Timothy get blessed with the Holy Spirit and what does Paul advise Timothy to do?*** (2 Tim 1:6; 2 Tim 2: 3-6; 1 Tim 1:18)

Timothy received the gift of God for his ministry when Paul had laid his hands on him. Paul encouraged Timothy to suffer hardship with him for the gospel as a good soldier of Christ and as a hard-working farmer who reaps the benefits that come from doing his work.

“This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare holding faith and a good conscience.”

4. ***What does Paul warn Timothy about? How does Paul encourage Timothy to endure?*** (2 Tim 3:11 - 12; 2 Tim 2:1-4; 1 Tim 4:12)

Paul warns Timothy that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ will be persecuted. However, he encourages Timothy by telling him that the Lord rescued him through all the persecutions that he had to endure.

Paul encourages Timothy to take his share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Paul tells him not to worry about his youth, but to set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love and faith, in purity.

5. ***What did Paul write about Timothy to the Philippians?*** (1 Corinthians 4:17; Philippians 2:19-22)

Paul wrote that Timothy was a co-worker who was concerned about the welfare of the Christians and their churches; who sought the interests of Christ Jesus, and who was committed to the gospel. Paul thinks of Timothy as his own son and as his co-worker;

“Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord.” He told the Philippians that Timothy had proven himself and that he had served with Paul as "a son with the father."

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

C. Role of True Co-workers / Friends: Give some examples of true co-workers / friends in the bible

15. *Ruth 1:6-22*

17. *Daniel 3:8-25*

19. *John 15:13-15*

16. *1 Samuel 18:1-4; 1 Samuel 20*

18. *2 Kings 2:1-14*

20. *Romans 16:3-4*

D. Short Answers:

2. Why do you think Paul thought so highly of Timothy? Could it be because Timothy stood by Paul at his time of need? Discuss (Acts 14: 8-23)

3. What are some leadership qualities seen in Timothy?
(1Tim 1:3; 4:14; 1Cor 16:8-10)

Bible Application:

- What are the qualities needed for a sincere co-worker or a faithful friend? How would you be a good co-worker or friend?
The best way to be a good co-worker or friend is to be like Christ. Jesus is the ultimate friend to everyone. He is compassionate, encouraging, patient, loyal, understanding, loving and also guiding, instructing and disciplining. "A good friend indeed is a friend in need."

- How can we endure the hardships we go through? (Phil 4:13)

With Christ we can endure anything – "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me."

Life Response:

Faithful Co-worker in the Divine Vineyard

Can we consider ourselves a faithful co-worker in the Divine Vineyard? Are we able to stand firm in our faith and endure hardships for God? But we need to remember that God is with us at all times and he will see us through everything.

Memory Verse:

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands”. 2 Timothy 1:6

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for blessing us in so many ways – help us to be strong and use our blessings to help others - Amen.

CHAPTER 22

MINISTRY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Lesson Theme: Wider Ecumenism

Lesson Aim: To understand that members of the Church should love and care for one another.

Bible Reading: Acts 4: 32-37, 6: 1-7.

Values for Life:

- *The love and fellowship that nurtured the early church should be the cornerstone of the present day church.*
- *The organizational and hierarchical structure within the church is necessary to carry out the God's ministry in the church and in the society around us*

Preparation:

Let us think about what we want out of life. We all aim to study, do well in school and then go on to the best college or university that would get us that really good job and good wage so that we could lead a very comfortable life. Is that what God has planned for us?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for our sins. It is this same ministry of service and reconciliation that God expects of us.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Structure of the Early Church

From the beginning, the rapidly growing church cared for its poor, including widows and orphans, through a daily distribution of food and other needs. The believers in the early church realized that there were many duties and responsibilities involved in maintaining the church community. When the early church grew rapidly in number, some people began to complain about the distribution of the food. Therefore, these initial group of believers came together to select seven people to assist the twelve apostles to take over the running of the social and physical aspects of this community, leaving the Preaching of the Gospel to the Apostles. The Seven who were chosen to ensure that the distribution was fair to all were Greek-speaking Jews, and were “men of good repute and full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts. Ch.6.). Stephen was one of the Seven.

As the church continued to grow in number, the need for an organized structure within the Church was felt, so that the mission of the Church could proceed efficiently. In the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, Paul talks about the organizational and hierarchical structure of the Church as well as the responsibilities assigned to the various office-holders, especially Bishops, Deacons

and Helpers. In the early church at Jerusalem, the twelve apostles and the seven helpers were all assigned to various responsibilities.

The community of believers trusted and looked up to their leaders for guidance and leadership.

2. Life Style of the Early Church

The life style of the early Church is described in Acts. 2: 44-47 and 4:32-35. All the believers continued to live together and shared their belongings. They sold their possessions and distributed the money among the needy. They considered nothing as private. A totally selfless and sharing life was the identity of the Early Church.

The early believers not only shared their money and their needs but also their joys and sorrows. By such manner of sharing, the believers showed their love and concern for each other. This enabled them to earn the goodwill and respect of the people, resulting in more believers being added to the Church.

Through this life style, they enjoyed the 'Grace of God'. With gladness and humility the believers had meaningful fellowship with one another and with others and praised God by their service. The believers of the early church willingly gave up their earthly possessions to the Church and lived and worked together as one big community and this was the success behind the growth and success of the early church.

3. Leadership Qualities

Let us study the leadership qualities that Stephen showed. While the apostles were busy with the mission of preaching, Stephen was entrusted with the responsibility of the distribution of food (Acts. 6-7). However, Stephen was not content to just distribute the food. He had a desire to preach the message of salvation to the people who did not know the Lord. He began preaching the Good News whenever he found time and opportunity.

Stephen was one of the first to see that the message of Christ could be a direct challenge to many of the features of Judaism that separated it from the Gentile culture. Because of Stephen's belief and arguments that the Gospel of Christ removed the need for the Temple and its associated sacrifices and Mosaic rites, his opponents tried to silence him, eventually causing him to become the first Christian martyr. Although Stephen realized what was happening to him and that he could lose his life, he did not waver in his faith and his preaching.

4. Fellowship in the Early Church

This fellowship of love and sharing is what Jesus requires of us today in our community of believers. Today, in our churches, we find situations of extreme disparity between the members. We should emulate the example of the early church and display the spirit of loving one another, and sharing our resources with those in need.

5. The Witnessing Church

The Church today needs to incorporate and emulate the qualities and features of the Early Church in order to be a truly witnessing Church. St. Paul discussed these features in 1Cor.12: 12-26. These include:

- Meaningful fellowship (koinonia)
- Praying together with one mind and heart
- Rejoicing and praising God
- Sharing all possessions with others because we are only God's stewards on earth.
- Sharing our joy, sorrow, fame and glory with others.
- Earning the goodwill of all other people.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. What is our goal in life? What are we doing to achieve this goal? Discuss the pressures and stresses that we go through to achieve our goal. What are the positive aspects of striving towards our goal? Are there any negative aspects?
2. Discuss what would happen if each member of the class were to bring everything he or she owned and they became common property for all to share and use. Would this ideal society be practicable today? If so, how? If not, why?

Bible Application:

1. What was the reason that the early Church selected helpers and leaders in the Church? When we choose the leaders and office-bearers in our community and church, do we select them based on their Christian leadership qualities? What should be the criteria?
2. How could we apply what we have learnt of the early Church to be a witness to the others around us? What can we do as a church and as individuals? Check out the outreach work done by the Mar Thoma church through the following institutions:
 - The Mar Thoma center for Rehabilitation and Development in Thadiyoor, Kerala
 - Mar Thoma Deaf and Dumb school, Kasargod, Kerala
 - Asha Bhavan, Pathanapuram, Kerala
 - Salem Children's (girls) Home, Thiruvalla
 - Dharmagiri Mandiram, Kumbanad, Kerala

Life Responses:

1. The needs of all members of the Early Church were met by the Community socially as well as spiritually in terms of food, clothing, shelter, fellowship, love and care. Do you think this is possible in our Church today? What can you do to follow the model of the early church?

2. What was the reason why the Macedonian and Corinthian sent aid to the Church at Jerusalem (Acts.11: 29-30)? What equivalent can you think of today? Discuss the natural disasters that affect our nation, other nations and communities?

Memory Verse:

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had”. Acts 4:32

Prayer:

Lord, we pray for the members of the Church. Help us to follow the example set by the members of the early church in enjoying meaningful fellowship, praying together, always rejoicing and sharing what we have so that we would be a witness to your love. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

ANOINTING THE SICK

Lesson Theme: Foundations of Faith Doctrines
Lesson Aim: To understand the sacrament of anointing the sick with oil
Bible Reading: James 5: 13-18

Values for Life:

- *Anointing the sick with oil and praying for their healing is one of the sacraments that our church observes.*
- *We should intercede for others, constantly and visit the sick to strengthen their faith.*

Preparation:

A Sacrament is a means of experiencing Divine Grace. It is the visible means to experience the invisible Divine Grace. There are physical objects used in the sacrament, but it is an activity of Holy Spirit. There are Seven Sacraments that are administered in the Mar Thoma Church.

Oil is one of the symbols of Holy Spirit. Muron is a Greek word and is a perfumed Holy Oil specially prepared and blessed by Bishop in the Eastern Tradition. This sacrament is performed at the time of Baptism, as a sign of the anointing and receiving of the Holy Spirit. There is another occasion when the sacrament of anointing with oil is performed. This is anointing the Sick with Oil, for healing and in the past to reintegrate the sick into the society. In this sacrament we use the oil 'Syth'(olive oil). We shall be concentrating on the sacrament of Anointing the Sick in this lesson.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Healing

Christian Faith declares God as the Great Healer. God heals those who approach Him in humility and trust. The Sick receives the healing power of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, health was considered to be a sign of prosperity while sickness was considered a sign of weakness (Psalms 3:11; 6:2; 88:4-6). The anointing the sick with oil started, even during the time of Jesus (Mark 6:13). The Good Samaritan also used oil to treat the wounded (Luke 10:34).

The Sacrament of Anointing the Sick with oil gives mental, physical and spiritual uplifting and feeling of peace with God and the world. This is a great gift given by God to alleviate the physical and mental sufferings of the believers in the modern world replete with conflicts and tensions. This is the way to impart to them the healing of the spirit and comfort the body.

Although teaching and preaching the Good News was of primary importance in the Ministry of Jesus, healing and curing the sick was an integral part of the ministry of Jesus. What do we understand by the word “healing”? Healing may be the restoration to normalcy of organic or psychological disorders, or making sound or whole that which is broken or injured and the returning of a person to the general state of well-being. The miraculous healing work of Jesus served as a visible sign of His ‘Messiahship’ and power to forgive us our sins.

2. Anointing the Sick

In the early church, anointing the sick was conducted purely for the healing of sickness. James 5: 14 it clearly says, “Is there anyone who is ill? He should send for the Church Elders who will pray for him and rub olive-oil on him in the name of the Lord”. Mark 6: 13 say that “They drove out many demons, rubbed oil on many sick people and healed them”. Refer also to Luke 7: 38 and 46. These references show that anointing with oil was a very common practice for the healing of the sick. However, it is important that the one performing the cure or healing have full faith and confidence in God and acknowledge as Jesus did, that the healing was accomplished by the power and grace of God (Matt: 17: 14 – 20; John 5:19).

Note: During the eighth century, there was a practice of anointing the extremely sick people who were on their deathbed for their remission of sins. This concept does not have any Biblical basis and was not practiced by the early Church. The Mar Thoma Church does not subscribe to this practice or belief either. Our church conducts this sacrament only for the healing of sickness and for the total healing of the whole person.

3. Order of Service

The Eastern Churches, which includes the Mar Thoma Church, there are two orders of service which are used while praying for the sick. We see in all the prayers in the order of the service that the basis of healing is God’s love, mercy and grace. The sick person confesses his/her sins and asks God for pardon. It is usually when one is sick or dying that a person has a true conviction of one’s sins. Therefore it becomes meaningful to confess one’s sins at such times. On several occasions Jesus had associated healing with the redemption from sin as well. In the order of the healing service, there are many occasions when the sick person accepts and confesses his/her sins and also proclaim that God is the ultimate source of cure for all their illnesses. In all the prayers that are chanted during the service, there is healing not only of the body but also of the mind and soul included.

4. Visiting the Sick

We as Christians have a duty to visit the sick in order to strengthen their faith and hope. The sick person would be concerned about his/her health and may be in a depressed state of mind. As part of this sacrament of anointing the sick, we should visit the sick, pray with them and help them to confess their sins and receive healing from God. Through the anointing of oil, we are expressing the belief that God is with us in all of life’s experiences and through this sacrament, the person who receives this sacrament become partakers of God’s Grace.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Discuss the seven sacraments practiced in the Mar Thoma Church and classify them as Dominical, Repeatable, Non-repeatable, compulsory and Optional Sacraments?
2. What is the difference between anointing with oil for the sick and the one performed for the person on the deathbed?

Bible Application:

1. God is inviting us to partake in his work to make the world a better place. What would be your response if you get an opportunity to do voluntary work in your community hospital?
2. Is anointing with oil acceptable as the final sacrament to an unconscious person on his deathbed? What is the Biblical basis for anointing with oil?

Life Response:

1. What can I do to someone in my community or group who is sick? How will that help the sick person and also help me?
2. Do I firmly believe in God's healing power? Are there any examples of God's healing presence in my life?

Memory Verse:

"Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord". James 5: 14

Prayer:

Lord, we know that you work through us in all situations. Give us the willingness and desire to intercede for others in need. Amen.

CHAPTER 24 ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Lesson Theme: Hindrances in God's Work

Lesson Aim: To understand the setbacks that we would have in our Christian life, if we do not have total commitment and faith.

Bible Reading: Acts 4: 36 - 5: 1 - 11

Values for Life

- *Be faithful to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Deceit leads to separation and broken fellowship from God.*
- *To fulfill our obligations towards our fellow beings and the earth as commanded by our Lord.*

Preparation:

We are familiar with the life style of the Early Church (Acts. 2:40-47; 4:32-37). It was a new Community of fellowship, equality, love, sincerity and mutual encouragement in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was a community of one mind, heart and faith. They enjoyed and celebrated the breaking of bread and fellowship. These believers met regularly to hear the apostles preach and to spend time in prayer and fellowship.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Identity of the Early Church:

As we have learnt in earlier lessons, the early church developed with its members considering everything they had as common property, with purity and oneness of heart and praising God constantly. After the Day of Pentecost, (around 33 C. E.), when the Holy Spirit came upon the believers, the physical needs of the community of believers who remained in Jerusalem were met by the mutual assistance amongst themselves. A common fund was set up for this purpose, sustained by contributions representing the price of fields and houses sold by the members of the community and then voluntarily donated. Through this, those who were wealthy shared with those who were poor, equally, based on their needs. Everyday they enjoyed the Grace of God abundantly.

We see that all the members of this community enjoyed a good life, with all their needs taken care of and in the fellowship and care of the community. However, as in many cases, there were some who joined this community, with ulterior motives, of selfish interests and seeking leadership positions.

2. The deception of Ananias and Sapphira

Ananias sold a field and with the full knowledge of his wife, Sapphira, brought a part of the proceeds to the apostles, while giving the impression that they were donating the entire amount. The donation of the entire amount would have gained the couple the support and esteem from the community. However, Peter was able to discern through the Holy Spirit that Ananias and his wife were being false to the Holy Spirit and to God. This deception caused a break in the fellowship between them and the other believers and resulted in the deaths of both Ananias and his wife.

Peter did not curse them but let them know that they had sinned against God. The shock of being caught in the deception probably caused their deaths. We can see a comparison in Adam and Eve being separated from the fellowship of God and cast out of the Garden of Eden, because of their attempted deception.

3. The sin against the Holy Spirit

Ananias and Sapphira chose to join the Church. They were not compelled to do so. They were also not forced to sell their belongings. They probably started off with good intentions, guided by the Holy Spirit but deviated from their plans, may be due to lack of complete faith. If we deviate from the decisions that we had made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it would be a sin against the Holy Spirit. We as Christians have an obligation to our fellow beings and if we fail in our duties, it would be a sin against the Holy Spirit.

4. The attitude of Barnabas

In Acts 4:34-37, we read of a prominent figure of the early Church, Joseph who was surnamed Barnabas by the Apostles. Barnabas is the only person named of the many believers who sold their belongings, shortly after Pentecost and gave all to the advancement of the early church. He was a very generous person who did not hesitate to offer both himself and his material possessions, willingly for the Kingdom of God. He gladly came to the aid of the others (Acts 9: 27) and was a good man, full of faith and of the Spirit (Acts 11: 23, 24). Barnabas became a prophet and a teacher and accompanied Paul in his missionary journeys.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Why did Ananias and Sapphira give only a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their field? What would have happened if the ideal fellowship and principles that sustained the early church were destroyed by deception and or persecution? This could be one reason why this couple chose to hide part of their proceeds, to tide them over in case of the proverbial ‘rainy day’.
2. Do you think Peter was right in his exposure of the deception of Ananias and Sapphira.
3. Compare the characters of Ananias and Barnabas

Bible Application:

1. We must be honest in our giving and in our dealings, as was Barnabas, to safeguard the identity of the Church. If we are faithful to God today, He will be faithful to us tomorrow. If we trust God to be faithful tomorrow, why should we worry about tomorrow? This assurance is based how faithful to God, we are today. Barnabas could do it. What about us?
2. Prepare a list of Bible characters who like Ananias, slipped away from God's call.

Life Response:

1. How does our life and our church compare with the early church? Are we willing to be like wheat grains that have to die in order to multiply a hundred fold?
2. Am I totally committed to the guidance of the Holy Spirit or am I, like Ananias and Sapphira, only partially committed?

Memory Verse:

He answered; "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as you love yourself". Luke 10:27

Prayer:

Lord we acknowledge that whatever we have is your gift. We realize that nothing is our own. Forgive us our sin in not handling the gifts you have bestowed upon us for your glory. Help us to use our gifts in the way you expect us to. Amen.

CHAPTER 25

JOHN THE BAPTIST

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|-----------------------|---|
| Lesson Theme: | Response to Hindrances in God's Work |
| Lesson Aim: | To study how John the Baptist faced obstacles in his mission |
| Bible Reading: | Luke 1: 57-80, Luke 3:4-20, Mathew 14:3-12 |

Values for Life:

- *The essential quality of a Christian leader is not to use the spotlight for personal glory but to lead others to God*
- *An effective leader will always be a model for others in his/her lifestyle and attitudes*
- *It requires certain courage to take a stand against the social values or systems that dehumanize or victimize people in our society.*

Preparation:

Bishop Isaias Duarte Cansino who was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1963 became the Archbishop of Cali, 480 km southeast of Bogota Colombia. Archbishop Cansino was a charismatic figure in the Colombian Catholic church and is well known for his position against the Colombian guerrilla's and the narcotic traffickers.

The Archbishop was very vocal about his concerns for the people of Colombia who were constantly attacked, humiliated and offended by the rebels. While kidnapping, violence and death against defenceless civilians were carried out wilfully by the militia, they continued to represent the people at Government negotiations. The Archbishop could not tolerate this hypocrisy and put up a brave fight to end the suffering and genocide of his people. Although the Archbishop received constant threats against his life, he never gave up his fight for justice for the Colombian people. On March 16, 2002, Archbishop Cansino was assassinated for his stand against the corrupt political system in Colombia.

In today's lesson, we will learn about a man who stood against the social evils of his time and preached the values of the Kingdom of God. His name is John The Baptist.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. Who was John the Baptist?

John the Baptist, who is considered as a prophet, was a contemporary of Jesus. John was a Levite. John lived in the wilderness of Judea, between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea (Mathew 3:1) He was clothed in camel's hair, wore a leather belt, and ate locusts and wild honey. This kind of simple lifestyle enabled him to challenge and criticize the existing social set up. John

prepared himself before he presented himself to the public. He lived a life of simplicity because the value of Kingdom of God is simplicity and not luxury.

2. How did John the Baptist address the social evils during his time?

John the Baptist never played a divided role. He never watered down the message of God. He surrendered his whole being completely to the power and will of God. John fearlessly preached to the workingmen, religious leaders, and governing officials, encouraging them to repent. He baptized people in the Jordan River for repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Lk.3:1 -20).

When the tax collectors asked John what they should do, he instructed them not to collect more than they had been ordered to. Publicans purchased the right to collect taxes from Rome and they often increased their wages by unfairly taxing the Jews.

When the Roman soldiers heard John, they also repented. He told them not to accuse anyone falsely, not to take money from anyone by force, and to be content with their wages.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees came to hear John, he called them a "brood of vipers," and warned them to repent.

3. What do we learn about the Humility of John the Baptist?

When John was questioned by the Pharisees on his authority to baptize, he responded to them " I baptize with water" "but among you stands one you do not know, He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie". Luke 3: 15- 17

John's ministry became so popular that some wondered if he was the messiah. He answered, "I am not the Christ, but I am sent ahead of Him." (John.3:28). With the ministry of Jesus Christ then begun, John recognized that his own mission was nearing its end. So, he said to the crowd, "He must become greater; I must become less." (John. 3:30). John was considered very highly by Jesus Christ, who said about him, "Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew 11:11). He prepared the way for Christ and was not a stumbling block to Jesus.

4. Why was John the Baptist imprisoned and beheaded by Herod?

John's ministry, and life, came to an end when he admonished Herod for his sinful behaviour. John fearlessly preached against his adulterous marriage to his brother's wife, Herodias (Mtt.14:3-4;Lk.3;18-19). Herod imprisoned John for the sake of Herodias. She held a grudge against John, and was put to death.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Find Bible references for the following leadership qualities that you will find in the life and Ministry of John the Baptist?

- *Simplicity*
- *Humility*
- *Readiness*
- *Fearlessness*

2. Fact Finder: Who made the now-infamous request for "the head of John the Baptist on a platter"?

Bible Application:

1. Discuss the qualities of a good leader and list four leadership qualities that you think are most important to every Christian Leader:
2. Why are the numbers of people who are ready to follow John's path, or way of life, getting less and less today?
3. What is our responsibility as Children of God in a society, where all sorts of evil such as corruption, immorality, self-indulgence, crime, violence against children etc., are on the rise?

Life Response:

- The vast majority of so called Christians today are afraid to do anything that would make them stand out as being different from the crowd. Are you afraid to take a definite stand for Jesus and be utterly fearless about what people say or think about you? How could you get the strength to face obstacles that hinder God's work in your daily life?
- As a young adult growing up in North American culture, how do you discipline your lifestyle as simple, humble and sacrificial?

Memory Verse:

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. John 12:24

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for fearless leaders like John the Baptist who boldly point others towards you. Help us to understand what our life's mission is and give us the wisdom to make the right decisions in our lives. Show us when to lead and when to support those who are in need, so that your work will continue through each of us. Amen

PART VI

OUR MISSION IN GOD'S WORLD

CHAPTER 26

THE PRAYER OF JONAH

Lesson Theme: Personal Values

Lesson Aim: To study the importance of prayer at all times especially during a Crisis

Bible Reading: Jonah 2

Values for Life:

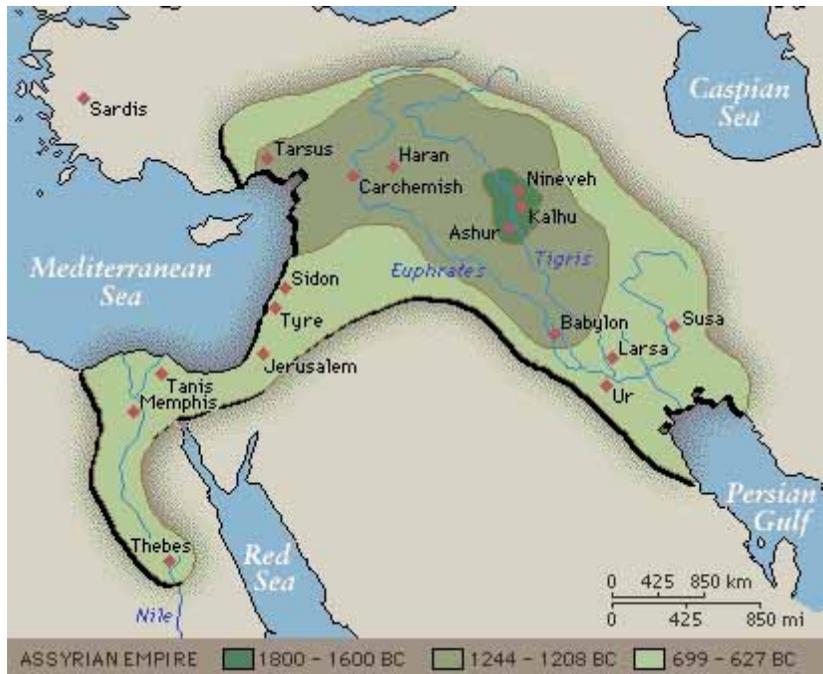
1. *We should seek the will of God and strive to follow it even if it clashes with our own goals and expectations*
2. *A Christian should pray with faith and consistency.*
3. *God can turn around any situation, even most desperate*
4. *Salvation belongs to the Lord*

Preparation:

When do you normally take time to pray? Is prayer a daily priority in your life or do you pray only when asked to or when you are facing a crisis? The Bible teaches us that we need to “pray without ceasing”. Have you realized that every moment of your life is suitable for prayer?

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

The story of Jonah (meaning Dove) revolves around two ancient cities, Nineveh and Tarshish. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire, one of the great enemies of the Nation of Israel in the Bible. The ancient site of Nineveh is part of Mosul, the second largest city in modern Iraq. Nineveh is on the east bank of the Tigris a few kilometers downhill from the beginning of the Kurdish mountains.



Tarshish is the eponym of a country distant from Palestine, which cannot be accurately identified; Cyprus, Spain, and Tarsus (S Asia Minor) have been suggested. Traditionally, Tarshish is identified with Spain—with the region and city of Tartessus, a Phoenician settlement of S Spain.

The story begins with God commanding the prophet to go to the city of Nineveh and warn them of the destruction that would befall their city if they didn't repent from their evil ways. Jonah decided that going to Nineveh wasn't what he wanted to do. In an attempt to run away from God, Jonah decides to move to Joppa (Joppa, meaning *beautiful*, is located on Israel's [Mediterranean](#) seacoast between Caesarea and Gaza, about 35 miles (57 kilometers) northwest of [Jerusalem](#). Today, the ancient city of Joppa is annexed to the modern city of Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city). He then takes a ship and travels on the ship to Tarshish.

You may try and locate where these three cities (Joppa, Nineveh and Tarshish) might be by referring to the map above.

Jonah doesn't realize that God is omnipresent and that he cannot run away from His presence. He tells the passengers on board that he is running away from the Lord. A great wind and a violent storm threaten to destroy the ship. The people on board pray desperately to their Gods while Jonah, who realizes that God sent the storm, is found soundly sleeping in a lower deck. The sailors decide to cast lots to determine who would be the cause of the raging storm. The lot falls on Jonah and Jonah shares his story and his attempt to run away from the command of God. Jonah then insists that the sailors throw him aboard in order to settle the storm. Reluctantly, they do so and the storm calms instantly. The Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah and he spent the next three days and nights in its belly.

The “belly of the whale “was the biggest trial and turning point in the life of Jonah. Faced with the certainty of death, in a dark, sludgy, and foul smelling belly with all the digestive juices hurting his skin, Jonah’s faith soars and he prays with humility and faith to the Lord, His God. These are the highlights of Jonah’s prayer:

Jonah prayed while he was in crisis: Jonah prayed while he was in trouble, probably due to the guilt of the sin that he had committed. He was thrown out from the ship. He was facing his death. Even when he was swallowed by the fish, he knew God was able to save him from any situation. Jonah’s prayer was an expression of the feelings of his heart. He struggled between feelings of faith, hope and fear. He was praying for a miracle.

Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish: The place one chooses for prayer is never a problem if one wants to spend some time in the presence of God. We don’t need an appointment with God to pray. Any place and any time are acceptable to God as long as we can experience His presence. In the process, we become a temple of God. This process of spending time with God leads to our sanctification. Our God always searches our hearts and restores us even though we disobey Him. Though Jonah disobeyed God, God does not break His relationship with Jonah, and on the contrary, God continued to restore the fellowship, even when he prayed from the belly of the fish.

Jonah prays to the Lord God: Jonah had been running away from God, but he later realizes his folly and repents of his sins. He knows that God is in control and that He is powerful. He knew the God that he served. He knew that God was a God of love and forgiveness. He turns back to Him. He had no problem to pray to the Lord, his God.

Jonah’s prayer is answered: God gave Jonah a second chance. In a miraculous way, the fish vomits Jonah onto dry land. His cries did not go in vain. He praises God and thanks Him for protecting him while he fell deep into the ocean depths. He vows to make good all his wrongdoing.

Bible Applications:

1. Can anyone run away from the will of God? If so, does God always intervene like he did for Jonah?
2. Can you think of one instance each in the Bible where the command of God was obeyed and one where it was not obeyed? What was the reward/punishment in following/disobeying the will of God?
3. Can you locate, using the map provided a route that shows the journey of Jonah from the time God called him to his journey to Nineveh?
4. After three days and nights in the belly of a fish, Jonah was released on dry land. What brought about this miracle?
5. The story about Jonah has so many miraculous interventions of God. Can you find out four such interventions in the first chapter of Jonah?

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities Try and complete the crossword puzzle. It includes all the main words related to today's lesson.

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| | | | | | | | | | | |

Across

1. Jonah ran away to.
2. The man
3. Jonah vowed to look towards this (Ch 2)
4. His last resort
5. Wrap around his head
6. What got him around in the end

Down

1. In the belly of ...
2. The men on board feared
3. He found a ship from here
4. Jonah ----- away
5. Disobedience to God

| | | | | | | | | | | |
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| O | | | | | 3T | E | M | P | L | E |
| 4P | 4R | A | Y | E | R | | | W | | |
| P | A | | | | | | | R | | |
| A | N | | | 5S | E | A | W | E | E | D |
| | | 6F | A | I | T | H | | C | | |
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Life Responses:

1. From the life of Jonah, we learn these personal lessons:
 - God has a definite plan over our life. Disobeying God means we are inviting trouble and perils in our life.
 - We must set apart a time and place for daily prayer and that will help us to discern God's will.
 - We don't need an appointment to pray, we may pray at any time and from any place.
 - We can look to God even if we have been disobedient as He is a God of mercy and forgiveness.
 - We must seek God's grace and providence to fulfill His will in our lives.
2. How does God communicate with you and me today?
3. What does the story of Jonah teach you about your response to a challenging situation in your life, that you would rather avoid facing?
4. People resort to the following responses when faced with trials. They might dwell in **fear**, try to **fight** the problem with their own abilities, resort to **flight** (running away or ignoring the problem), or look to God in **faith** and prayer. Which of the mentioned is the wisest response?

Memory Verse:

"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple". Jonah 2:7

Prayer:

O God, help us to thank and praise you at all times. Help us to turn to you in prayer in all situations and experiences of our lives, in good times and in bad times. Help us to obey your commands and seek to fulfill your will and purpose for our lives. Amen.

CHAPTER 27

THE MISSION OF MICAH

Lesson Theme: Outreach

Lesson Aim: To study about the mission entrusted to Micah by God
 Bible Reading: Micah 2, 6:8

Values for Life:

- *Understanding that God condemns social injustice. We cannot and must not accumulate wealth and things through unjust means*
- *Living a lifestyle that is pleasing to God: To do what is just, show constant love and to live in humble fellowship with God.*
- *Trusting God: Understanding that God will have compassion on us – He will guide us through our various burdens and difficulties, gathering us like the shepherd does for his sheep.*

Preparation:

In today's lesson, we are going to learn about the prophet Micah, from Moresheth, Judah, who prophesied in the early part of the seventh century, during the time of the Jewish kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He must have been active in the last quarter of 8th century B.C. as a contemporary of Isaiah. Micah delivered messages to both kingdoms, Jerusalem and Samaria(1:1). He had a first hand experience of social evils. He was a friend of farmers, shepherds and such weaker sections of the society. He uttered the voice of the Lord against injustice, agrarian law in favor of the rich, violence against the weak, exploitation and affluence and religious cultic practices. Micah spoke out against the evils in society. He condemned the powerful that took advantage of the underprivileged. His prophecy of disaster reaches its climax, the destruction of both kingdoms. On the other hand he declared God's promise and hope. But people never listened to him. Let us examine how Micah's words can speak to us today.

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

1. What did Micah speak out against in his time – what did he condemn? (Micah 2:1-3)

Micah lived in an agricultural based socio-political situation. He condemned the sin of oppression and covetousness (desiring that which is not their own). Micah spoke out against those who plotted evil by night and carried out the evil in the morning; taking land and home from others. He warned that they should not carry out evil just because they had the power to do so.

2. *Who were the helpless victims of the oppression that was going on in Micah's time? (Micah 2:8-9)*

The two groups of people who were helpless victims of oppression were women and children of the lower class. Women were driven out of their homes and children were robbed of their blessings. Micah criticized the leaders for taking advantage of them and also taking the clothing of the peaceful.

3. *Did the people listen to the prophets who warned them of judgment? (Micah 2:6-7,11)*

The people did not listen nor want to hear of judgment. They asked prophets not to prophesize but instead to tell them things they wanted to hear; they encouraged false prophets.

4. *What does Micah do at the end of all the condemnation? (Micah 2:12-13)*

Despite the condemnation, Micah gives people the message of hope. He tells them that the Lord will have compassion on his people and be a shepherd to them, leading them and gathering them as sheep of one fold.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

Short Answers:

1. Micah tells the people of his time how they should live their lives. List the three things he tells them to do. (*Micah 6:8*)
2. If you and your class were to take Micah's words seriously, what would you need to do differently?

Bible Application:

1. List some characteristics of right living in our lives. For example:
 - Showing kindness to others
 - Praying and attending church
 - Obeying your parents
2. What does God want you to do right now to show justice and loving kindness to others?

Life Response:

Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, formed the Christian Worker houses in most major cities where small communities lived in poverty. Her life was devoted

to doing justice, loving - kindness and walking humble with God. Her social concern was grounded in biblical imperatives of justice, goodwill, nonviolence and peace.

Do you believe that Micah's words speak to us as well? How does God expect us to live our lives? How would we do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God?

1. Do a search to identify the places or situations of discrimination, segregation, exploitation, violence or injustice in the world around?
2. What is your attitude towards the people of lower class, is there any issue more than sympathy, discuss?

Memory Verse:

“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8b

Prayer:

O God, help us to reach out to everyone around us. Help us to be kind and fill us with love and wisdom to carry out your will – Amen.

CHAPTER 28

FAMILY: A HEAVEN ON EARTH

Lesson Theme: Study of institutions/School/Family
Lesson Aim: To understand the role of family in the society
Bible Reading: Ephesians. 6: 1 - 4, 2 Timothy 1: 3 -7

Values for life:

- *To understand the roles and responsibilities of the members of a Christian family*
- *The relationship between the head of the house and other family members is similar to the relationship between Christ and the church.*
- *Families are the building blocks of the Society*

Preparation:

Breakdowns in family relationship are happening at an alarming rate these days. Very few homes have a healthy, hearty, parent-children relationship. In some instances, although they live under the same roof, there is no proper communication or healthy relationship between the children and the parents. Too many children are growing up to resent, scorn and even hate their parents.

Bible learning: Main ideas

Family a holy relationship:

God has established a few institutions for the society: the government, the church and the home. The first and the most basic of these institutions is the home. Long before there ever was a church or a government, God established marriage and the home. God made Adam, and said of him, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So, God made Eve, and brought her to Adam, right there in the Garden of Eden. So, even when there were only two people on earth, God established the home. Genesis 2:24 reads, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh". In conclusion, we can say that Family is a gift from God.

Family its social dimension:

God knew very well how important the home really is to society's well-being and health. No society can survive without strong, Godly homes because without them, the society will soon breakdown into immorality, materialism, crime, absence of true values and general chaos and confusion.

Pope John Paul while delivering the message of peace message in 1994 called family as the "source of peace". He said that peace would exist in the society if every family is built on good values, and

the family ties are very strong. To show love and concern to all God's creation is a basic teaching of Christian faith. Moreover, the thoughts that we are co-workers with God also make us more responsible. If this is so, then family can easily respond creatively to all human issues and in the process makes the society strong.

Family - a school

James Dobson in "Dare To Discipline" says, "heredity does not equip a child with proper attitudes; children learn what they are taught." If a child is going to do right, he must be taught to do it.

In proverbs 22: 6, we read, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." King Solomon wrote this truth thousands of years before any church or school existed in Society. Most young people spend the first 18 years of their lives in the home. Of these, the first six years, is the most formative of his/her life. This is the time their character is being molded and formed. Every child needs a good home, and every parent should instill moral, spiritual and social values in their children. In proverb 4: 1 -10, we see the benefits of imparting wisdom and spiritual knowledge in children. Ephesians 6:4 says, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. In short, we can say that it takes time and effort to make a man out of a boy.

Family and formation of faith:

In a culture where parents are increasingly being subjected to evaluation by their offspring, Ephesians 6: 1- 2 might be a difficult teaching for Christian children to accept. But parents in a Christian household deserve honor, because their children first and foremost learn about Christ .at their home. The Christ centered home will foster such honor, and the home that is not Christ Centered will be at the mercy of a culture that not only does not respect the family but is doing it's best to destroy it. Children learn moral values and the development of faith not from any schools, but from their own family. There is a popular saying: "A family that prays together stays together". The children learn about family prayer from their homes.

Family and Christian values:

The ever-changing values that prevails in today's society, always has an adverse impact on the family. To deal with such circumstances, a Christian family has to seek ways by which Christian values can be upheld in the family life. In addition to this, Christian families should also be centers from where the Christian values can be spread to its surroundings. Families that forsake family prayer, worships and Sunday schools are actually doing an offense to their future generations. In the present day consumer culture, in the quest to become the best, what the family is loosing is their own future generation.

Family - communication:

Hearty communication between family members is very essential for a healthy family life. The family members should have the patience and tolerance to listen to what the other members have to say. It is not only in prayer and worship, that the members of the family should come together but also on occasions where there is need for mutual exchange of ideas and views. Organizing

family games, attending social events, dining out etc., are some of the activities that can lead to happy occasions in the family. It is through the family that we learn to make friendship, to share, to console, to succeed and to encourage each other. All these are definitely very valuable experiences for a person as far as the future is concerned.

Family - guides to the call of god:

It is the responsibility of each member of the family to guide others to feel and also experience the presence of God. Parents need to shed tears for their children in the presence of God. It was because of the tears that Hannah shed that she got her son Samuel. It was because of the tears of Monica that led to the transformation of St. Augustine. The model set by these mothers should be an example to us. Mother Theresa, who was influenced by her mother, said like this. "My mother's faith had a practical side. She never turned away anyone who came to her for food, shelter, money or clothing, empty handed. She taught us to love God and also our neighbor." Yes, parents like to produce leaders who can lead this world to a future that is full of hope and also children who can listen to the call of God. In this process, heave is made on earth.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

1. Check out the words of wisdom from the following Old Testament references and make a list of Christian principles that you could follow for a happy, healthy and blessed life.
 - Proverbs 23: 22
 - Proverbs 15: 5
 - Proverbs 30: 17
 - Proverbs 6: 20 23
2. Why do we say that the relationship in the family is Holy?
3. What is the role of family in the development of a child's faith?

Bible Applications:

1. Do you think it is necessary to obey and honor your parents? Why?
2. How does our current culture promote ideas of devaluing Christian Family principles?
3. What are some of the things that should be banned or excluded from the home in order to sustain Christian values?

Life Response:

1. In a culture where parents are increasingly being subjected to evaluation by their offspring and where healthy relationships between parents and children are breaking down, what role can you play to make your home a heaven on earth?
2. How does your family help you to understand God's will and prepare you to live accordingly?

Memory Verse:

For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life.”. Proverbs 6:23

Prayer:

Our loving Heavenly father, thank you for giving us a loving and caring family. Give us that desire to listen to your call. Amen.

CHAPTER 29

LIFE STYLE OF JESUS

Lesson Theme: Self-Emptying

Lesson Aim: To study about the implication and also the model set by Jesus through the way of the cross.

Bible Reading: Philippians 2:5 - 11, Luke 22: 39 - 46

Values for Life:

1. *Christians must have the mind of Christ*
2. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. True humility and self-sacrifice is possible only when we value others as persons of worth, as deserving to be appreciated and loved, and as deserving to be treated with the utmost respect*
3. *Understand about the "Way of the Cross" or the continuing passion of Christ*

Preparation:

The Most Rev. Dr. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, the 19th Mar Thoma, was born on 10th April 1913 in Kuriannoor, Kerala. When he was ten years old, his father Rev. M.C.George, who was a well-known priest of the Mar Thoma Church, passed away due to a sudden illness. This was a turning point in his life. M.G.Chandy worked very hard to complete his formal education and with the help of a scholarship, attended the Union Christian College, Alwaye to pursue his University Degree. During his student life, M.G.Chandy was attracted to Gandhian ideals and simple living, which he followed all his life.

After his graduation he secured a teacher's job in the CMS College High School, Kottayam. In 1945, after 12 years' work as a teacher he decided to proceed for theological studies and became an ordained clergy in our Church. In 1953, Rev. M. G. Chandy was consecrated as an Episcopa (Bishop) with the name, Alexander Mar Theophilus, and elevated as 19th mar Thoma Metropolitan in 1976.

For eighty-seven years he walked under the divine grace on a noble path, which consisted of right-mindfulness, right concentration, right view, right thought, right behavior, right speech and right lifestyle. He was a very humble man; humility was the insignia of his personality. A few years back, at a family conference at the London Bible College in Northwood, a young man questioned Thirumeni about the theological position of the Church on the Holy Spirit. Thirumeni sat quietly for a few seconds and said, "in my limited understanding, when one is under the influence of the Holy Spirit others would know it without any effort from oneself." Here was a man with a profound understanding of the Holy Spirit, responding under the yoke of Christ's humility. A daily experience of the love of God was the secret of that winsome humility.

(Extracted from the *Glimpses of Mar Thoma Church History* written by Dr. Zac Varghese Kanisseril & Mr. Mathew A. Kallumpram)

Bible Learning: Main Ideas

Ref: *Philippians: 2: 5 -11*

The Philippian church had been very dear to St. Paul because they supported his ministry in many ways. He was very grateful for their love towards him but their love towards one another was missing in their relationships. St. Paul is very concerned for the lack of unity in their congregation and is advising them to be one in spirit, one in zeal and one in purpose. Of all the letters that

St. Paul wrote to various congregations, none is more personal, more appreciative, or more joyous than his letter to the Philippians.

In verses 1 - 4, Paul is teaching the Philippians that Christian unity is based on humility and self-sacrifice.

In verses 5 - 11, St. Paul explains what does it mean to have unity through humility and self-sacrifice. The apostle chooses Jesus himself as the church's model. Through this letter, St. Paul is reminding the Philippians - and us - that their primary task is to follow Jesus' teachings and way of life. In his comments, St. Paul says that Jesus is to be our model in both humility and obedience. St. Paul is portraying two aspects of Christ's nature in verses 5 to 11:

1. His Human Nature:

Jesus Christ willingly set aside his special rights as God's Son, accepted public humiliation, and obeyed God to the extent of accepting death on the cross (*verses 6 -8*). St. Paul is encouraging the Philippians to have the same spirit about themselves.

2. His Divine Nature:

Jesus was the eternal Son of God, yet he did not hold on to his right, instead took the form of a servant and lived as man among men. God exalted Jesus at the appropriate time, giving him the name of *Lord* (*verses 9 -11*). Paul's message is very clear: if we humble ourselves and serve one another, God will do the exalting in His own time.

The greatest characteristics of Christ's lifestyle were humility, obedience and self-renunciation.

Humility of Christ: Christ's lifestyle was not one of Lordship but that of a servant. From his birth to death, Jesus was the epitome of true humility (*verse 7 - 8*). The glory of divinity that Jesus shared was given up willingly in order to become man.

In the New Testament, one of the key thoughts is that only when a man humbles himself, he will be exalted. If humility, obedience, and self-denunciation were the supreme characteristics of the life of Jesus, they must also be the hallmarks of a Christian.

Obedience of Christ: Jesus humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the humiliating death on the cross. Death on the Cross was a cursed death, a shameful death, yet Jesus bore it and thus made even the cross a symbol of holiness through his death. Humility of spirit enabled Jesus to accept the cross obediently (*verses 2:8*). In the garden of Gethsemane he prayed, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (*Luke 22: 42*)

Self-renunciation and exaltation of Christ: The self-renunciation of Jesus Christ brought him the greater glory (*verses 9 -11*). Because of Christ's obedience to his father, it was made certain that, every living creature, in heaven, in earth and even in hell would bow, keel and worship him. This worship comes out of love to the One who won the hearts of men, not by ruling over them with his mighty power, but by his divine love (*agape*) for mankind. When we worship Jesus Christ, we are falling at his feet by the power of his love. So, our worship is grounded in love, not in fear. As a result of his sacrificial love, God gave Jesus the name, which is above every name. A new name denotes a new beginning in a man's life. The new name for Jesus is the title "Lord". It means master and owner of all life. He is the king of kings, the lord of lords. Hence at the sight of the king of kings, every knee shall bend and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Jesus, the symbol of humility and self-renunciation is God's precious gift to mankind.

Bible Learning: Strategies and Activities

- A. In the bible, new name is given as a mark of new beginning. Search and find the context for giving new names in the following instances:

Genesis 17:5

Revelation 2:17

Daniel 1:6, 7

Genesis: 32:28

Revelation: 3:12

Exodus: 10

- B. Jesus' desire to be obedient to his father's will was tested very early in his ministry. Identify some of the tests that Jesus had to overcome to prove his obedience.

1. *Mark 14: 36*

3. *John 4:34*

2. *Mathew 4:1 -11*

4. *John 5:30*

- C. Is there any place and value for humility in our lives? Reflect and discuss based on the following bible references about Christ:

- *Matthew 11:29*

- *Matthew 5:5*
- *Philippians 2:8*

Bible Application:

1. What we need today are people who are ready to empty themselves of their positions of authority, pride and self-righteousness and become true followers of the lifestyle of Jesus. Are we willing to trust God, believing that whatever God prepares for us is for the best? Would you be willing to take risks to be obedient to God's will and live through an uncharted way?
2. How do we live for others and not for ourselves?

Life Response:

1. How do we overcome temptation and receive the power of the Holy Spirit to help us to make the right choices in our life. Discuss situations of conflicting choices that would take us on a detour from the path of a Christian.
2. Do you value your friendship based on good looks and material possessions or value your friends as persons of worth, as deserving to be appreciated and loved, and as deserving to be treated with the utmost respect?

Memory Verse:

“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” . Philippians 2:10, 11

Prayer:

Our Lord and Savior, who had come down to us from heaven, give us your humility and obedience and enable us to be your servants - Amen

CHAPTER 30

PANDITA RAMABAI (1858 - 1922)

Lesson Theme: Service

Lesson Aim: To study the glory of service as seen in the life of Pandita Ramabai

Bible Reading: Mark 10: 42 -45

Values for Life:

- The transforming power of Christ’s love enabled a devout and orthodox Hindu women to become a social reformer, a champion for the emancipation of women, and a pioneer in education
- Pandita Ramabai, a poet, scholar, and champion of the rights of women, has been acclaimed as a "Mother of modern India"
- Pandita Ramabai remains today as an intriguing example of the effort to bridge the spiritual traditions of the East and West; both sides felt the challenge posed by this courageous and independent women

Preparation:

In lesson 12, we learned about the life-changing story of Mother Teresa. It was the way of the cross that helped her to find the true meaning of life and also elevated her to the glorious position of being called the “Mother of the Poor”. We can also see several people like her in history who have made a difference in the life of thousands of needy people around the world. Today we are going to study about a woman whose mission in life was to live for the forsaken ones. She is Pandita Ramabai.

Bible Learning : Main Ideas

Early life of Ramabai:

Ramabai, was born in Karnataka, India in 1858 to a wealthy Brahmin Scholar. Though her father was a devout orthodox Hindu, he embarrassed his high caste friends by teaching his wife and daughters to read the Sanskrit classics because education was forbidden for Brahmin women at that time. Her knowledge of Sanskrit stood her well, when her family perished during a great famine. At the age of 16, Ramabai walked across India, visiting the holy Hindu shrines and attracting astonished audiences to her recitation of Sanskrit poetry. Her knowledge of Sanskrit,

the sacred language of Hinduism, eventually won her fame and honor. She was given the honorific title "Pandita," mistress of wisdom.

During her childhood, Ramabai endured enormous suffering. She lost her parents and a sister to the famine. The sufferings that she underwent helped her to understand the afflictions of others and also try to relieve them. After her parent's death, she, along with her brother walked more than four thousand miles and finally came to Calcutta. There she got acquainted with learned Brahmins. She boldly declared the need for education for women and was often called to give public lectures.

In Calcutta she became acquainted with Christians. She was invited to a Christian gathering, and Christian rituals and customs aroused her curiosity. A deeper study of the Hindu Shashtra's and other sacred books made her dissatisfied, for they offered no religious hope for women. Her interest in Christianity increased and she began to read parts of the Bible. Christian missionaries visited her regularly and this enabled her to grow better in Christian faith.

Difficult periods in her life

At the age of twenty-two she was married to a Bengali man. Unfortunately after two years he died of Cholera leaving Ramabai and a daughter in despair. In order to champion the cause of women in India, Ramabai thought that she needed more education and training, so she went to England. There she was taken in by the sisters of the Church of England and the contact with them helped her to know more about Christian faith and teaching. She also visited the different branches of the homes managed by the Sisters in different places and saw their work. She was much impressed by what was being done for the degraded and fallen women. She saw the transformation that Christ had brought into those lives and she was convinced that He alone could transform the women of India. She was baptized and confirmed in the Church of England.

Work among women

Having known Christ, Ramabai had a great desire to serve Him. She wanted to do something to rescue Indian widows and children from life of sin and shame and lead them to Christ. So a refuge home was setup in Poona known as 'Sharada Sadan' meaning the 'Home of Wisdom'. The ill-treated, the outcaste and the hungry were all welcomed into the home. The women who came into the home were taught to work with their hands and to learn some trade, and this enabled them to stand on their own feet. Many homeless girls and outcaste came into the home and Ramabai welcomed them with sympathy and love. They all loved her for she was their mother, friend and teacher. She did not compel them to accept Christ. But hearing about Christ from her, and by seeing her life and love, many of them found Christ as their savior. Temple girls and women who were kept as slaves in a life of sin and misery were rescued by Ramabai. She would go on preaching tours in the villages in a bullock cart and distribute food and clothes to the needy people. She depended on God to supply the needs of her work. She also had to face opposition many times. Many people started appreciating Ramabai's work and soon people from other lands began to help her through prayer and money.

Ramabai's work had spread and there was no room for all the girls who came into Sharada Sadan. So another home was built which was known as 'Mukti'. This word means salvation. The girls who came here were also taught some useful occupation so that when they left the home they could find employment. Many of them became nurses, weavers gardeners, Bible teachers and housekeepers. Whenever a girl left Mukti to begin a new life, another one took her place. Ramabai was always busy in her work for Christ. From humble beginning, the two refuge homes had grown so large that in Mukti alone there were nearly two thousand girls and women. In 1922, Pandita Ramabai entered into eternal rest. Even today the Mukti mission continues to be a place of refuge for the outcaste and the homeless, and hundreds find a life of satisfaction and usefulness there.

Ramabai's success and her work have caused many people to wonder how all this was possible? When she gave her one and only life into the hands of Christ, He gave her a purpose in life and made use of her. With strength it is possible. In Ramabai's words what God has done for me, He can do it for you also.

Bible Learning : Strategies

“If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest; and if one of you wants to first, he must be the slave of all”

Humility and the willingness to serve and help others in their need are a true measure of greatness.

1. How did Ramabai come under the influence of Christian faith?
2. How did Ramabai champion the cause for the women during her time?

Bible application.

1. Can you identify some of the areas of need in our society today? What can we do to help the homeless people in our cities?
2. Let us think about the sufferings of widows and orphans today and what we could do to bring them to the realm of society.
3. The Mar Thoma church has established several institutions to deserve the destitute. Please find out more about the following homes for the underprivileged members of our community.
 - Ravi Varma home for the Destitute, Trichur, Kerala
 - Carmel Agathi Mandiram, Ayroor, Kerala (home for destitute)
 - Balika Bhavan, Elanthoor, Kerala (home for girls)

Life Response:

If you are given an opportunity to serve the underprivileged, can you make a decisive choice and rearrange your priorities?. Do you take the opportunity to help others as a privilege or as burden?

Memory Verse:

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Mark: 10:45

Prayer

O God who had worked through many human beings, help us to realize that we too can do such things. Help us to surrender ourselves fully for such services.

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