100 DAYS

100 daily Bible readings for the Armed Forces

Originally compiled by **Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Smith, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC LLD** in 1924.

Completely updated by Martin Riddall, Val Hall and other AFCU staff in 2020.

Suggestions for the improvement and development of '100 Days' are welcomed by the AFCU.

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Abbreviations

Bible references are written like this.
John 3:16 which means the book of 'John' Chapter 3 verse 16

NLT = New Living Translation
AV = Authorised Version (The King James Bible)
RSV = Revised Standard Version of the Bible
RV = Revised Version

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Introduction

Since 1924, 100 days Bible Study has been a key tool for the spiritual formation and growth of AFCU members. This special, revised edition seeks to be faithful to the original text but apply Biblical truths in a way that is relevant and accessible to today's servicemen and women.

The first edition was written by Captain Arthur Smith whilst adjutant at Sandhurst between 1921 and 1924. During the First World War he was wounded three times, mentioned three times in dispatches, awarded a DSO, MC and Croix de Guerre. These years were foundational in showing him how important the Bible was. On one occasion his Bible took the main force of shrapnel from an explosion - the Bible is still in the AFCU office. Later in the war his foot was nearly severed in an explosion and the surgeon thought he would have to amputate. In his Bible reading that day Sir Arthur read the verse, "The Lord shall be thy confidence and keep thy foot from being taken" and claimed it! The surgeon didn't amputate!

He went on to have an illustrious career; a summary of which can been found in Annex A. He was a stalwart supporter of the AFCU (then OCU) and hosted many events and weekends in his home. He died in 1977.

The world is very different from the way it was in 1924, the maps have changed, technology has advanced and people seem to be busier than ever. One thing has not changed: the importance of reading God's word regularly and with understanding. When we study the Bible, God speaks to us. He reveals His will and shows us the men and women he wants us to become. Gradually we are changed to reveal His likeness and we are seen by a world that needs Him as much now as it ever did.

This edition of 100 days looks a little different to the way it has looked in the past. Those familiar with previous editions might notice that some titles have been changed, key verses and short prayers have been included and some of the daily entries have been expanded whilst others have been shortened. There are several reasons for this. We wanted to produce a booklet that was accessible to the modern Bible reader and recognised that some of the studies in the first edition were far more suitable to a group study rather than an individual having a quiet time. While we recognise the value of a Bible study

group, we decided that we wanted a resource to encourage new and growing disciples of Jesus wherever they were based; 100 days can therefore be an ideal accompaniment on an operational tour. We have also made other changes where concepts and language have changed beyond recognition, for example 'efficiency'. When Arthur Smith talked about being an 'efficient Christian', he wasn't speaking about time management, but about being a faithful steward of God's gifts.

Our prayer is that this study will enable you to grow and develop in your faith and ground you in what the Christian life means through a thorough explanation based on Biblical truths.

How to use this study

These notes are designed to illuminate Bible passages and are written as an aid to Bible Study. You may use them as a daily devotional, or as a more thorough Bible study, alone or in a group.

If full value is to be obtained from them, it will be necessary to look up the various references and really study the subjects and not merely read them. The studies are both systematic and thematic, as the table of contents shows. They are designed to disciple, challenge and encourage you to become a mature believer in Christ.

Before you start each study, ask God to help you to understand His word and speak to you personally. Then read the Bible passage and spend a few minutes waiting on God to reveal something new to you. After this go on to the rest of the notes. At the end of each there is a suggested prayer for you to pray.

In order to get the most out of each study, there are several questions you can choose from to help prevent this being a purely intellectual exercise. If the passage hasn't yet spoken to you, try asking yourself one or more of the following questions:

Is there for me today...

A command to obey?
A prayer to echo?
An example to follow?
A promise to claim?
A gift to accept?
A sin to avoid?
An ideal to obtain?
A truth to believe?
A lesson to learn?
A warning to note?

It is our prayer that you will be richly blessed as you work through the material each day.

SECTION A - CHRISTIANITY

"There is within every soul a thirst for happiness and meaning"

Thomas Aquinas

"You can laugh at Christianity. You can mock and ridicule it. But it works. If you trust Christ, start watching your attitudes and actions – Jesus Christ is in the business of changing lives."

Josh McDowell, 'Evidence that demands a verdict' p xxvii

The uniqueness of Christianity **Romans 12**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice… Do not conform to the pattern of this world… Romans 12:1, 2

As our key verse indicates, Christianity differs from other religions. It does so in four chief respects:

Christianity is based on love: God seeks man. Other religions are based on fear: man seeks God.

Christianity starts where other religions end. All other religions are about mankind's attempt to become good enough to please the god they worship. Christianity starts when a person accepts the free gift of salvation made available by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, then your sin has been forgiven; you are considered as having reached the necessary standard of righteousness required by God, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Christianity and equality. Christianity puts womanhood in a totally different position from that which it occupies in other religions. As Paul tells us, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

Christianity has a unique power for good. Christianity is centred in a **PERSON** and is not limited to a mere **CREED**. We do not need to become more 'religious', but we do need to become more like Christ. People may laugh at 'religion', but only ignorant fools laugh at the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ lives today ("…Jesus lives forever…" Hebrews 7:24). Buddha, Confucius and Mohammed are all dead.

PRAYER

Father God, as I embark on this journey of 100 days, please help me to remember that I do so as the beloved child of You, the Living God because of the way that You have shown Your love to me through Jesus Christ, who died for me.

Amen

People's need **Ecclesiastes 6 and 12:6-14**

…*and the spirit returns to God who gave it.* Ecclesiastes 12:7

All people are made up of three parts:

The physical - our body
The mental - our soul
The spiritual - our spirit

In the first part of today's study we see such 'gods' as riches, wealth, honour and worldly prosperity which, though not necessarily wrong in themselves, are of little or no value in and by themselves. They are "vanity of vanities" (AV), or "meaningless, meaningless" (NIV) (Ecclesiastes 12:8). The conclusion expressed in 12:13 shows clearly that to enjoy the true values in life we must, "Fear God and keep His commandments" (2 Chronicles 26:5).

A 'religious tendency' exists in everyone and is evidenced by the fact that people everywhere have some kind of god that they worship. In fact, **we either worship the God who made us, or the god we have made.**

A person, therefore, who only exercises the physical and mental portions of themselves, and who neglects God, or substitutes **a** god for **the** God, is only two-thirds a person, or, to use a slang phrase, is 'not all there.'

For a person to be 'whole' no part, including the spiritual, can be neglected, for each part is dependent on the other two for complete and proper development. A three-legged stool is most stable if all three legs are the same length[1].

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that You have made my body, my soul and my spirit. Please help me to remember that there is more to me than meets the eye and help me to keep all parts of me fit and healthy.

Amen

[1] See 1 Thessalonians 5:23

'Religion' does not satisfy **Acts 8:26-40**

You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life. John 5:39-40

Do not mistake 'religion' for Christianity. Some people are 'religious' and use their religion as a cloak of respectability, or as a sedative or insurance to quieten the conscience, but as yet do not know Christ. In today's passage note specifically the words 'to worship' in verse 27. The Ethiopian was a religious man as well as being an upright, trustworthy courtier yet, evidently, he was not satisfied. Light came when Philip "told him the good news about Jesus" (verse 35). Jesus means Saviour (or rescuer); that was what the Ethiopian needed.

- **Verses 26, 27** An instance of Divine guidance. Philip does not delay in obeying the angel's orders, even if they make no sense to him.
- **Verse 31** The Ethiopian was humble enough not to resent the interference of a dust-stained traveller.
- **Verse 32** He was reading the very passage in Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-8) most likely to bring him peace.
- **Verse 36** Belief leads to action.
- **Verse 39** He had found the secret of true joy.
- **Verses 26-32** The Angel (verse 26), The Spirit (verse 29), the Bible (verse 32), and Philip were all used in bringing light to the Ethiopian. A person can be 'religious' and go to church, etc., but miss the point that they must go to Christ for *Life.* See John 5:39-40.

PRAYER

Lord, please help me to go beyond the rules and regulations of religion and find the relationship with You for which I was made.

Amen

A world in need **John 15:1-17**

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:8

Sadly, we have neglected God, who is the only one who can put right all that is so terribly wrong in the world today[2]. We sometimes forget that God wants to use us Christians for this purpose and, if we are to be used by God, we must see to it that we are ready to be used[3]; in other words, that we 'remain' in Him (verse 5). We must therefore be Christians in practice 24/7 and not just in name. It's easier to say than to do!

Remember that, by definition, only Christ's disciples (actual followers) are real Christians[4]. It is our duty 'to bear fruit', but this is only possible if we remain in Him. Look especially at verses 4 and 5 (specifically the last sentence), and verse 8. The Scofield Reference Bible points out that there are three conditions for the fruitful life:

- **Cleansing** verses 2-3
- **Abiding** (RSV) verse 4
- **Obedience** verses 10 and 12.

It is vital that we get right with God and keep right with Him if our lives are to have any meaning or value. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21).

PRAYER

Father God, please help me to be a fruitful follower of Christ. Please work in me to make me the person You want me to be and to help me to do all that You want me to do.

Amen

[2] Jeremiah 2:13
[3] 2 Timothy 2:20 - 21
[4] Acts 11:26

Christianity is not selfish **Mark 5:1-20**

Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you. Mark 5:19

Some people say that people attempt to get right with God simply in order to be sure of getting to heaven. If 'salvation' ends at that, then indeed it is selfish. But it does not end there. It is only the beginning. It is, in fact, the first necessary step for the person who wants to help others; for how can anyone really be the greatest help to another, if they are not right with God?

We need 'salvation' then, not only because God wants us to have it – and we are disappointing Him if we do not take what He offers – but also to help others. We need it, not so much 'in case we die,' but much more 'in case we live'. We are 'saved to serve,' and that is what Jesus Christ told the demoniac in verse 19.

Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." Living this life contributes to the solutions of the world's problems and many have risked everything to do this[5]. Christianity gives purpose to men and women who have everything to live with, but nothing to live for[6].

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that You love me exactly as I am right now. Thank you that You love me too much to let me stay like that. Thank you that, like the demon-possessed man, You can make me whole and allow me to serve You and others.

Amen

[5]Acts 15:26
[6] See note on Study 70, also John 1:40-41.

The abundance of Christianity **Malachi 3:7-10**

"Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it". Malachi 3:10

God wants us to put Him to the test! He longs to pour out unlimited blessings on us and through us to others. But note that the condition is **Complete Surrender,** "Bring the **whole** tithe (offering) into the storehouse" (verse 10).

If Jesus Christ is not **Lord of all**, He is **not Lord at all.** This is the same truth as the first of the 10 Commandments – "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). Jesus put it this way, "Those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples" (Luke 14:33). When we give Him sovereignty in our lives, He pours out His abundant blessings on us so that we can echo the psalmist's words, "I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13: 5-6).

You might like to look up some of the 'abundance' verses on the next page and praise God for what He has done for you.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, You have said that You came to give us life in all its fullness. Please help me not to hold back, but to give You all of me. Help me to look to You for all that I need and to thank You for all that You give me.

Amen

The abundance of God's provision for the Christian

True happiness	Psalm 146:5
Absolute cleansing	Isaiah 1:18
Abundant pardon	Isaiah 55:7
Sin conquered	Romans 6:14
Life abundant	John 10:10
Glorious freedom	Romans 6:18; 8:21
More than conquerors	Romans 8:37
Generously enriched	1 Corinthians 1:5; 2 Corinthians 9:11
Continuous victory	2 Corinthians 2:14
All-sufficient grace	2 Corinthians 9:8; Romans 5:20
Complete redemption	Galatians 3:13; 4:5
Unlimited power	Ephesians 1:19; 3:20
Boundless love	Ephesians 3:19; Romans 8:35-39
Unbelievable peace	Philippians 4:7
Every need supplied	Philippians 4:7
Real wisdom	James 1:5
Joy unspeakable	1 Peter 1:8

The church **Ephesians 5:15-32**

…Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. Ephesians 5:25-27

To many people, the church is just a religious society run by bishops, clergy and ministers. However, in the Bible the word 'church' or 'ecclesia' means 'called out' or, in other words, 'saved' from the results of sin which separates us from God. Instead of being separated from Him we become His children[7].

So, the Church is made up of people no matter what nationality, colour, sex, age or intellectual ability – who have become Christians or, as the Bible puts it, have been 'born again'[8] by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour[9]. Therefore, anyone who has really asked Jesus to be in charge of their life is part of the body of Christ.[10] You become part of the church when you become a Christian, you don't become a Christian by going to church or by trying hard to be religious.

When a local church, of whatever denomination, is filled with spiritual life and faithfully proclaims the biblical Gospel then, through repentance and faith, men and women will follow Christ, who is the head of the church. We discover unity when we find a family bond with other Christians of all sorts of backgrounds.

PRAYER

Lord, I am not sure I like the word 'submit' but please help me to understand that today's reading talks about everyone submitting to everyone else within the Christian family. No one is better than me and I am no better than anyone else if we all submit ultimately to You. Help Your Church to be easy to lead as we come to You in humility and faith as one body… the body of Christ.

Amen

[7] Romans 8:21
[8] John 3:3, 7
[9] Acts 20:28
[10] 1 Corinthians 12:27-28

Moral courage **John 2:12-25**

His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' John 2:17

The British Soldiers' Values and Standards booklet[11] explains that "all soldiers need courage, both physical and moral…" The RAF's Ethos, Core Values and Standards[12] describes moral courage as "the conviction to do what you believe to be right, even though it might be unpopular or dangerous and the personal cost may be high". It can be hard to be a Christian on a day by day basis when you are living and working 24/7 with others who often don't hold the same values and standards. However, precisely because of that it's worthwhile… but it takes courage if we are not to be afraid of public opinion. Moral courage!

The most morally courageous person ever to live was Jesus Christ. In today's passage, Jesus found men changing ordinary money at inflated prices for Temple money, which was what the animal sacrifices had to be bought with, thus making excessive profits. They were also in a part of the Temple, where they should not have been, with the permission of Annas, the High Priest, thus violating or desecrating His Father's House. This led to Jesus' physical action in verses 15 and 16, not caring in the least what the people would think or paying the slightest heed to the risk He ran of being assaulted. Jesus Christ was completely unbound by the customs and public opinion of the day.

Everyone in military service knows what it means to serve, but to serve God takes real moral and sometimes physical courage. Serving God means standing up for what you believe!

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, for the example of Jesus. Please help me to follow His example and be pleased with the things that please You and angry about the things that anger You. Please give me the moral courage to stand up for what is right and stand against that which needs to be condemned.

Amen

[11] AC 63812 A British Soldiers Values and Standards p9
[12] AP 1 2nd edition revised Jan 08 p8

Physical courage **John 19:1-30**

*Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him…*John 19:17-18

Read the passage carefully and note the courageous way in which Jesus went to His death to pay the price of our sin, with no hint of turning back. Imagine the awful pain of such a cold-blooded death; He even refused the drugged wine that was usually given to criminals[13]. He knew beforehand the suffering – physical, mental and spiritual – that was coming and yet never turned aside[14].

After being beaten with a whip, His flesh would have hung off His back in strips, but still He was forced to carry a huge wooden cross on His back to the place of execution. Once there, Roman soldiers would have laid Him down on the cross, stretched out His arms and nailed Him to the wood through His wrists and His heels. After this, they lifted the cross up and slotted it into a hole deep enough to support it. As it hit the bottom of the hole, Jesus' shoulders would have been dislocated by the jolt and His neck would sink into His chest. Every breath He took after that would be absolute agony because He would have to pull up on His dislocated arms to be able to breathe.

Verse 30 says that "Jesus gave up His spirit", signifying a voluntary act. Satan did not succeed *for Jesus died as Victor, not Victim.* Jesus Christ laid down His life for you and me. God the Father looked on in anguish as God the Son felt the unbearable emotional pain of being separated from His Father through the weight of the sin of the world and He breathed His last. No other story in history can touch that of the crucifixion of the guiltless Jesus, who stands out as the supreme example of moral and physical courage and endurance.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You laid down Your life for me as an act of obedience. Please help me to have enough physical courage to be able to stand in obedience for You. I cannot do this on my own and admit I need your help. Thank you.

Amen

[13]Matthew 27:34
[14]Matthew 16:21-27

SECTION B –SIN

“We are separated from God by our sin, so we cannot know Him or experience His love.”

Dr Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ)

“Everyone has sinned and falls short of God’s Glory”

Romans 3:20

“The wages of sin is death (separation from God for ever) but God’s free gift is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”

Romans 6:23

The barrier between God and man **Romans 5:1-21**

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Sin spells death and this is the inheritance of all of us (verse 12)[15]. To wipe out our sins, it was necessary for the sinless Son of God to die, as foreshadowed in the Old Testament sacrifices[16].

Sin is selfish, and the Cross is the price Jesus paid for man's selfishness. Sin creates a complete barrier between God and us; the object of our Lord in coming to this earth was to remove that barrier[17]. There is hope for everyone who realises they are a sinner; there is none for any other.

Justice demands that sin must be punished. That punishment is not the result of vindictive anger; it is the proper reaction of God's holiness and His righteous judgment of sin. God's anger[18] is not excessive – it is the calm, measured, legally correct response to wilful and defiant hostility against His Divine authority. Thankfully, for those who accept that Jesus died on the cross in their place, God's mercy overrides His justice.

S **S**eparates us from God[19]
I **I**ntoxicates us with temporary pleasure
N **N**umbs our sensitivity to God and man.

PRAYER

Thank you so much Lord that though I have built a barrier between You and me through my own deliberate sin, or even by simply ignoring You, You "demonstrated (Your) own love for (me) in this: while (I was) still (a) sinner, (You) died for (me)" (verse 8).

Amen

[15] See also Romans 3:23 and 6:23.
[16] Hebrews 9:19-28
[17] Read Matthew 9:13 and 1 John 2:1-2
[18] John 3:36
[19] See Isaiah 59:2

The impact of sin **James 2:1-13**

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. James 2:10

It does not matter what people ***think*** about sin; what matters is what God ***says*** about it. People often seem to condemn 'big sins' whilst ignoring the 'little sins', but God's standard is clearly shown in today's key verse. Note that it does not say that a person who offends in one point has committed every sin, only that they are counted with those who are guilty of all.

Once, whilst flying a 'chop ride'[20] at RAF Shawbury, a student scored very highly on a number of the assessed areas: his navigation procedures were spot on, his emergency handling was good and he got in and out of the helicopter landing site with no issues. But when it came to the unplanned navigation element, he failed to find the required waypoint. Overall, he only failed one element, but the result was the same as if he had failed them all; he was removed from helicopter training. Alternatively, imagine you are trying to swim the channel but get cramp when you are only ¼ mile away from the French coast and have to climb into the support boat. You have failed to swim the channel just like the person who got cramp just ¼ mile out from the British coast. Failing to get to the finishing line is failing to get to the finishing line.

God detests all sin (do we?), but He loves the sinner[21]. **An inadequate understanding of the seriousness of sin leads to an inadequate idea of salvation.** A useful prayer is, "Lord, keep me sensitive to sin."

PRAYER

Father please help me to see sin just as You see it. Please search me and show me any areas of my life which I like to keep hidden, those places where sin can lurk. Help me to confess my sin to You and to experience the freedom that comes from being in a close relationship with You.

Amen

[20] The last chance sortie before being removed from a course
[21] Deuteronomy 25:16, Luke 16:15

Sin's entry point **Genesis 3:1-24**

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6

Today's passage tells us how sin came into the world. The story is usually known as the 'fall of man', which brought spiritual death. Note the sequence: doubt (verse 1); denial (verse 4); defiance (verse 6); defeat. This is hard teaching, but it is true. This is the bad news that you need to understand before you can really grasp the good news of the Gospel[22].

Romans 5:12 explains that humankind has been impacted by this first sin ever since, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned" (NLT). The sin of Adam and Eve was passed down to all humankind and has infected and corrupted our nature. All people are, therefore, born spiritually dead (separated from God)[23]. No one would deny that there is evil in the world. **Why** it was allowed to enter is more difficult to understand. We must remember, however, that Adam and Eve were given free will and that, had this not been the case, we would be characterless and unable voluntarily to give love. This would mean that we would not have been able to keep the greatest two commandments, "Love the Lord your God… and… love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39)

Because we have free will, we must choose between the path of sin and the path of righteousness. It's a choice we all have to make. A choice that you have to make. Choose well, choose life.

PRAYER

Lord, as I consider the bad news that sin is not only a choice I make, but also a condition I am born into, please let me bring the burden of sin that I carry and give it to You, so that You can deal with it once and for all.

Amen

[22]You might like to watch The Bible Project's account at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQI72THyO5I
[23] Ephesians 2:1, Psalm 51:5, Genesis 6:5, Jeremiah 17:9.

How "sin" and "sins" differ **Romans 8:1-17**

For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4

Because of Adam's fall, **we inherit a sinful nature**. It is not our fault. It's our 'natural' state. Just as a garden is weedy by nature, so are we sinful by nature. It may help to differentiate between this sinful nature and sins, the result of that nature. This is clearly brought out in 1 John 1:8-9, ("If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves… but if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins") where the word 'sin' is used in verse 8 and 'sins' in verse 9. In today's passage we see how to deal with 'sin' (verses 1–11) and 'sins' (verses 12–17). The point is important, because if we do not want to commit 'sins', the only remedy is that of **receiving a new power with which to conquer that tendency.** We must "put off the old self" (Ephesian 4:22) and be "controlled by the Spirit" (Romans 8:9 (NLT)).

Re-read today's passage, remembering that God's plan of salvation goes to the root of the matter, that is, deliverance from our sinful nature. With the new nature we can conquer sin, not by victory over it, but by being dead to it and so experience salvation from sins – their guilt, shame, attraction, and power[24]. Dying to self and being submissive to God[25] is at the very heart of living as a Christian. We will discover that self likes to get back on the throne of our lives, so we will constantly have to remind ourselves that Jesus is King and submit ourselves to Him.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that there "is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Please help me to let You be Lord of my life as I follow You instead of expecting You fit into the life that I lead.

Amen

[24] See Romans 6:11
[25] As Jesus did/was in John 4:34 and 12:49

What is sin? **Romans 3:21-26**

… *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Romans 3:23

The following is an extract from the note to Romans 3:23 in the Scofield Reference Bible. It states that sin is:

- Disobedience. An overstepping of the divine boundary between good and evil.[26]
- Missing the mark. A failure to meet God's standard[27], a bit like missing the bull's eye. If you need a bull's eye to win but miss, it doesn't matter if you miss the dart board or miss by a millimetre; you have still missed the mark.
- Lawlessness. Or spiritual anarchy – the denial of God's right to be God and to exercise His authority[28].

Sin:

- Originates with Satan[29]
- Entered the world through Adam[30]
- Was and is universal[31], Christ alone excepted[32]
- Incurs the penalties of spiritual and physical death[33]
- Is only overcome by the sacrificial death of Christ[34].

Just as a flock of white sheep appears grey against white snow, there is little conviction of sin where there is too little sense of the holiness of God[35].

PRAYER

It seems that sin is all kinds of things, Lord. But without You I always miss the mark. Please help me to see my errors and walk with me to help me to repair them.

Amen

[26] Ephesians 5:6, Luke 15:29 – where the Greek word, *parerchomai*, means to come or to go over, or beyond
[27] Daniel 5:27; Romans 3:23
[28] 1 Tim 1:9
[29]Isaiah 14:12-14
[30]Romans 5:12
[31] Romans 3:23
[32]1 Peter 2:22
[33] Genesis 2:17, Ezekiel 18:4,20, Romans 6:23
[34] Hebrews 9:26, 10:17
[35] Habakkuk 1:13

The Philippian jailer **Acts 16:25-34**

What must I do to be saved? Acts 16:30

The phrase 'Are you saved?' is likely to irritate. Yet it is a fact that people do want to know how they can be saved, ie, how they can be 'born again' from spiritual death into life. They wonder how they can overcome temptation, how they can get victory over self, how they can get true satisfaction. They may not know what they are looking for, but they know there is 'something'.

The Philippian jailer wanted that something, and he expressed it like this, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30). The reply is as true now as it was then, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Notice the jailer wanted to know what he could **DO**. People think that by their deeds they can get to heaven. **It is not a question of what we do but of what God has done for us**. Even an earthly inheritance need not depend on merit; how much less the heavenly. Salvation is the gift of God's grace, not the achievement of our effort.

If you want to go to America and you see a plane at Heathrow headed for Washington, simply believing you will get to America by seeing the plane is not enough. You must get on the plane. Knowing that by becoming a Christian you get to heaven is not enough. You have to become a Christian. You have to believe IN Christ not just believe ABOUT Him.

Note that the salvation of the jailer spread to his family (verse 31) and his entire household believed (verse 34). True salvation is like that. There's not much point just saying you are a Christian; if you really are one people will notice, ask you questions and maybe want what you have got too.

For notes on how to become a Christian, see Study 100.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that I cannot do anything to get myself saved. I know that I can never be good enough, but I have to rely on You and what You have done for me. Please help me to remember this and be thankful.

Amen

Naaman **2 Kings 5:1-19**

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:8,9

Leprosy is used in the Bible as a picture (or 'type') of sin. Note the following:

- Naaman was a great man, BUT he was a leper (verse 1). A person may be a great person in many ways, BUT they are a sinner.
- Naaman had his own cure (verse 12), and people today have their own ideas as to how to get rid of their sin. On the surface, his cure was like the real thing but lacked the humility of obedience and therefore spiritual power. This is a common contrast between 'religion' and true faith.
- If a cure had depended on some hard work, or a dramatic act, Naaman would happily have complied (verse 13). The simplicity of the method of getting rid of sin is the difficulty with many.
- Eventually, he 'repented' (see Acts 3:19) and despite his anger, pride and his own ideas, when he went and washed in the river Jordan he was cured (verse 14). A definite act of faith was required – an act of submission to God. 'I know' (verse 15) contrasts with 'I thought' (verse 11).

You may have sinned terribly or you may be very respectable (like Naaman); nevertheless, you need to claim the one and only remedy made available by Jesus when He shed His blood on the Cross to atone[36] for man's sin, "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood" (Romans 3:25). This atonement[37] is the basis of the Christian gospel.

PRAYER

Father please help me to understand that I can't fix myself. Please let me trust you more than I trust myself when it comes to living the life you want me to.

Amen

[36]Atone literally means 'at one with'
[37]Atonement is the reconciliation between God and humankind brought about by the death of Jesus Christ

The bronze snake **Numbers 21:1-10**

So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived. Numbers 21:9

Today's reading can seem alien to modern ears, but it still contains an important message for us. Note our key verse for today. Snakes had bitten these people; we have been 'bitten' by sin. No effort to make them better was needed, except the effort to look. No effort to make us better is needed, except the effort of faith to look confidently to Christ on the Cross, where love and justice meet (John 3:14-16).

Just as the people did not understand how looking at a bronze snake could cure them, we may not understand how looking to Christ on the Cross can cure us. The cure is no less effective because we do not understand it. The bronze snake was 'dead' and impotent. So, seemingly, was Christ on the Cross; "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He died that sin in us might be rendered impotent. He was made *sin,* but he was not a *sinner.*

Moses did not deal with the situation by removing the snakes, but by providing a remedy for those bitten. God has provided a remedy for us in the death and resurrection of His Son. If we reject this remedy, we make His death pointless "how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3).

The Israelites who were bitten by a snake were as good as dead. When they looked at the snake of bronze, they practically started a new life, i.e. were born anew ("born again" (John 3:3)). We look to Jesus to be saved. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here."

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I really am powerless to do anything to change myself. Thank you that like the bronze snake in the desert You have been lifted up on the Cross so I can look to You for forgiveness of my sin and for new life. Please forgive me and help me to look to You.

Amen

Mephibosheth **2 Samuel 9:1-13**

You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies.
1 Corinthians 6:20

King David's loyalty towards his friend Jonathan extended beyond Jonathan's death (1 Samuel 20). David's action toward Mephibosheth is typical of what God desires for us. Note the last sentence of verse 13, Mephibosheth came to the king's house as he was, ie, "crippled in both feet". God wants us to come to Him, with all our lameness. We don't have to be anything we are not. We do not need to try to fix ourselves before we come to Him. He does not need us to be made even slightly better than we are in order to come to Him. We come just as we are and, having come, we shall, "eat at the king's table like one of His sons." (2 Samuel 9:11) Our Lord wants to take away our lameness (our innate inability to walk uprightly) and give us His love and holiness that leads to righteousness.

Christ wants to be everything to you. He desires and deserves nothing less than 100 percent of you. **Hand your whole life over to Him, He has already paid for it.** Read 1 Corinthians 6:20 and Matthew 11:28-30 to see what I mean.

It does not matter who you are, what your rank or station in life, how clever you are, how wise you think you are, what you can make with your hands, or how kind or good you are. Nothing you can do is ever going to be good enough to deserve to eat at the table of our Lord and King. We have already seen that human beings, all of us, are sinful. We miss the mark. We are spiritually lame. And yet, in this state, God still welcomes you. He sits you down at His table, He feeds you and He provides for you… everything you could possibly need and much, much more.

PRAYER

It's hard to think of myself as a cripple Lord. Help me to recognise my spiritual weakness, my lameness, but also to know that you love me enough not only to die for me, but also to provide everything that I need to be able to call myself Your child.

Amen

The resurrection and ascension **Mark 16**

You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. Mark 16:6

When Jesus paid for our sin by dying on the cross, He 'atoned' (paid the penalty / took the punishment) for us. This atonement can never be over emphasised. There is a danger though in only focusing on it and not experiencing anything else, but remarkably there really is more, much more. It did not end there with Jesus dead on a cross, or in a tomb.

The resurrection and ascension completed the work of the crucifixion and turned apparent defeat into amazing victory. Sin ends in death (eternal separation from God) but if the Crucifixion also ended in death, there would be no victory. The death of Jesus cannot be separated from His resurrection because the two, together with the ascension (Christ's return to Heaven), made complete the victory over sin and death.

The resurrection of our Lord was a proof of the all-sufficiency of His atonement for sin and of its acceptance by God. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:4-6 that Jesus appeared to Peter, the Twelve and then 500 others after His resurrection. Also, the life of a true Christian is just as much a witness to the resurrection as to the Crucifixion. Historically the resurrection is proved conclusively, for many hundreds of contemporaries were prepared to vouch for its truth with their lives. See also in 1 Corinthians 15:12-22 the significance of the resurrection.

Some reject the resurrection because they do not believe in the supernatural. But the true scientific method is to examine the facts and then form a theory, not first form a theory and then deny the facts.

PRAYER

Thank you, Jesus. Just thank you. That is all. You saved my life through Your death, resurrection and ascension. Thank you.

Amen

Knowing, not hoping **1 John 5:1-21**

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13

People sometimes say that it's a bit arrogant to think that you can know that you are saved, but it really IS possible to know you are saved and today we are going to look at how you can know. We *know* because God says so in John 3:16 and 36: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"; "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life".

Feelings are a terrible way of knowing something. As a rule of thumb, it's not good to depend on how you feel. It's much more reliable to trust the facts instead. Just feeling you are a Christian is not enough; you need to trust the facts. Have you asked Jesus into your life? And what if you just don't feel it? That does not mean you are not one. Did you ask Jesus into your life?

The certainty of today's passage is noteworthy. The word 'know' appears in verses 2, 13, 15, 18, 19 and 20. Verse 12 is quite definite and coupled with John 6:37 ("whoever comes to me I will never drive away") leaves no room for doubt. Search the Bible through and you will find no doubt expressed anywhere except by the devil. In so doing remember that in many cases where the word 'hope' appears (as in Colossians 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory", and Hebrews 6:11, "what you hope for may be fully realised") it is a **certain** hope, not a 'cross your fingers and hope for the best' kind of hope. In this context, it is really another word for faith.

PRAYER

Lord, I know I am a Christian because I have asked You to forgive me and help me to live for You. I know You have accepted me because I have asked You to come into my life and make me the person You want me to be. Sometimes, though, it's easier to know with my head than with my feelings. Please help my feelings to come into line with the truth. Help me to KNOW. Thank you.

Amen

SECTION C – HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

Jesus Christ. (Luke 9:23)

"I have come so that you may have life and have it to the full."

Jesus Christ. (John 10:10)

The Holy Spirit – a person **Acts 2:38-47**

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17

Today's key verses tell us that the Holy Spirit has been sent to us and is intended to *live in us*. Verse 38 of today's passage refers to "the gift of the Holy Spirit." *He is a Person whom we can get to know* and who lives in our hearts by faith. He is sometimes called 'Comforter' (John 14:16) and 'Advocate'[38] (1 John 2:1).

We do not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit by luck or by chance. The two conditions for receiving the Holy Spirit are faith and obedience: "by faith we… receive the promise of the Spirit" (Galatians 3:14); "the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:32). Not only this, but obedience is the key to holiness[39] and one of the Holy Spirit's jobs is to help us to become more 'holy' (the clue is in His name). The word 'holy' comes from the same root as the words 'whole' and 'healthy'. The Holy Spirit relates to us in three ways:

- **With:** The Holy Spirit comes to be **with** us (John 14:17) to give us sufficient spiritual understanding to grasp the Gospel message of salvation
- **In:** He comes to be **in** us (John 14:17) when we receive Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour and Lord, for the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus
- **Upon:** He comes **upon** us (Acts 1:8) to empower us for service. If we doubt this, we should ask our Heavenly Father in simple faith ("your Father in heaven [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:13).

PRAYER

Dear Father, I need you. I know that I have been trying to do Christianity in my own strength. I have been trying to run my own life and I have sinned against You. Thank you that You have forgiven my sins through Jesus's death on the cross for me. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit as You promised. In Jesus name. Amen

[38] One who speaks in our defence
[39] 1 Peter 1:14-15,22

The Holy Spirit – a power **Acts 4:1-22**

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them… Acts 4:8

The teaching of Christian ethics is of little value unless we have power to live Christian lives. Peter had power because he was "filled with the Holy Spirit" (verse 8). We see from verse 20 that Peter and John were impelled to preach "Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2) and risen. Threats, public opinion and open hostility held no fears for these "unschooled, ordinary men" (verse 13). The result is told in that verse. God grant that people may be able to say of us, "We took note that they had been with Jesus".

It is not necessary to have a university education (or, indeed, any education!) to be a power for God, you just need to have a relationship with Jesus. St Paul urges us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18), and the context of the Greek means to 'keep on being filled with the Spirit'. Also, in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 Paul commands us not to "quench the Spirit", ie, do not put out the Spirit's fire.

The power of the Holy Spirit should be felt in our lives in a very practical way. God never gives us tasks equal to our power. He gives us **power equal to our tasks**. The words in the table on the next page reveal something of the work of the Holy Spirit.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for the person of the Holy Spirit. Thank you too that He is powerful. Thank you that through His power I can do more than I can ask or even imagine. Please help me to always be open to His power in my life.

Amen

A-Z of attributes of the Holy Spirit:

Access to God	Ephesians 2:18	**M**anifests Himself for our good	1 Corinthians 12:7
Adopts	Romans 8:15-16	**N**ew life	Romans 8:11
Advocate	John 14:26	**O**neness	Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:2
Brings to remembrance	John 14:26	**P**eace	Galatians 5:22
Boldness	Acts 4:31	Patience	Galatians 5:22
Counsellor	John 14:16	Power	Acts 1:8
Deposit	Ephesians 1:14	**Q**uickens (Makes Alive)	1 Peter 3:18, Romans 8:11
Dwells	John 14:17	**R**enews	Titus 3:5
Eagerness	Galatians 5:5	Rebirth	Titus 3:5
Fellowship	Philippians 2:1	Reveals	1 Corinthians 2:10
Freedom	2 Corinthians 3:17	**S**anctifies	1 Corinthians 6:11
Guides	2 Peter 1:20-21	Strengthens	Ephesians 3:16
Gentleness	Galatians 5:23	Seals	Ephesians 4:30
Helps	Romans 8:26	Self-discipline	2 Timothy 1:7
Holiness	Romans 1:4	**T**eaches	John 14:26
Inspires	1 Corinthians 12:8;	Testifies	John 15:26
Intercedes	Romans 8:26	Truth	John 14:17, 16:13
Justifies	1 Corinthians 6:11	**U**nderstanding	Isaiah 11:2, 1 Corinthians 2:12
Knowledge	Colossians 1:9	**V**ictory	1 John 4:4
Leads	Romans 8:14	**W**isdom	Ephesians 1:17
Live by	Galatians 5:16 & 25	**Y**ields fruit	Galatians 5:22
Love	2 Timothy 1:7	**Z**eal	Romans 12:11

Sacraments **John 6:47-69**

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. John 6:51

The Armed Forces' Christian Union is a union of Christians of all denominations and we all come with our own particular take on things like sacraments. However, Jesus Himself introduced us to the two most important sacraments: Holy Communion and Baptism. It's important that we look at these things but since each denomination will do things their own way, notes on this subject are brief.

Brevity does not, however, imply unimportance, for such means of grace have a definite position in all Christian denominations. A sacrament can be thought of as *'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality'*– no good can come simply from that which is outward and visible alone, something inward and 'real' needs to be happening. I have an England football shirt. I wish that when I put it on, I could play football really well. It does not work like that. My shirt is an outward and visible sign but there is no inward reality. Both Baptism and Holy Communion have an awesome spiritual, mysterious power but they only mean anything when you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

There is much to be gained from enjoying your local church's fellowship and supporting its services, but **simply going to church does not make you a Christian.** If it did, then going to watch a top league football match would make you a top league football player. You may be an amazing football player, but you did not become one simply by watching a game! It is the ***Holy Spirit*** who gives us life, not the ritual. There is no virtue or merit in the rites themselves.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, I am not an England football player and an England shirt can't make me one. I am a Christian with Christ at the centre of my being. Baptism and Holy Communion can help me to demonstrate that to a watching world. Please help me as I wear my 'Christian shirt'. Fill me with obedience, power from You and a love for the world that I don't possess in myself.

Amen

Baptism **Matthew 3:1-17**

"I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Matthew 3:11

The Lord Jesus received the baptism of John for repentance, even though, as God's Holy Son, He had never done anything that needed to be repented of. He did it as a humble act of righteousness, to demonstrate that He took His position on earth as a human being. He received a rite that signified both confession (verse 6) and repentance (verse 11), necessary in the case of a human seeking God, but He was baptised not "to fulfil all repentance" but "to fulfil righteousness" (verse 15). Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin."

Baptism by immersion as an adult is designed to demonstrate that the person is dying (drowning) to their old way of life, being cleansed (washed by water) and coming to new, eternal, life (as they come out of the water) (see Romans 6:3-4). Baptism by sprinkling as an infant followed by confirmation (which is the custom in some branches of the Christian church), is making promises to bring up a child as a follower of Jesus, which they can later confirm when they decide for themselves to follow Him.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the value of Christian baptism/ confirmation depends solely on the **repentance and faith of the person being baptised** (Acts 2:38). John the Baptist insisted on real repentance (inward and real) not mere submission to the rite (outward and visible) (Luke 3:7).

PRAYER

Father, I am amazed that Jesus got baptised. He who had no sin and no need of cleansing chose to obediently submit to this ritual. Thank you for His obedience. Help me to live in obedience to You.

Amen

Holy Communion **Matthew 26:26-30**

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Luke 22:19

The simplicity and naturalness of Holy Communion is greatly emphasised when we remember that the first Lord's Supper was a continuation of the Jewish Passover Feast (itself an act of remembrance of the redemption of the first-born, Exodus 12:14-27, at which words very similar to those in verse 26 and 27 were used). The fact that the Holy Communion is a feast in memory of our Saviour's death is brought out in our key verse for today where we are told to continue it by the command, "Do this in **remembrance** of me."

We are taught by Paul to associate these thoughts with the one outstanding approaching event, our Lord's coming again, "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Therefore, in the Lord's Supper, as we offer the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psalm 116:17, Hebrews 13:15), we look:

Back	to the Cross, in commemoration of a Saviour Who died for us
Forward	to His coming again, in contemplation of a returning Saviour
Up	to be fed by Him, the living Saviour
In	to Him, our life and our indwelling Saviour
Around	to those who share with us the one loaf and the one cup

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord that Holy Communion reminds me that You died for me, that You bled for me and that You are in me and I am in You. Please help me to live my life in the knowledge that this is true. Let me live for You and let me serve You daily. As You died for me let me live for You.

Amen

Our armour **Ephesians 6:10-20**

Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Ephesians 6:11

If an army is to be efficient, it must be equipped and trained in all areas. The same applies in Christian warfare. Satan is implacably opposed to God and to those who put their trust in Him, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Today's passage may be summarized by the statement that three essentials for a true Christian are:

- **Bible:** Verse 17, study, rather than just read, your Bible;
- **Prayer:** Verse 18, pray, rather than just 'say your prayers';
- **Witness:** Verses 13-16, demonstrate by your lifestyle that you believe rather than just say you do.

Note that the armour in this passage is chiefly for the front: a Christian must not turn their back (except to "flee from sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18)). The six pieces of armour mentioned are all for defensive action, except the 'Sword of the Spirit', which is both for offensive and defensive use.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for the armour that You give me. Help me to remember every day to put on the full armour to guard my life against attack. I put on the belt of truth to protect against lies and deception. I put on the breastplate of righteousness to protect my heart from temptation. I put the gospel of peace on my feet, so I am ready to take Your light wherever You send me. I take up Your shield of faith that will extinguish all the darts and threats hurled my way by the enemy. I put on the helmet of salvation, which covers my mind and thoughts. I take up the sword of the Spirit, Your very Word, the one offensive weapon given to me for battle. Thank you that I never fight alone, for You are constantly at work on my behalf, shielding, protecting, strengthening, exposing deeds of darkness, bringing to light what needs to be known and protecting me from the cruel attacks I face even when I am unaware. In the powerful name of Jesus.

Amen

The Bible **Psalm 119:9-16**

How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. Psalm 119:9

A person who designs a new machine takes great care to issue a handbook to ensure that it is understood and operated correctly. The more delicate and complicated the machine, the greater the care in compiling the handbook.

No instrument is so wonderful or so beautifully designed as a human being. Therefore, it is inconceivable that the 'Designer' would have allowed His handbook, the Bible, to be inaccurate. We may take it then that the Bible is wholly trustworthy and is entirely sufficient for God's purposes of revealing God to man and bringing man to God. To see what the Bible claims for itself, ie, its inspiration by God, look at the table on the next page:

Whilst the Bible is the **Written Word**, Christ is the **Living Word,** "Jesus lives for ever" (Hebrews 7:24); the two go hand in hand. Just as words are the way that humans express themselves, so Jesus is the expression of God to humankind. In a sense, He is God's last word to us, "In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus is both Messenger and Message. Listen to the warning in Mark 7:6-8, "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me… You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions".

In the history of the Christian Church, as in the history of the Jews, many unhelpful traditions have been added to, or have been subtracted from, the Biblical revelation provided for us by Almighty God. However, the Bible is God's revealed word for all humankind and by reading it and allowing it to speak to us we will increasingly know the truth and "the truth will set [us] free" (John 8:32).

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for giving us the Bible. As I read it please let me learn more about You and about Your interaction with human beings. Please let me be changed as You, the Living Word, interact with me through Your written word. Let me hear Your voice as I read the Bible.

Amen

What the Bible claims for itself:

It gives success in God's service	Joshua 1:7
It protects from sin	Psalm 119:11
It offers food	Psalm 119:103
It offers guidance	Psalm 119:105
It protects from error	Mark 12:24
It is life-giving	John 6:63
It brings hope	Romans 15:4
It is a weapon	Ephesians 6:17
It is inspired by God	2 Timothy 3:16-17
It is relevant today	Hebrews 4:12
It is permanent	1 Peter 1:25

Jesus and the scriptures **Luke 4:1-13**

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone'." Luke 4:4

The temptation of Jesus came just after He had received special blessing, "The Holy Spirit descended on him… 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'" (Luke 3:21 and 22). We will often experience temptation at a similar point in our lives. Jesus overcame the devil by the intelligent, accurate and honest use of the Scriptures, a weapon available for all Christians. Jesus could easily have used 'clever arguments'! But the simple authoritative Bible statements are more effective than all arguments. He answered Satan by the words, "It is written..." quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13 and 6:16 respectively.

It is interesting that Satan's final temptation involves (mis)using words of Scripture (from Psalm 91:11-12). Satan is a legalist and is fully aware of the authority of the Word of God, "You believe that there is one God… Even the demons believe that…" (James 2:19) but he takes a verse out of context and makes it a pretext.

Because Scripture states that the devil "is a liar" (John 8:44), he cannot "correctly handle the Word of Truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This is a salutary reminder to us always to seek the help of the Holy Spirit when we read our Bible; He is the one "who will lead us into all truth" (John 16:13) because He is the Spirit of Truth.

This passage also demonstrates that the only way to counteract the lies of Satan is to know and use Scripture correctly. As we saw in Study 26, the only offensive weapon available to Christians in their spiritual battle is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). We, like Jesus, need to know 'what is written' and speak those truths fearlessly when we are tempted.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus. Thank you for modelling to me how to cope with temptation. You are the Living Word quoting the written word to one who twists the word. Please help me to follow Your example. Help me to read and learn the word of God so that I can use it, instead of simply trying to argue with people.

Amen

Interdependence of the Old and New Testaments (1)
Exodus 20:1-17; Mark 12:28-31

"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time," says the Lord. "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds."
Hebrews 10:16

Some people consider that the New Testament teaching is more applicable to the present day and the Old Testament does not hold much practical value. The fact is that although the New Testament may be more easily understood, those who place little value on the Old Testament deprive themselves of a treasure trove of spiritual insight and understanding. The main point of today's study is to see and understand the interdependence of the Old and New Testaments. One is not complete without the other.

The Commandments in Exodus are negative in character; they set the standard and offence against them was punishable 'under the law'. They set the external boundaries within which God intends man to live safely and fully. But when Christ was revealed to mankind, emphasis was laid on the positive rather than the negative; the internal rather than the external. The positive command in the New Testament to 'love one another' does not cancel the Old Testament commandments, but whereas the latter were 'standards of the law' they now become tests of the new life in Christ, as well as promises to those who seek to live "led by the Spirit" (Romans 8:4, 8-14).

There are certainly some difficult passages in the Bible. Don't tackle them first. When you eat a herring you first take the simple flesh before you tackle the bone. So, with the Bible: consume the tender meat first, then tackle the bones. Such food is sufficient, suitable, satisfying, strengthening, sustaining and sure. *Accept all that you can of the Bible by reason and accept the remainder by faith.*

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that the Bible, beginning, middle and end, is Your word. Thank you that You can use all of it to communicate to me. As You send, please let me be always ready to receive.

Amen

Interdependence of the Old and New Testaments (2)
Exodus 12:3-13, 18-21; Hebrews 9:11-15

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! Hebrews 9:14

The interdependence of the Old and New Testaments is brought out again today in these passages. The Passover meal was to be celebrated every year to remind the Jews of the angel of death 'passing over' their houses with the blood of an unblemished lamb on the doorposts and the hastily prepared meal before their deliverance from Egypt. Centuries later, Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), celebrated the Passover with His disciples the night before He was crucified. Jesus is Himself seen as the Passover lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7):

- **Unblemished.** The chosen Passover lamb must be established as without blemish. So, our Lord's life was lived under constant scrutiny that showed that He was without blemish (John 8:46; 14:20; 18:38, 1 Peter 1:19).
- **Sacrifice.** The perfect Passover lamb was then sacrificed. Jesus fulfilled this. (Hebrews 9:14).
- **Obedience.** At Passover, each family had to choose to paint the blood on the doorposts to ensure divine protection. We have to choose to accept salvation by personal faith; this refutes the universalism theory that all men are automatically saved (John 3:36; Romans 3:22).
- **Protection.** Simply applying the blood, constituted a perfect protection from judgment. Though faith in Jesus, we are protected from God's judgement by His righteousness. (Philippians 3:9).

Our understanding of what Christ accomplished for us on the cross is much enhanced by a knowledge of the Old Testament and we miss out on much of the richness of the Bible if we concentrate solely on the New Testament.

PRAYER

Jesus, You are truly the lamb that was slain. Thank you that You chose to take my place, to be sacrificed for me to save my life. Thank you that I am protected from God's judgement by Your righteousness.

Amen

Interdependence of Old and New Testaments (3)

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. Matthew 5:17

For today's reading look up the following verses in the New Testament, which among many others refer to the Old Testament. Many Bibles have the cross reference to the Old Testament passage as a footnote. If not, use an online Bible such as Bible Gateway to see these cross references easily. Note how Jesus Christ and the Old Testament are inextricably connected.

What I am asking you to do today is a little bit like mining. Instead of having all the thoughts laid out before you, I hope that you will be keen to do the digging. The Bible is like a gold mine. The more you dig the more you find. It goes from being an interesting exercise to being an exciting adventure almost as soon as you dig the first shovelful. It may even seem like a dull idea at first (much like getting your work clothes on and picking up your shovel), but the first nugget changes all that in an instant. I hope you enjoy the process…

Matthew 1:22-23; 2:23; 4:4, 7, 10; 5:17; 15:7-9; 24:37-39; 27:9-10
Mark 10:5-9; 12:26-36
Luke 4:17-19; 24:25-27, 44-47
John 6:45; 19:36-37
Acts 13:47
Romans 4:13; 9:33; 11:26-27; 13:9; 15:8-12
Hebrews 11 (the whole chapter is dedicated to looking at examples of faith from the lives of Old Testament men and women)
James 2:8-23 (here James rationalizes his whole argument for Christ on Old Testament scriptural evidence)
1 Peter 2:6-8

PRAYER

Thank you, Father, that when I look into it, I can see how well the New Testament connects to the Old. Thank you that You speak with power and authority to me today through words that were written thousands of years ago.

Amen

How to study the Bible (1) **Joshua 1:1-8**

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8

Joshua is commissioned for definite service. In order that he may carry out his work efficiently, he is ordered in today's key verse to take the Bible as his guidebook. Psalm 119:160 tells us that God's words are "true" and "eternal".

Six practical rules for studying the Bible. Be:

- **Investigative.** Approach the Bible with the attitude of, 'what will I learn? How can I change?' Pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."
- **Obedient.** Study the Bible with the intention of obeying it and of applying its teaching to your everyday life like Ezra. He "devoted himself to the study and observance of the law" (Ezra 7:10).
- **Open minded.** Study it with an open mind and without preconceived ideas; what we think is often different from what God says, "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts…' declares the LORD. '…my ways [are] higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Avoid the mentality that rejects that which it does not comprehend, or which challenges its moral conduct.
- **Prayerful.** Study it prayerfully (Psalm 119:18). We can only understand the Bible as the Holy Spirit reveals it to us. "The person without the Spirit… cannot understand [it]" (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- **Humble.** Study it humbly. "He guides the humble…" (Psalm 25:8-9).
- **Honest.** Study it honestly (2 Corinthians 2:17).
- **Expectant.** Study it expectantly. "My word… will accomplish what I desire" (Isaiah 55:11).

Above all, aim to study the Bible regularly, daily if possible. Make it a priority in your life. **See Annex B for different ways to study the Bible.**

PRAYER

Father, I want to get to know You better every day. Please help me to read and understand Your word so that I can hear You speaking to me through it. Please help me to be able to set aside time to spend reading, meditating, thinking on and digging into the Bible so that I can learn more about You every day.

Amen

How to study the Bible (2) **Joshua 24:14-27**

Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them.
Proverbs 4:5

We know from Joshua's life how keen he was that the people should serve the true God. But he had a problem. The people were rebellious and often wanted to go their own way rather than God's. Verses 14 and 15 are great words from the Commander-in-Chief. How then can verses 19 and 20 be right? Our key verse tells us to ask God for wisdom and understanding. We can do this when we come across verses that on the surface seem baffling! Joshua was something of a psychologist and he knew that the very fact of 'taunting' the people would make them all the more determined to serve the true God.

Human nature likes being put on its mettle, so Joshua goads the people by painting a picture of the ultimate reality of their choice should they choose not to change their behaviour now. Verse 21 shows that it had the desired effect.

This example tells us how important it is, when studying the Bible, to read passages in context, whilst asking God for wisdom and understanding.

PRAYER

Father God please work in me so that I can be a bearer of truth. May the world be able to see as You work out in me all that it means to be a child of the living God.

Amen

How to study the Bible (3) **Mark 12:18-27**

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15

Remember that a single verse on any subject may give the truth from only one angle. As today's key verse indicates, we need to study more widely if we are to know all that God has revealed on a particular subject in the Word of Truth. Do not just select 'pleasant passages' (see Isaiah 30:10).

Today's study contains an excellent example. The Sadducees[40] (verse 19) quoted from Deuteronomy 25:5 yet Jesus tells them that they do not know their Bibles (verses 24, 27) and goes on to reveal the truth about the subject.

At first glance, Romans 3:10 ("There is no-one righteous") and the last sentence of Colossians 1:28 ("That we may present everyone perfect in Christ") seem quite contrary, However, these verses are interdependent, not contradictory (see Colossians 1:22, "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish…"). The truth is that our natural state[41] is sinful, but the moment we claim Christ's death as having redeemed us personally, God sees us as perfect in relation to His law.

There are many other examples that could be quoted where verses seem to be contradictory, but as you study the Bible you begin to discover that it all hangs together. The Bible is God's word to us and He does not contradict Himself for Jesus said, "I am… the truth" (John 14:6).

PRAYER

Father, I really do want to grow and develop. I thank you that by reading and studying Your word I can grow closer to You and more like You day by day. Please help me to walk with You every step of the journey of my life.

Amen

[40]The Sadducees were a sect or group of Jews that was active in Judea at the time of Christ. The sect fulfilled various political, social, and religious roles, including maintaining the Temple. Acts 23:8 defines the Sadducees theologically, saying that, in contrast to the Pharisees, they hold there "is no resurrection, and neither angels nor spirits."
[41]see Study 12

The parable of the soil **Luke 8:4-15**

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. Luke 8:15

In this parable, we see the different ways in which people respond, or fail to respond, to the Gospel. However faithful the work of the sower may be or however excellent the quality of the seed (see verse 11), a great deal depends on the nature of the soil. Hence the emphasis of the parable is upon human responsibility in relation to the Divine message.

Here are four types of hearers:

- **The indifferent** (12) who fail to accept the Gospel at all because of the activity of the devil
- **The shallow** (13) who after making a superficial profession of faith, quickly fall away
- **The choked** (14) who, while receiving the message and showing signs of spiritual life, are all the time entangled by the hindrances and temptations of the world
- **The obedient** (15) who defeat the devil by keeping the Word, overcome the world by bearing fruit, and persevere in the Christian faith.

Remembering that the seed is the Word of God, we find obedient Christians:

- **Admit** it is God's Word by understanding it (Matthew 13:23).
- **Submit** to its teaching by accepting it (Mark 4:20)
- **Commit** it to memory, thus retaining it (Luke 8:15)
- **Transmit** it by telling others (Romans 10:14-15)

PRAYER

Father God please let me always be good soil, that the seed of Your word can settle into and grow. Help me to become fruitful through all the seasons of my life.

Amen

SECTION D - PRAYER

“We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but God wants it to be our first line of defence. We pray when there's nothing else we can do, but God wants us to pray before we do anything at all.

“Most of us would prefer, however, to spend our time doing something that will get immediate results. We don't want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time, because His idea of 'good time' is seldom in sync with ours.”

Oswald Chambers

“He who kneels the most, stands the best.”

Dwight L. Moody

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.”

1 John 5:14-15

The prodigal son **Luke 15:11-32**

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms round him and kissed him. Luke 15:20b

In today's reading, "Give me" (verse 12) becomes, "Make me" (verse 19). Our first idea of prayer is usually that of asking God to give us something. In one respect, as a primary conception of prayer, this is absolutely right, when we ask for one of God's gifts, eg, "You have been saved through faith… it is a gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9); "He who did not spare His own Son… how will he not… give us all things (Romans 8:32).

The prayer, 'make me' is, however, bigger. It implies that we are willing to let everything go for Christ's sake. It also includes the prayer 'give me', because in the process of our being made, it will be necessary for us to accept the gifts that God wants to shower upon us. The prodigal son learned a lot between verses 12 and 19. Prayer is not conquering God's reluctance but taking hold of God's willingness.

It is only as the Holy Spirit teaches us to pray "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1) that our prayer will have power and be a joy to us.

A Christian on his knees sees more than a philosopher on tiptoe. God delights to answer prayer, "Before they call, I will answer" (Isaiah 65:24).

PRAYER

Father God, thank you so much that I don't have to beg You for my inheritance or try to con You out of it and run away to enjoy my life. Thank you that You have more for me than I could imagine and that, as Your child, I am an heir of a promise that is eternal that no one can take away from me. Please help me to trust You and to be happy to be whatever You make me.

Amen

When to pray **Daniel 6**

Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Daniel 6:10b

Daniel is a dynamic example of what it means to lead a life of prayer. As today's key verse shows, even in the midst of great danger and against all the odds, his faith was unshaken. God heard his prayers and saved him from certain death.

The command to "pray continually" in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 shows us that prayer is, among other things, an attitude. It is obviously impossible to be speaking to God all the time. Daniel fulfilled the command to 'pray continually,' because his life was rooted in prayer; he was always in touch with God.

We can learn much from his life. If you have time it is worth reading the whole of Daniel's story in Chapters 1-6. Note especially:

1:8	He "resolved not to defile himself."
1:12-13	He trusted God not to fail him, "Test your servants..."
2:19-23	He gave all the glory to God, "Oh God… you have given me wisdom and power…"
5:17	He did not crave for earthly gifts, "You may keep your gifts."
6:5	His faith permeated every aspect of his life.
6:10	He had regular times of prayer.
6:21-23	His trust in God was rewarded.
6:28	He prospered.

Praying continually includes "in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Prayer is communion with God and we can pray anywhere at any time.

PRAYER

Father God, please help me learn, understand and experience that You are never more than a whispered prayer away. Help me to take You into every circumstance of my daily life and never feel that I need to leave You at the door.
Amen

Unanswered prayer **Matthew 7:7-11**

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! Matthew 7:11

There is no such thing as unanswered prayer, although God does not always answer our prayers in the way that we would like or expect. For example, a child sees a sharp knife on the table and asks his father to give it to him. The loving father answers that request by putting the knife out of the way. It is fortunate that God knows what we need, whereas we only think we know what we want, "my God will meet all your needs" (Philippians 4:19).

It has been said that God answers in 3 ways: 'Yes', 'No' or 'Wait'. We are apt to think God should answer our prayers by saying 'Yes'. We forget He may say 'No' (e.g. 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient…'"), or 'Wait'. Elijah had to pray 7 times before he saw an answer to his prayers (1 Kings 18:41-46).

The passage we read today shows us that we can trust God as our heavenly Father who desires to give good gifts to his children[42]. Therefore, we can **ask** with expectancy, **seek** with persistence, and **knock** with assurance.

However, we read in 1 John 5:14, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." The condition is that we ask, "according to His will."

PRAYER

Father God, thank you that You are the one who knows best, not me, no matter what I think about that and no matter what the circumstances are. Please help me to pray according to Your will and let me see You do great things in my life as a result.

Amen

[42]See study 36 on the Prodigal Son.

The Lord's prayer **Matthew 6:9-15**

This, then, is how you should pray… Matthew 6:9a

"Our Father." The supreme example of prayer opens with words that emphasise God as a loving Father and us as His children. He is in Heaven; Heaven is where God lives enthroned in glory – and yet we have access to Him at any moment, "Approach the throne of grace… to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). The sequence of our Lord's Prayer teaches us to begin with worship; that the interests of the kingdom come before merely personal interests; that we must accept the Father's will, whether to grant or withhold; that personal petitions should mainly concern present needs, leaving the future to the Father's care and love.

We cannot pray, "Your will be done" unless we mean to apply it to our own lives. Many must plead guilty, after saying, "Your will be done," to adding (perhaps unconsciously) "provided Your will is the same as my will". The will of God is not an evil to be endured, but a blessing to be acquired.

The cry of Jesus on the Cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) suggests that when He "was made sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21) the all-holy God had to turn His face away, as He could not look on sin. Jesus, therefore, knew what it was to be God-forsaken in order that we might never know it. This is the only occasion when any recorded prayer of Jesus began with the words "My God"; in all other cases He addressed God as His Father.

PRAYER (slowly, think it through, roll each phrase around in your mind and let it sink in)

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, Your Kingdom come, Your Will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours now and forever.

Amen

Hindrances to prayer – sin **Psalm 66**

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. Psalm 66:18

Prayer is like radio communication; we can only transmit and receive if we are tuned in to God's 'frequency' and our equipment is in order. Barriers to real prayer are not only sin, but also the "cherishing" of sin (Psalm 66:18) and an unforgiving spirit, "When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him." (Mark 11:25- 26). The harbouring of a grudge, the subtle wish for another's harm, the envy that corrupts the heart – these attitudes always prove impassable barriers to spontaneous prayer and break the circuit. Our sin, of whatever kind, jams all transmissions, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God… so that He will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2-3).

Lack of complete surrender and not being unreservedly willing that God's will be done, are hindrances to real prayer and communion with God. What a contrast to the extraordinary submission displayed by Jesus, "My Father… not as I will, but as You will." (Matthew 26:39).

The Psalmist in today's reading is honest with God, whilst acknowledging all that God has done (verses 10-12). He thinks of the hard time he has had, but it was worth it, as the last part of verse 12 shows. He knows that God uses even the worst trial to develop spiritual muscle. Only in extremity can God's reliability be fully experienced; this experience creates a secure platform from which prayers of true faith may be launched.

PRAYER

Dear Lord God, I am not perfect, only You are perfect. I sin. I mess up. I break my relationship with You over and over again. I often think that simply saying, 'please forgive me' is not enough, but it's all I have. Please, Father, help me to depend on You and not on my own righteousness or strength. Help me to come to You as soon as I become aware of sin in my life and confess it directly to You. Help me to stay close to You and please do forgive me.

Amen

Hindrances to prayer – anxiety **Philippians 4:1-7**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6

The sense of the first part of verse 6 is "do not be full of care for anything." We must, of course, be careful, but the trouble is when our care turns into anxiety. The same teaching is found in Matthew 6:34, which should read, "don't be over-anxious about tomorrow." We can gain encouragement from Romans 8:28 "and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose". We can confidently trust God rather than being left worried and anxious. Luke 12:22 too urges a spirit of confidence, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry...".

Compare Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-42, "'Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but… Mary has chosen what is better'". *If you worry you do not trust; if you trust you do not worry.* If you find prayer hard, read a passage from the Bible first; note especially the promises there and allow God to speak to you, and *then* speak to Him. Here are 5 great Bible passages to get you started:

John 14:27
1 Peter 5:6-8
Matthew 6:25-34
Joshua 1:7-9
Philippians 4:10-13

PRAYER

But I DO worry God. Am I supposed never to worry about anything again? That's not even human! As I fight with the worries, the cares and concerns I have in the world, please help me to give them to You. To lay them at the foot of Your cross where Your love and blood flow mingled down to cover them. Let me give them to You and know the "peace of God which transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Thank you, Lord.

Amen

Hindrances to prayer – lack of 'thought-control' **Philippians 4:8-23**

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Philippians 4:8

Augustine said, "An evil thought passes your door first as a stranger. Then it enters as a guest. Then it installs itself as master." As we think, so we live.

Psychology teaches us the enormous importance that our thoughts have upon our lives. Every Christian struggles with wandering thoughts, but not all of these are sinful. In prayer, we need to learn to "take captive every thought" (2 Corinthians 10:5). In the matter of concentration, some may find it helpful to pray aloud or make a note of things to do later. Another hint – if tired, try praying whilst standing up.

Sometimes distracting thoughts are a spiritual attack. If they are responsibilities that you have, pray that you will be conscientious and efficient; if they are temptations, pray that you will be guarded and protected from sin; if irrelevancies, that the Lord would grant you clear thinking. In this way, you can turn distractions into prayerful victory.

Another practical point is to keep a list or lists of people for whom you want to pray daily or weekly. In praying for Christian organisations, such as The Armed Forces' Christian Union, you can always use our prayer diary (which you can access via Prayermate, on the website or by hard copy) as well as *Dispatches* and diary of future events as a prayer reminder.

PRAYER

Father God You know me so well, You know my thoughts and words before they are even formed on my lips. You even know how hard it is for me sometimes to simply sit still and pray when there seems so much I need to do. Please forgive me for this and help me to rest in Your presence and experience Your closeness as I come to You in prayer.

Amen

Hindrances to prayer – lack of sincerity **Mark 9:17-29**

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Matthew 6:7-8

Verse 29 would be better understood if it read "this kind does not go out except through hard work in prayer, which costs the person who is praying something." Our sincerity can be judged by the effort we put into prayer.

We get an insight into what prayer meant to the Lord when we read how much it cost him, "He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). Bartimaeus was persistent (Mark 10:46-52). We read, "He began to shout… 'Jesus, have mercy on me.' Many rebuked him… but he shouted all the more." Epaphras was "always wrestling in prayer for you" (Colossians 4:12-13).

Note in today's study that lack of faith (verse 19) was a hindrance to prayer. See Hebrews 11:6 ("And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.") and James 1:6-7 ("But when you ask him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.")

In our key verse today, Jesus taught that our prayers do not need to be long and 'impressive'. He is more interested in quality than quantity.

PRAYER

I know I can't make anything happen Lord. I am just a human being. You are the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the One who flung stars into space and who keeps worlds spinning! For You all things are possible. Help me to trust You. Please teach me how to wrestle in prayer and to be persistent.

Amen

Hints on prayer **Nehemiah 1:4-11**

Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night… Nehemiah 1:6

- **Think** of prayer as a method of co-operation with God. Prayer is not groping after God. Prayer is opening up all areas of your life to Him.
- **Realise** the importance of prayer; even Jesus Himself found it essential for His life on earth. Think of it also as a privilege and expect an answer.
- **Before** praying, wait in silence, realising the wonder of what you are about to do. Remember God is more ready to hear than you are to pray; also, that He understands you far better than you do yourself. Nehemiah spent several days fasting and mourning before he started praying (verse 4).
- **Prayer** is simply talking to God. You can be absolutely natural and share with Him your plans, your work, your leisure, your feelings and your concerns. Tell Him what you have done during the day as you would a friend. Remind God of His promises in the Bible and claim them.
- **Prayer** is not trying to get God to do our will, but it is a way of aligning our will to God's, so that His will be done in and through us. It is seeking God seriously (verse 4) and then doing what He tells us to do, i.e., pray and obey.
- **Read** the Bible and pray first thing each day if you are able and small children allow! Some will find it helpful to read and pray before getting dressed, so that if anything is hindered or hurried, it will be the dressing.

Nehemiah's prayer is a great example of what to include in your prayers:

- **Meditation** Reflecting on God, His Majesty and His love (verse 5)
- **Adoration** The worship of God (verse 5)
- **Confession** Telling God about our sin (verses 6-7)
- **Intercession** Pleading for others (verses 8-10
- **Petition** Personal requests (verse 11)

PRAYER

Today as I come to You in prayer, Lord, please sit with me as I enjoy Your presence. Allow me to practise some of what I have read today and spend slow and unhurried time with You. May I leave this time of prayer renewed, restored refreshed, going into the rest of my day ready to do Your will.

Amen

SECTION E - WITNESS FOR CHRIST

"God forbid that I should travel with anybody a quarter of an hour without speaking of Christ to them."

George Whitefield

“The Spirit goes ahead of us when we witness— preparing the way, giving us the words, and granting us courage.”

Billy Graham, ‘Billy Graham in Quotes’

The Great Commission **Matthew 28:16-20**

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20

Mission is vitally important to the Christian. Jesus commanded His disciples in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15, to "GO!" Obedience to a command is not dependent on our understanding the reason for it or agreeing with it. He promised that "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus said that this would be "beginning in Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47), which is where today's reading was first heard. This suggests that mission starts wherever we are, at work, on the married quarters' patch, in the Wardroom/Lower Deck/Mess/Cookhouse/supermarket, etc.

Mission is not restricted to evangelists or 'missionaries'. We are all called to love our neighbours as ourselves. Christianity has brought the abolishment of slavery, emancipation of women, light instead of darkness, hope instead of fear, satisfaction instead of superstition, hospitals, care of the aged, justice, honour and integrity. Can anyone be selfish enough to keep all this to themselves? Christianity makes you care.

Jesus also said, "This Gospel… will be preached in the whole world… and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). (ie, He will not return to earth until the Gospel has been preached to all nations.) I, for one, will be eternally thankful that the disciples left "Jerusalem and… Judea and Samaria and [travelled] to the ends of the earth" (Acts1:8). What is God calling you to do, where is He calling you to serve Him?

PRAYER

Father God I thank you that You are with me. **Always**. Help me to be obedient to Your call on my life, let me trust You moment by moment knowing that You will never leave me.

Amen

Expect tough times (1) **Matthew 10:1-42**

You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. Matthew 10:22

In the early part of Matthew 10 we read of the orders given by Jesus to the twelve disciples when sending them out to proclaim the closeness of God's kingdom: to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cleanse the leper and to drive out demons. (Note from verses 9 and 10 that they were to be totally reliant on God. Note also that preaching and "doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38) were all part of the same mission.) Luke 10:1-24 tells how Jesus launched a second mission of a similar kind, this time with 72 rather than 12 workers. Our commission is from yesterday's key verse, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

If we are true disciples, we too must witness for Christ (see verses 32 and 33). We must be prepared to be hated (verse 22); our decision to follow Christ may not be popular. In fact, the way we live as Christians may result in conflict rather than in peacefulness (verse 34). Nevertheless, if we really do live according to what we believe then we can earn the respect even of those who appear outwardly opposed.

We must be ready to let anything, and everything go if need be (verse 39). There is very definitely a cross to be borne and this cross must be taken up voluntarily, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24). The fact that it is hard makes it all the more worthwhile. Christ does not promise an easy passage; He does guarantee a safe arrival. Make a definite stand early in your career. It will save a lot of trouble.

PRAYER

Father, it's hard, but please help me to live out every day what I believe in my heart. Let me 'walk the walk' and not simply 'talk the talk'. Help me to be bold about my faith with those whom I meet. Help me to live for You.

Amen

Expect tough times (2) **John 15**

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. John 15:18

You may not have heard of Stuart Keene Hine but you will almost certainly know of his famous hymn, 'How great Thou art'. He was drafted into the Army at the age of 18 in 1914. This was to be his first experience of being a missionary.

Stuart recounts[43], "On that first night on Salisbury Plain, just before 'Lights Out', I knelt by my bed in prayer. This was greeted by bottles, boots, lumps of coal, and anything else to hand being thrown at me, paving the way for the big showdown. For dinner, each of the thirty men in our hut received two horrible red herrings. 'Come on, Hine - say grace!' So, for this (to most of them very unwelcome food), I stood up and gave thanks to God. As I said, 'Amen', I received all over my person fifty-eight red herrings. At that very moment the door flew open, and the orderly officer entered. His, 'Any complain__?' was cut short by the sight before him. From that time, not only did persecution cease, but I enjoyed a strange new authority which no rank or promotion could have given me. Later, a young recruit sidled up to me in a church parade service, whispering, 'I know you're a Christian – I saw you bow your head in prayer.' He had been only three days in the Army but not yet knelt at his bedside. I extracted his solemn promise to do so that very night. We next met months later in France. His first words to me were, 'I can't thank you enough for making me give that promise – it changed my whole life.'" During his Army service, Stuart encouraged numerous Christians to take a stand and led good numbers of others to faith in Christ.

Conditions of service (and food!) have improved over the last 100 years, but opportunities for persecution and ridicule of 'sky pilots' and 'God-botherers' remain and can lead us to try to hide our faith. But we need to remember that "[the world] hated [Jesus] first" (verse 18) and as we trust Him, He will give us the courage to stand firm. Our colleagues will end up respecting us for our faith if we are consistent and faithful followers of Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, give me wisdom to know how to respond to banter and persecution with courage and good grace. May the light of Jesus shine out from me to others so they too will come to know Him and have the courage to make a stand for Him.
Amen

[43] From Stuart K. Hine, *Not You, but God: A Testimony to God's Faithfulness* 1st ed. p12 (S.K. Hine, 1973). ISBN 0-9504853-1-4.

Living and telling (being a good witness) **Romans 10:1-13**

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Romans 10:10

Although it is more important what a man is (living) than what a man says (telling), confession with the mouth (v 9) must find its place in the life of a Christian. This does not necessarily mean preaching or public speaking (though it may), but it does mean that we should take any God-given opportunities to say a word which will show those with whom we live and work what a difference God makes in our lives.

Many Christians in the military can tell you how much joy they get from just letting people know what they believe and seeing the results God can achieve from it. What we do and what we say must agree. May it never be said of any of us that we are hypocrites, ie, we do one thing, but say something else, "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). Note that Jesus is described as "powerful in word and deed" (Luke 24:19); we are encouraged to be the same so that He receives the glory, "in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17).

A practical question that often arises is how far we should push ourselves forward in witnessing for Christ. The points in the table on the next page might be helpful.

Live the life and tell the message. For further encouragement in this challenge see 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ("May our Lord Jesus… strengthen you in every good word and deed").

PRAYER

Lord, I want people to know that I am Yours. Please let my life reflect this. As I live for You please give me the words to say so that by living and telling I can help others to see You and to come into a relationship with You.

Amen

When witnessing for Christ, remember:

- Our efforts should be from love, not just a sense of duty. Love is the only universal language.

- Take opportunities rather than make them (they are often there, but we don't see them because we are not looking for them).

- God is more willing to use us than we are to be used.

- Be natural and avoid the use of overly 'Christian' language that non-Christians don't understand.

- Try to understand the other person's point of view even if it's wrong, it will help them engage if you listen to them.

- Quote the words of the Bible rather than the words of man, "My word… will not return to me empty but will… achieve the purpose for which I sent it". (Isaiah 55:11).

- Give facts, not views.

- Don't give the impression of feeling superior. You are no better than any sinner. It's just that you have been saved.

- Admit your failures, "In humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).

- When being side-tracked onto a secondary issue, seek to move back to the 'higher ground' of a Bible statement such as the specific words of Jesus. Promise (genuinely) to discuss the secondary issue later, explaining that until the primary matters have been dealt with, they cannot be properly resolved.

Example and influence **1 Timothy 4:11-16**

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.
1 Timothy 4:12

Three facts about the example we set:

- People we live and work with, surprisingly and usually secretly, expect us to maintain a very high standard. In fact, it may be said that they are disappointed if we lower it
- We are watched far more than we think
- Remember the encouragement and help that a bold and sane witness for Christ may be to others, particularly those on the fringe of faith or early on in their Christian life.

Read verses 12 and 15 again; we have great responsibility in the matter of our example. (See also Mark 9:42; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13.) For instance, people notice if you go to church every Sunday and this is a hugely important thing to do. If you can, try to support your padre and attend the church on or near camp[44].

You don't have to be the most outgoing preacher either, one of the best ways of witnessing at work is simply to do your job as well as possible, to be professional and diligent. It is said that "Christians are the only Bible some people ever get to read" and so Christians at work are either living 'Bibles' or living 'libels' of the name of Jesus Christ, "make it your ambition… that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Let your witness be natural rather than forced. Simply live out what you believe, and people will be bound to ask you questions. It's a good idea to have some answers ready!

PRAYER

Lord, help me to remember that things I do and say are being watched and heard by my non-Christian friends and colleagues. Please help me to be a good example of Your love to the world and to influence others for good.

Amen

[44]see Study 98.

Courage **Acts 5:17-32**

We must obey God rather than human beings! Acts 5:29

Courage is a key quality in a man or woman of God and many examples can be found in the Bible[45].

In Acts 4:13 we find that it was "the courage of Peter and John" that attracted the attention of their opponents. The "miraculous" signs that accompanied their teaching (Acts 5:12) aroused the jealousy of the high priest; also "crowds gathered bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits and all of them were healed" (Acts 5:13-16). As a result, the apostles were thrown into jail. Determined to obey God rather than men, their courage was such that they immediately started teaching again when released.

We can test our love for the Lord by our boldness and courage in serving Him. When we feel that we are going out on a limb for God, where we are stripped of all comfort and support, we are actually moving deeper into the protective embrace of our Lord. We are at our strongest and most effective when we are utterly dependent on Him alone, "My grace is sufficient for you for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

PRAYER

Lord, I know I am supposed to be courageous and sometimes it's easy, but there are times when my courage seems to leave me standing. I know I can't always be as brave as I am supposed to be. Please help me to do all I can to stand firm and even when I have come to the end of my own ability to stand, please help me to stand in Your strength and not my own.

Amen

[45]Deuteronomy 31:6; Joshua 1:6-7; 23:6; Ezekiel 2:6; 3:9; Acts 4:29; 1 Corinthians 16:13, Philippians 1:20 and 27-28; 2 Timothy 1:7.

Tact **Luke 12:11-21**

Let your conversation be always full of grace… Colossians 4:6

In yesterday's study, emphasis was laid on boldness; today on tact. In the presence of "many thousands" of people (Luke 12:1) one of the crowd takes the opportunity of trying to settle a family matter (v 13). If the Lord had dealt with this detail, He might have found Himself involved in a dispute in which there would have been jealousy and ill feeling. Tactfully He ignores the detail, but in verse 15 deals with the principle instead. Note the irony of His choice of words mirroring the challenge issued to Moses, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us?" (Exodus 2:14).

The fact that Jesus was tactful did not make Him less direct. We must avoid making tact an excuse for not witnessing or for being ambiguous. For instance, never be satisfied with talking about religion. Talk about Jesus Christ and the personal relationship you have with Him. It is our responsibility to share God's love with people whether they respond positively or not, "You must speak my words to them whether they listen or fail to listen" (Ezekiel 2:7). Spiritual fishermen are not made in a day; it may take some years to learn how to fish properly but that is no excuse for not practising. However, a lot of harm has been done by tactlessness. Consider whether you always follow Daniel's example to speak "with wisdom and tact" and show Godly common sense (Daniel 2:14). Note how submission to God and respect for others go together in 1 Peter 3:15, "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord… Give the reason for the hope you have… with gentleness and respect".

Claim the guidance of the Holy Spirit (verses 11 and 12 of today's reading) so that "you may know how to answer everyone" (Colossians 4:6).

PRAYER

Lord, I sometimes feel like a bull in a china shop. At other times I feel like I fade into the background. Help me to balance my desire that everyone hears the wonderful news that You died for them so they can live, with the need to be sensitive and caring. Please protect me from simply doing nothing and watching as people march away from You and directly into the gates of hell. Let me be like You Lord, honest, powerful and gentle.

Amen

SECTION F – SEPARATION

"I think that hell essentially is separation from God forever. And that is the worst hell that I can think of. But I think people have a hard time believing God is going to allow people to burn in literal fire forever. I think the fire that is mentioned in the Bible is a burning thirst for God that can never be quenched"

Billy Graham

"All human problems are ultimately symptoms and our separation from God is the cause."

Timothy Keller

"We are separated from God by our sin, so we cannot know Him or experience His Love."

Bill Bright

Rebellion **I Samuel 15:1-35**

To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
1 Samuel 15:22b

Consider verse 14. If Jesus were to appear to you in person, would He have any reason to say to you "I told you to go and totally destroy all that has been hindering you in your spiritual life. You say you have done this but 'what then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?'"

Note in verse 9 that Saul only spared "the best of the sheep and cattle," etc, and yet these very things are the problem. Many people have acted like Saul in refusing to completely destroy the things that are getting in the way of their relationship with God. It's better to get rid of anything at all that gets in the way of our relationship with God, rather than to try to make excuses for why we are still hanging on to them.

And that's what verse 21 is in today's reading. An excuse! And a pretty lame one at that, but what a lesson in verse 22! To obey God is far better than to sacrifice to Him. Complete obedience to God is essential. Incomplete obedience is disobedience and no rationalisation or excuse will alter the fact. In failing to obey God completely, Saul was placing his views and his wishes above God's – that is a fair definition of rebellion!

In the same way we are tempted to compromise. People say things like, "be a Christian if you want to, but relax a little, join in with the rest of us, be more 'normal'". It's good to be able to relate to those around us, but if we are just like them, letting go of what we believe so that we can join in, we end up world-pleasing rather than being set apart for God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

PRAYER

I want to follow you completely Lord, I want to stay close to you and do your will in my life. Please forgive me when I stumble and help me to keep short accounts. Help me, Lord, to come back to you and to be obedient to you as I learn to trust you more.

Amen

The "world" **John 15:18-25**

If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. John 15:19

James 4:4 contains a blunt statement of fact. "…don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God?" It has always been that way. As far back as the Exodus we find that followers of God are set apart. Today's key verse tells us we have been "chosen out of the world," ie, we are to be set apart from worldliness. Jesus prayed that the Father would not take his followers "out of the world" but… "protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). We are to remain in 'the world' (ie, to carry on with our job) but avoid the evil around us.

I suggest the following principles when considering worldly things to avoid:

- Anything that would displease the Lord Jesus Christ or hurt His cause.
- Anything that spoils our communion with God; any place where we feel Christ would not take us; any friendship that is unhelpful.
- Anything that gets in the way of spending some time each day in God's presence in prayer and studying the Bible.
- Anything doubtful. Certain things may not be wrong in themselves, but they are not the best; they may be 'permissible' but not 'beneficial'.

We need to be separated from unspiritual, 'worldly' things, but there is a balance. There is value in being able to demonstrate the great things of Christianity like love and fellowship, as well as mercy and grace, which you can't do on your own or when you are surrounded by people who are all exactly like you. So, stay in your place of work. Carry on living in the world, but make a difference, don't just be like everyone else. Be an influencer!

PRAYER

Father God I know that I am Yours. As a child of God, I am in Your family. Help me to be different enough from those around me for them to be able to see the family likeness. Please help me to remain 'in' the world but not 'of' it.

Amen

SECTION G - DIFFICULTIES AND EXCUSES

"Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried."

GK Chesterton

"I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."

C. S. Lewis

"It's better to offer no excuse than a bad one."

George Washington

"He who is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else."

Benjamin Franklin

"I attribute my success to this - I never gave or took an excuse."

Florence Nightingale

"I don't understand" **1 Corinthians 2:1-16**

The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to them and they cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 1 Corinthians 2:4

We cannot possibly understand the infinite ways of God with our finite minds, so it's a good job that belief does not depend on understanding because, "'My thoughts are not your thoughts'… declares the Lord… 'As the heavens are higher than the earth… so are my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8).. The fact is that evidence is unlikely to produce faith, but when you have faith the evidence makes much more sense. Few people really understand electricity; it's easier to believe in than it is to understand and it's pretty much the same with God. Just because someone tells me there is a current in the cable, it's hard to see or believe in it until I have experienced it, but when I flick the switch and the light goes on, suddenly it becomes easy to believe in.

Look at today's key verse. In our natural state of sin, we cannot possibly understand the things concerning the Spirit of God, for they seem foolish to human intellect; neither will we ever understand them with human brains, because they can only be understood by God revealing them to our hearts.

The emphasis in the Bible on the importance of the heart is great. 2 Corinthians 4 contrasts 'minds' in verse 4 (blinded by Satan) with 'hearts' in verse 6 (enlightened by God). Read the following and note how you might have expected the word 'head' instead of 'heart' in:

Genesis 6:5; 1 Kings 3:9; Psalm 66:18; Proverbs 22:17-18; Jeremiah 24:7; Matthew 15:19; Mark 2:8; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9; Ephesians 3:17.

PRAYER

Father God, I don't understand everything, but I thank you that You do. I thank you too that You know me better than I know myself. You know what I need. Please give me all I need in order to be able to follow You closely even when I don't understand what You are doing in my life.

Amen

An intellectual difficulty **John 4:1-30; 39-42**

Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life. John 4:14

- Verse 4 of today's reading tells us that Jesus "had to go through Samaria". No, he didn't! No-one EVER went through Samaria. The Jews really did not like the Samaritans and considered them a crazy mixed up group of religious heretics. Jews would go to great lengths to avoid travelling through Samaria. Jesus did not HAVE to go there…. except He did… He went because of that one woman!

- Verse 9. Notice how Jesus' love and sympathy created a friendly atmosphere.

- Verses 10, 13, 14. We are told it's a good idea to ensure the Gospel fits into the context of our hearers and this story is a great illustration of contextualisation. Jesus knew the woman's need and so He spoke about a "spring of water welling up" in order to make her feel the dryness of her soul. Contact made.

- Verses 18, 20. Jesus put his finger on the hindrance, *sin*. The woman tries to wriggle out of accepting her sinfulness by talking about religion. She tries to camouflage *sin* by raising an intellectual difficulty. While many intellectual difficulties are genuine, many are just a smoke screen and would not exist if they were not convenient.

- Verse 28. The woman left her water jar – she had something better. She fixed her "eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen(spiritual), since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18)[46].

PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you that we can see how Jesus cares for those of us who find it hard to understand and who even try to make clever excuses for not believing. Please help me to be like the woman and leave my 'water jar' behind as I continue on this journey of faith with You.

Amen

[46] See also Matthew 13:45-46

Intellect **1 Peter 3:8-17**

*But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect…*1 Peter 3:15

Today's key verse explains that Christians should be able to give a reason for why they put their trust in Christ. Our brains are God-given gifts and are very much to be used. But we must "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5) if we are to have the "mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 10:5).

Humans are very inventive; we have been able to overcome so many obstacles using our God-given intellect. Science and medicine are full of discoveries made by people using their brain and we should be truly thankful for the many ways in which people have been able to help improve life for so many others. James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father" and so knowledge, intellect and wisdom are all very good.

However, Christians do not have to be all-knowing to be able to share their faith. We do not have all the answers, "The secret things belong to the Lord... but the things revealed belong to us" (Deuteronomy 29:29) because God has not given them to us, but He has given enough for us to live by.

There is no greater example of an intellectual person than Paul, but even he found the light through heart conversion, not intellectual ability, "'Who are you…'? 'I am Jesus'" (Acts 9:5). Belief is spiritual consent, not intellectual assent, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know… the riches of his glorious inheritance". (Ephesians 1:18).

PRAYER

Lord, thank you that you have given me a mind to think with and thank you that You have used my mind to help me come to You in faith. Please help me to always be on the lookout for ways in which You will use my mind to help others come closer to You.

Amen

"It's all too simple" **1 Corinthians 1:17-31**

We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:23-24

The simplicity of the Christian faith is the difficulty for some people. But when we are talking to our friends, we must be careful not to rely on our own wisdom or intelligence (verses 17, 19, 20) to try to win the intellectual argument. Paul says how he focuses on the heart of the Gospel – the cross of Christ.

Look up Matthew 18:2-4. Simplicity is one of the characteristics of the little child. Being child-like does not mean that we are to be childish, "When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me" (1 Corinthians 13:11)[47]. Compare a little child's attitude of trust and reliance upon an earthly father with our attitude towards our heavenly Father. The God-inspired man wants to be child-like; the devil-inspired man wants to 'play at being god' and gain power.

The simplicity of a statement is not a measure of its profundity. 'God is love' (1 John 4:8-9) is a simple statement, but probably the most profound revelation ever entrusted to mankind.

'Something for nothing' would be a foolish motto for a business firm, but it is an accurate statement in starting the Christian life. Its very simplicity seems so foolish, "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness" (1 Corinthians 2:14). If your faith is delightfully simple, life becomes simply delightful, "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple" (Psalm 19:7).

PRAYER

When it really comes down to it Lord, I know I really am like a child compared to Your great wisdom and knowledge. Please let me accept that You really have made it simple for me to come to You because I would not be able to do it if You made it hard. Thank you for helping me.

Amen

[47] See 2 Kings 5:1-14 and note v 13.

"I am too weak a character" **2 Corinthians 12:1-11**

But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

There is more hope for the person who honestly feels weak, than for the person who thinks they are strong. The weaker we are, the more room there is for Jesus Christ to exercise His strength. The more we allow ourselves to be filled with Jesus' strength, the less room there is for our own weakness. In Study 18, we read the story of how David took care of Mephibosheth, who was the disabled son of David's best friend, Jonathan. Mephibosheth had no right to expect that the king would take care of him, but he arrived in all his weakness in the king's palace, where he found that he was invited to eat at the king's table like one of his sons. Just like Mephibosheth came to David, we need to come to God in our weakness so that He can demonstrate that, "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (verse 9). God wants our availability, not our ability. Our availability will include whatever natural talents and spiritual gifts He has invested in us, but these must be exercised under His control.

The last part of verse 10 shows that Paul was only really strong (in God) when he was weak (in himself). It is not a question of our strength, but of God's.[48] *If your knees are knocking with fear kneel on them so that they cannot knock.* It is not the direction or strength of the wind, but the set of the sail (our will) and the handling of the rudder (by God) which determines the course of our boat.

PRAYER

Lord, it's hard to accept that I am weak. All my life I have been told I have to be strong. I must win. But Lord I can't win at being a Christian. I must accept my limitations and hand over responsibility for victory to You. I know that with You I can do anything… but only WITH You. Help me please to lean on You and trust You and achieve all YOU have set for me to achieve. In Your time and in Your way and with Your power, not mine.

Amen

[48]See also: Ephesians 6:10; Philippians 4:13; 2 Timothy 1:12.

"There is too much to give up" **Philippians 3:7-21**

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. Philippians 3:8

The devil will always emphasise what we may be called to give up, but who can imagine the owner of a rope of imitation pearls not wanting to exchange them for real pearls? The truth is that, if you are truly following Christ in obedience and faith, the life you are leading now means that nothing will attract you away from Him as much as it did before.

Paul gives his opinion in verses 7 and 8. The average person wants a 'good time', good friends and peace of mind. Christianity provides these; the imitation products of the world are nothing in comparison. The key to being a Christian is not the negative 'give up', but the positive 'fill up'; Ephesians 5:18 tells us to "be filled with the Spirit".

Note the extraordinary principle of giving in Luke 6:38, "give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." God is the most generous giver of all, and "richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17)[49]. We cannot out-give Him!

PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, You gave up heaven for me. You gave up Your throne and became a homeless baby. In the end You gave up Your life. Sometimes I wonder at my mind and the way I think. How can I think of there being 'so much to give up'? I gain eternal life and a relationship with the King of Kings. Thank you that there is so much more to get than there is to give. When I am considering all I have to leave behind to follow You please give me an eternal perspective… let me see things with Your eyes and not just mine.

Amen

[49]See also Psalm 84:11; Mark 8:36-37; Luke 18:29-30.

"My temptations indicate my wickedness" **Matthew 4:1-11**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. Hebrews 4:15

Our key verse for today shows that temptation is NOT sin. You can't prevent birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them making their nests in your hair. Jesus has experienced all our temptations. He can sympathise because He understands and comes to our aid since He has overcome.

The first of Jesus' temptations took place in the wilderness, typical of depression and isolation. Here the devil tried to make Him act in His own divine power, apart from His Father. But Jesus refused to use divine powers and insisted on meeting the temptation as a man; in fact, with only that strength available for the ordinary person.

The second was to gain acknowledgement and success by spectacular advertisement, ie, to lower His standard in order to widen His reach. Had the Lord thrown Himself down and remained unhurt, thousands might have believed in Him (though some who witnessed His miracles were among those who plotted His death). Common sense, but not God's plan.

The third temptation was to gain the material at the expense of the spiritual.

Remember, it is not the temptation that is sinful, it is how we respond to the temptation that can be outside of what God would have us do, say or think. Learn to respond to temptation with scripture, like Jesus did.

PRAYER

Even though it's hard, Lord, I thank you for temptation. Thank you that You faced the same temptations as me and even more and yet You were able to overcome them. Help me when I am tempted, to turn to You for help. Please let me trust You more and more each day and learn to walk away from those things that tempt me as I become more like You and less like I used to be.

Amen

"My temptations are too great to overcome" **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.
1 Corinthians 10:13

Anyone who feels their temptations are too great to overcome can cling to today's key verse. "A way out" should be translated, "a way up out of". Couple this verse with "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). It is also a help to remember that we are fighting a defeated enemy, "[Jesus] shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15). Therefore, do not pray "I hope I shall overcome my temptation. Please help me to." Psychologically this is unsound. Instead "I thank You that I can overcome my temptation, because I claim Your strength." Focus on Christ's ability and His provision of His power not on the temptation.

A simple recognition of the truth of 1 John 4:4, "the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" ensures victory, even when there is only time for a one-word prayer – "Jesus". We meet temptation by faith in God. The fight we must put up is to claim that faith which leads to obedience.

When weighed down by the burden of temptation, remember to, "cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you" (Psalm 55:22). Whatever is given to you to carry you can, in turn, give it to God and He will carry it, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). As you overcome the temptation with God's help, you will find blessing. Look on difficulties as a vote of confidence from God. You cannot hit the ball unless it's thrown at you!

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for Your Word. Psalm 55:22 reminds me to cast my cares onto You. I can't deal with them on my own Lord, but You say You will never let the righteous be shaken. I am not sure how righteous I am, but Lord I know that You can make me righteous and I cling to that. Thank you.

Amen

"I have failed so often" **Romans 7:14-25**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1-2

Only one thing is worse than being knocked down and that is not getting up again. A boy was once asked how he learned to skate. He said, "I got up every time I fell down". "Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes. (Proverbs 24:16).

In today's passage we read of a man who was conscious of his own failures in trying to serve a living God. In effect he cried, "Who will rescue me from my 'dual personality'?" The word "I" occurs 26 times indicating introspection. Avoid unhealthy introspection and instead pray, "Search me, God, and know my heart" (Psalm 139:23); be willing to learn from your faults. You may have given up hope, but God hasn't. Only worms can't stumble.

Members of the Armed Forces know the value of high morale and conversely the terrible effects of low morale. For this reason, the devil is happy to have us discouraged. Discouragement after failure is natural and common. Peter, David, Moses and others in the Bible suffered in this way, but they did not let their discouragement overcome them.

If you are suffering from a sense of failure, read 1 John 1:7-9, "the blood of Jesus… purifies us from all sin... If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness". Thank God that He is faithful to forgive, to cleanse and to forget. Now read Romans 8:1-17, which is the antidote to the passage in Romans 7 with which we began.

PRAYER

Father, I know the words I read today are as true for me as they were for Paul who wrote them. I know what is good, and what I should do… I even want to be good, but it seems I can never actually do the good I want to do… Often it's the sin I don't want to do that I end up doing. But thank you God that You say there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Thank you so much.

Amen

"Many Christians are insincere" **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5

The fact that those who have been trusted with sharing the Gospel have not always proved faithful (see verse 2) is indisputable, but our key verse today teaches us that we must not be 'busybodies' regarding the behaviour of others[50].

Again, the fact that there are insincere Christians is all the more reason why you should become a sincere one! Just because one serviceman sets a bad example does not mean that all servicemen are bad. Because some professing Christians have failed their Master, it does not prove that Christianity does not work. There would be no counterfeit coins if there were not real ones. The fact that there are counterfeit Christians therefore proves there are real ones and constitutes a call to you to be a real one.

Jesus has been let down by many of His followers; He is also let down by those who refuse to yield themselves to Him. Pay careful attention to the warning in Genesis 6:3, "the LORD said, 'My Spirit will not contend with humans for ever, for they are mortal'", and do not procrastinate. We cannot lightly let spiritual things drift[51].

PRAYER

Lord I know that it's true that "if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Sometimes it's hard to admit, but it is true. But then so is "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Lord, please help me to listen to Your Holy Spirit as He pinpoints any sin in my life and confess it. Thank you that I can be forgiven; help me to walk in Your ways and do what You ask of me.

Amen

[50]See also Matthew 7:5; Luke 6:37; Romans 2:1 and 14:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:11
[51]Isaiah 55:6; Luke 12:20

"Christians are narrow-minded" Psalm 1; Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 7:13-14

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Matthew 7:14

People sometimes look at Christians and say that they are narrow-minded. It can feel quite painful when they do; it's like they are picking fault with us for simply not thinking the same way they do about something. In an age of diversity and inclusion, it can seem that unless we all agree on a thing it can't possibly be true - but that can't possibly be right.

Think of it like this. If you go to a doctor feeling unwell and they prescribe a certain course of medicine, it would not be unreasonable to listen to their advice and take the medicine, even if we knew that witch doctors or psychic healers might tell us to do something different. The question is who has credentials we can trust? What if you are told it's a good idea to walk across a motorway? Would you do it? The Highway Code says it's a stupid idea and you know what… it may be narrow minded of me, but I agree.

Psalm 1 puts it clearly. Wicked things are wicked. It may seem narrow minded to say such a thing and often today, people will say "it's not wrong, it's just different". There are many things that can be true for, but sin is sin and we must not "stand in the way of sinners" (Psalm 1:1)

There is a difference between having a narrow mind and walking the narrow way. As Jesus said, the latter is essential, "small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). We are to live our lives within the boundaries of God's will. Fear of being thought narrow-minded and the worldly desire to be considered a broad-minded person of the world are often in conflict with each other.

PRAYER

Father God, I want to be able to stay close to You and so I know there are things I must not do, but I also want to reach out to friends and family and that means there are other things I need to be free to do. Please help me to understand the difference between walking a narrow path and being narrow minded.

Amen

"Christians are eccentric" **1 Samuel 8**

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

Our reading today is about a people who did not want to be thought eccentric or different from other nations. It is true (verse 3) that bad government was the initial cause of the desire of the Israelites to have a king to reign over them, but evidently they thought this was certain to be the solution, for then they would be "like all the other nations" (verse 5). In spite of warnings that their 'new order' would not work (verses 10-18) the people persisted in their demand (verses 19-20) and God eventually granted their request (verse 21). However, God's permission may not be God's will.

To be thought eccentric by those we work with is really nothing to worry about, but common sense rightly tells us to avoid doing things that will give unnecessary cause for criticism in this respect. Keep level-headed and get on with your job and let your work and your play be improved because of your faith. It is strange that only Christian enthusiasm is put down to mental abnormality! Others' enthusiasm and obsession with professional advancement or sport is regarded in a different light. The man who is really 'ex-centric' is the man whose life is not centred in Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

I want to stand out Lord, I want to make a difference and let people see that I am a follower of Christ but Lord, please help me to do it sensibly. Help me to do it wisely and to do it in a way that will win people to You, not put them off. Please help me to want what You want more than anything else in my life.

Amen

"I will be laughed at" **Joshua 6:1-25**

Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become 'fools' so that you may become wise.
1 Corinthians 3:18

Picture the scene at Jericho. The inhabitants of that city must have got considerable amusement out of the 'absurd Israelites' marching round the walls. No doubt they jeered at them and perhaps they also threw rubbish, etc., at them. But the children of Israel obeyed God. The result is seen in verse 20 and is confirmed by archaeology. There is great spiritual teaching in this story. If your life is Christ-like in all its ways, men may laugh at you, but they will respect you and this brings glory to God.

Does it matter if you are laughed at? Surely you are big enough to take it. See what the Lord was subjected to when "they laughed at him" in Luke 8:53. Read what He went through for your sake in Matthew 27:28-44. Christians who are ridiculed because of their faith are in good company. It is a great honour to be "fools for Christ" (1 Corinthians 4:10), but remember it is possible by our actions (if not in accordance with God's will) to be fools for the devil's sake.

A practical hint: When laughed at, enter into the joke; show a sense of humour and see the funny side of yourself. There is not much room in the military for a person who takes him or herself too seriously. Better to be laughed at for something powerful and real like your relationship with Christ than a hundred other things. Laugh with them and help them to see you are big enough to take it… maybe they will realise it's more real than they thought.[52]

PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for the way the Israelites besieged Jericho. What a ridiculous way to fight a battle, yet their obedience was all You needed. Please help me to be obedient too, even when people laugh at me. Let me trust You, obey You and see what You do as a result.

Amen

[52]See also Nehemiah 4:1; Hebrews 11:30, 36-38.

False modesty **Exodus 3:1-14; Judges 6:11-16; Jeremiah 1:4-8**

Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,' declares the LORD.
Jeremiah 1:8

People often make excuses for not doing any particular work for God. These are of no more value now than they were in the days of Moses, Gideon or Jeremiah. Their excuses were probably partly evasion and partly false modesty. The reply that came from God was in each case more or less the same: "don't dwell on your insignificance, but think of My power, for I will be with you." Even Gideon who was "the least of my family" (Judges 6:15), was able to prove that "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

When anyone comes as close to God as Moses did ("The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus 33:11)) then there will be real modesty. We can be too 'great' for God to use, but we can never be too weak or insignificant.

God can do nothing great for a life that shrinks from difficulties. The question for us is, 'have we let the Spirit urge us into tasks for which we ourselves have not the capacity, except as we rely on Divine wisdom and power? Have we crept away from the challenge of the Spirit on account of the modest estimate of our own ability?' If so, we must suffer the penalty of diminished personal development. No amount of devotional life can make up for a retreat from the difficult tasks in life, for "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27). Don't apologise for your faith. Launch out boldly; you cannot steer a stationary bicycle!

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, for using the weak things and insignificant people. Thank you that with You even the 'least of the family' can become a powerful leader. Let me remember that You are the prime mover in our relationship. No matter how powerful or weak I feel, I can make a difference only by obeying You and doing what You want me to.

Amen

The deity of Jesus Christ **Matthew 1:18-25**

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel (which means 'God with us'). Matthew 1:23

Jesus Christ was either God or else He was the greatest impostor who ever lived! The statement that He was merely a very good man and a wonderful teacher simply does not bear scrutiny.

In John's Gospel Jesus said, "I am..." "the Bread of life" (6:35) "The Light of the world" (8:12), "from above" (8:23), "the One I claim to be (8: 24), "the gate for the sheep (10:7), "the good Shepherd" (10:11,14), "the Way, and the Truth and the Life" (14:6). In each case the Greek is 'Ego Eimi', 'I myself am'. If His statements were incorrect, He was a liar, and therefore could not have been a 'very good' man. If His statements were true, then He must have been divine. We can say in all reverence that the Lord Jesus Christ claimed for Himself more than any man who ever lived and yet His 'egotism' is attractive and not repelling. Could this be possible if He was not God?

The Gospel or good news that Jesus Christ brought to a sinful world has indeed been "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). His message has transformed the most 'hopeless cases'; has delivered the worst of people from sin; has 'converted' drunkards, prostitutes, and – in some ways the hardest of all – people who are self-righteous and 'good' from the world's point of view.

The resurrection of the Lord is also a proof of His Deity (see Study 19). It is remarkable that our calendar dates from the birth of our Lord.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you that You never left us the choice of simply thinking of You as a 'good man'. Thank you that You were always much, much more than that. Thank you that I don't follow a guru, a good teacher or simply a really good man. Thank you that are the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords and creator of all that is seen and unseen and yet You still love me… even me.

Amen

The Trinity **1 John 4 (especially 2, 9, 12-16)**

*This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God…*1 John 4:2

Although we cannot understand the mystery of the Trinity, we can believe in it because there are so many references and examples. Several times in the Gospels, the three Persons are manifested simultaneously, eg, Luke 10:21, "Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, 'I praise you, Father…'". In the epistles their triune (or 'three-in-one') work is explained with respect to salvation, "Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God" (Hebrews 9:14) and to the corporate life of Christians (1 Corinthians 12:4-6 – where the Spirit (verse 4), Son/Lord (verse 5) and Father/God (verse 6) are separately mentioned as active in the overall work of the church). The three Persons of the Godhead satisfy three distinct needs in human beings who are also spirit, soul and body, "May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

- **God the Father is the Majesty we worship.** Human need cries out for a God Who is Almighty, and immeasurably bigger than us. He makes faith reasonable.

- **Jesus Christ His Son is the Friend.** He walks by our side, holds our hand and sets the example. A friend is one who knows all about us and loves us just the same. He makes God tangible and personal.

- **God the Holy Spirit is the Power who works in us.** He enables us to become like Christ and live true Christian lives. The word sometimes used of the Holy Spirit, 'Paraclete' (translated 'Comforter', 'Counsellor' or 'Advocate', "the Father… will give you another advocate" (John 14:16)), literally means 'One called alongside to help'. He makes Christianity practical. Do away with one person of the deity and we are left with a god who cannot satisfy.

PRAYER

I don't suppose I will ever really understand the mystery of the Trinity, Lord. I do know that You are God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit and I thank you that all of You has all of me.

Amen

The Bible and science **Ephesians 4:14-18**

He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. Isaiah 40:22

Many people think that the Bible cannot be trusted, because science has shown it to be inaccurate. In fact, many scientists are also Christians, believing that the Bible and science stand side by side. Here are a few arguments:

- The conclusions of science are always open to revision. The conclusions that really conflict with Bible statements are few. These conclusions, when examined, are found to depend on many assumptions that, however seemingly reasonable, may at any time be and often are rendered untenable by further discoveries. Science has not repudiated the key message and teaching of the Bible.
- There are passages in the Bible that indicate a knowledge of facts far beyond that of the days when they were written (eg, the spherical earth (today's key verse); day in one part of the world coincides with night in another, "on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding corn together; one will be taken and the other left' (Luke 17:34,35); and in Job 28:25, "the force of the wind".)
- The historic statements of the Bible are also constantly being proved true, even though long denied in the name of science. Recent archaeological discoveries have produced extra-biblical evidence for the accuracy of the reference to many of the events, customs and persons named in the Bible and have demonstrated the accuracy of the transmission of the text.

Remember that the key message of the Bible is 'why', and not 'how', so do not expect it to give all the answers, only those you need to put your faith in God.

PRAYER

Father please help me to read the Bible and understand it. Help me to trust what I learn as I see what it has to say about all things. Please protect me from godless chatter and instead help me to guard what You have entrusted to me to care for.
Amen

SECTION H – SERVICE

No one can really serve Jesus Christ, unless they are right with God. Before commencing the Section on Service, it may therefore be helpful to quote from a letter written by a soldier who, realising his need, yielded himself to the Lord. In describing how he took this step he writes that the following prayer "helped enormously to push me over the line."

"Believing that the Lord Jesus Christ died for me,
I now accept Him as my Saviour.
I ask Him to blot out all my sins,
I believe that He has done so, and I thank Him;
I mean to trust Him absolutely now and in the future."

"One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbour, which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us."

John Wesley

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Mark 10:45

The necessity for service **Matthew 10:1-16**

Freely you have received; freely give. Matthew 10:8

Note our key verse today. Communism says, "I must have some of yours." Christianity says, "you must have some of mine." It is vitally important for a Christian to be a "doer of the Word, and not a hearer only" (James 1:22 AV). "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

We are God's witnesses (Isaiah 43:10; Acts 1:8) and His co-workers (2 Corinthians 6:1). As such we must be "filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18); the tense used implies a continual process. If there is this continual in-flowing, there must be a corresponding out-flowing.

An African lady once said, "I can't hold much, but I can overflow lots." A pond with no outlet or inlet becomes stagnant and brackish; a lake always has an outlet and inlet and is fresh and useful (except the Dead Sea, which is aptly named!). God grant that we may be 'lakes' and not 'ponds'! If the former, we shall make our corner of the world a better place; if the latter, we shall not only hinder others, but we shall also eventually dry up altogether.

Note the sequence of Romans 6:22: free from sin; slaves to God; leading to holiness; the result, eternal life. There is room in God's service for great diversity of gift and method, "in Christ we, though many, form one body… different gifts, prophesying… serving… teaching… encouraging… leading… showing mercy…" (Romans 12:5-8), all springing from a lively faith.

Remember "by their fruit you will recognise them" (Matthew 7:20) but note the warning in Matthew 24:24, "false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive"; results are not necessarily reliable indications. One of the most potent aspects of Christian service is to do our professional work "as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23-24).

PRAYER

Lord let me be fruitful, let me serve You, please let me always look for ways to be Your obedient servant.

Amen

The motive for service **John 21:15-17**

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. Galatians 5:13-14

The story is told of an Englishman who attended the sale of slaves in a slave-market, where he took pity on one particular slave and bought him. When the transaction was completed, he said to the slave, "I have bought you, you can go free". When the truth of this dawned on the slave, he fell down on his knees in gratitude and replied, "I will serve you forever". This story shows exactly the place that service takes in the life of a true Christian. We do not serve God in order to obtain a reward, but in sheer love and gratitude for what He has done for us. 'Thanksliving' is the best form of thanksgiving.

A Christian's life must be one of service; this alone brings real joy, as Jesus said, "my **joy** [will] be in you and… your **joy** [will] be complete" (John 15:11). Jesus also promised that He will set us free from our past lives and we will discover true freedom in His service, "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Paul was physically a prisoner (Philemon verse 1) but was spiritually free to serve God. The real slave is the worldly person, chained to this world with its limitations, its passions and its doom.

Today's study shows love as a true motive of service. 2 Corinthians 5:14 says "Christ's love compels us"; it should be His love in us responding to God the Father. In Mark 12:41-44, "a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins… she, out of her poverty, put in everything". Note the quality of our motive decides the quantity of the gift. The more we love God, the more we will give of our money, our time and our talents in His service.

PRAYER

Lord it's a real honour to serve You. I know that I can't make You love me more by serving You more, but because You love me so much, I find I want to serve You. Help me Lord to always experience Your love in this way and seek to find ways to serve You every day.

Amen

Our "works" **Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus 3:1-7**

For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Many people's belief can be summed up as follows, "if I do my best, lead a good life, say my prayers, read my Bible and go to church, I will get to heaven". In fact, they believe a person's future depends on their own efforts. Today's key verses and the following verses show this to be completely wrong: "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5); "he has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9); "if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:6); "a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ… because by the works of the law no one will be justified" (Galatians 2:16).

James 2:14 (see also verse 17) is no contradiction of this. The verse is translated in the Good News Bible as follows, "My brothers, what good is it for someone to say he has faith if his actions do not prove it? Can that faith save him?" James 2:17 says, "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead". Our actions must result from our faith – they are not the way of salvation, but the evidence of it. A place in Heaven can't be earned. We need to receive it as a gift. God never sells. He gives.[53]

PRAYER

Father God, I am so thankful that I don't have to earn my way into heaven. I know I could never be that good. Thank you for sending Jesus to die to take away my sin. Please let me learn more about how to rely on Him and what He has done rather than on me and what I can do.

Amen

[53]See 2 Corinthians 9:8; Romans 8:8; 10:3-4.

Half-heartedness **Revelation 3:14-22**

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they can eat with me.
Revelation 3:20

Half-heartedness never succeeds in business, in the military, or in any other walk of life. Look at verse 16 of today's reading. It is particularly necessary that we be wholehearted in living out the Christian life. 1 Corinthians 10:31, "whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" is a good motto. The fact that we are professed followers of Jesus Christ should be an incentive to encourage or get involved in every worthwhile and profitable activity. By so doing we will raise morale and may well increase our positive influence, as we become part of the solution and not simply part of the problem. As part of this, support the Chaplains and all who work for the Lord Jesus Christ in the Armed Forces.

The serviceman or woman who is wholehearted in their allegiance to God has limitless possibilities. Christians are to be "salt" and "light" (Matthew 5:13-16). Salt is no use in a packet. It must be shaken out. To light a street, lamps must be dispersed. Each Christian is a particle of salt and a single light. The less wholesome the environment and the darker the atmosphere, the more the need for salt and light. Note 'let' not 'make' in Matthew 5:16, "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven".

The Christian life is full of surprises; circumstances are divinely controlled. Indeed, "to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21) and to be without Christ is only to exist. To get the best out of life, you must put the best into life.[54]

PRAYER

Father God, I confess that sometimes I do feel a bit half-hearted about my relationship with You. Please forgive me when I am tempted to give up and settle for second best. Help me to push forward and always remember to run to You. I don't want to be lukewarm; I want to be on fire for You.

Amen

[54]For further study see Philippians 1:21; Colossians 3:23-24

SECTION I - THE RESULT OF CHRISTIANITY

“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”

G.K. Chesterton, ‘What's Wrong with the World’

“Love is not patronising and charity isn't about pity, it is about love. Charity and love are the same -- with charity you give love, so don't just give money but reach out your hand instead.”

Mother Teresa

“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.”

John Wesley

“The Christian shoemaker does his duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship.”

Martin Luther

Humility **Matthew 18:1-6; Luke 14:8-14**

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. Luke 14:11

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). Meekness is not weakness. It is real humility. All truly great men are humble men. Lack of humility has kept many people from God. It takes many forms, pride of position, of wealth, of success, of intellect, of being 'full of common sense.' When we come to the end of ourselves, then we are on the threshold of Christianity. Meekness leads to mightiness. In view of Paul's words in Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves", avoid the 'holier than thou' attitude.

In Galatians 6:14 Paul, aware of his tendency to pride, says, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ…", and Ps 25:9 tells us that "[God] guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way".

There is, of course, a right kind of pride, but this pride should be tempered with humility. If we remember the words of Jesus, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5), reliance on ourselves and the wrong kind of pride will disappear.

PRAYER

Father God, I am proud of many things. I have achieved things; I have made things and I am doing OK. What should I do with this pride Lord? Help me to give it to You. help me to see how nothing I have ever achieved would even have been possible without Your help, even if I do think I have done it on my own.

Amen

Trustworthiness **Genesis 39:1-6; 20-23; 41:37-46**

Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.
1 Corinthians 4:2

Untrustworthiness and incompetence will bring discredit to anyone's faith let alone those in the military. It is helpful to understand that Joseph's trustworthiness and competence in Egypt was learnt in the furnace of suffering in Canaan. He aspired to rule over his family (Genesis 37:5-11). He was arrogant and proud and so his brothers hated him. He ended up narrowly missing death and being sold into slavery (Genesis 37: 17b-28).

Trustworthiness is an outcome of the Spirit-controlled life. Joseph's life is an example of how faith in God alone produces trustworthiness when given a task. His secret can be found in verses 2, 5, 21, and 23 of today's reading, "The Lord was with Joseph". So, his master (verse 4) "put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned." Later on we find Joseph ruling in Egypt. Here he proved himself a far-seeing statesman and a diplomat. We see that Joseph was faithful in everything he was asked to do. Therefore, God blessed his work and it prospered.

Whilst endeavouring to be the very best we can, we need to remember that some people have greater ability than others; we can't all be the Commander in Chief, but we can be trustworthy and like Joseph, faithful in everything we do.

PRAYER
Father thank you that, like Joseph, I can know You are always with me. Joseph prospered, even as a slave and a prisoner. No matter what his circumstances he trusted You and was trustworthy. Please help me to be trustworthy in everything I do too.

Amen

The fruit of the Spirit **Galatians 5:13-26**

So, I say, live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. Galatians 5:16

It is important for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When we are so filled, the result will be apparent in our lives. Today we start a 10-part mini-series on the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is:

Inward	experience -	Love, Joy, Peace
Outward	experience -	Patience, Kindness, Gentleness
Upward	experience -	Faithfulness, Goodness, Self-Control

Ask yourself if this fruit is apparent in your own life. Religious profession does not of itself necessarily produce real fruit. Think over verses 24 and 25. Also notice "the acts of the sinful nature" (19) as contrasted with "the fruit of the Spirit" (22). Just as sins are the fruit of the old nature, so the fruit of the Spirit is the visible sign of the new nature, "But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you" (Romans 8:9). 2 Peter 1:5-8 shows how we can cooperate with Him to bring these Christ-like qualities into our lives, "make every effort to add to your faith goodness… knowledge… self-control… perseverance… godliness… mutual affection… love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." We can take no credit if we exhibit some of the fruit while failing to exhibit others.

Fruit is never intended for the tree that produces it. Similarly, the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in us is intended to bless other people. However, note that the fruit of the Holy Spirit is a sovereign work of God and it takes a lifetime for it to grow to fruition and ripen fully.

PRAYER

Father, I want to be fruitful. I am not sure I really feel fruitful at the moment, but that's what I want. Please produce within me the fruit of the Holy Spirit so that others can see the change in my life and want what I have got. Help me to point people to You.

Amen

Love **1 Corinthians 13:1-13; John 14:15**

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

The word 'love' has a deeper and more definitely Christian implication than the way in which it is often used. It is the Greek word *'agape'* rather than *'phileo'* (brotherly love or friendship) or *'eros'* (sexual love) and it is consistently used in the New Testament to describe the love of God (eg, 1 John 4:16 – "God is agape").

The Good News Bible's translation of verses 4 to 8 is, "Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal."

Christianity is the only religion based on love. Read again 1 John 4:7-21, this passage is well worth studying. We read in 1 John 4:11, "since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Remember that *love* (self-sacrifice) can never be spelled *lust* (selfishness, 2 Corinthians 5:14).

It is so good to be loved with this agape love of God:

It can't be earned
It's not about the things you do
It is not about the way you are
It is love 'in spite of'. Love in spite of the fact that we don't live the right way…. Love just because God has chosen to love you.

PRAYER

Thank you, Father God, for loving me. Just as I am, even though I'm not a good person, even though I don't deserve Your love, You chose to love me. Thank you for Your love, thank you for showing me how much You love me. Please help me to receive Your love today and every day.

Amen

Joy **1 Peter 1:1-9**

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. 1 Peter 1:8

Think about our key verse for today. It is impossible to explain the amazing joy of being a Christian; it must be experienced to be understood. People that are not Christians can't really know what true joy is![55] True joy does not depend on circumstance… it's something much deeper.

Happiness depends on what happens; joy is independent of what happens, because it comes from a relationship with God through Christ and not from circumstances which are constantly changing. We should "rejoice in the Lord," (Philippians 4:4) even when we cannot rejoice in our circumstances. Christian joy is permanent; earthly happiness is temporary. The secret of joy is not simply to do what we like, which is fluid and temporary, but to find it in something deeper, more solid and dependable, in our relationship with God through Jesus.

When we know the true joy that faith in Christ brings, others will be able to see it in our faces. "Those who look to Him are radiant" (Psalm 34:5). We don't feel joyful all the time of course. It is appropriate to weep with those who weep and "mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15), but if you never feel joy it may be worth asking if your relationship with God, the 'joy giver', is healthy. Just as the flag flying above Buckingham Palace signifies that the Queen is at home so joy, part of the fruit of the Spirit, should signify the presence of God in our lives.

PRAYER

Father God, thank you for the joy that You give me. Thank you that it does not depend on external circumstances or events. Thank you that it runs deeply into my heart and soul. Please help me to experience this joy more fully and deepen my relationship with You daily.

Amen

[55]See Nehemiah 8:10; Habakkuk 3:17-18; John 15:11; 2 Corinthians 6:10; James 1:2;

Peace **John 20:19-31**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27

In today's passage, the phrase 'peace be with you' occurs three times – verses 19, 21, and 26. We read in Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard (literally 'garrison') your heart (seat of the emotions) and your mind (seat of the intellect and will)". Though people search for peace through distraction or withdrawal from reality, true peace of mind can only be found in Jesus Christ, "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

Peace in Hebrew means wholeness. The peace that Jesus gives (John 14:27) is independent of circumstances; these words were spoken just hours before Gethsemane and Calvary. The Living Bible translates Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of heart which comes from Christ be always present in your hearts and lives." The root of our peace within ourselves is our "peace with God" (Romans 5:1). Peace of mind comes only to those "controlled by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 8:6); it is, in itself, a definition of the kingdom of God.

The characteristics of the "Kingdom of God" are "righteousness, peace and joy" (Romans 14:17). Righteousness and peace always go together in the Bible. Many long for peace but are unwilling to accept God's righteousness, "The fruit of that righteousness will be peace; its effect will be quietness and confidence for ever" (Isaiah 32:17). Real trust in God produces real peace, "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you (Isaiah 26:3).

PRAYER

Lord, my heart and my head can be so full of business at times. Sometimes I have to be busy. Especially in those times, let me know Your peace, peace that passes understanding and let me know You are with me.

Amen

Patience **2 Corinthians. 6:1-18**

As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way… in purity, understanding, patience and kindness… 2 Corinthians 6:4,6

Patience should be a sign of our Christian faith. In our key verse, note 'in purity, understanding, patience and kindness.' The Greek word here is *makrothumia* which literally means long-temperedness.

"Patience is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, is associated with mercy and is used of God." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words.) Nehemiah 9:16-17 says, "you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love".

Do some people irritate us? Do we 'suffer fools gladly'? Remember that the Lord loved the annoying and irritating ones so much that He died for them, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8) and "he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Don't mistake compromise for patience or accept a low standard of public opinion about moral issues. Don't pride yourself on not being easily shocked. Sin resulted in the death of Jesus on Calvary; may it always shock us.

PRAYER

Father, I am sure I can test Your patience at times and yet You remain a loving Father to me. Please help me to be more like You and demonstrate Your love to others as I become more patient. I know I can't do this myself, but I trust You and look forward to seeing how You make me more like You.

Amen

Kindness **Luke 10:25-37**

But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Luke 6:35

In today's key verse, note that kindness (Greek *chrestos* – good, gracious, kind), a God-like quality founded upon love, "Love is patient… kind… does not boast… is not proud…" (1 Corinthians 13:4). It is the motivating drive for our salvation "the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:7). Consequently, kindness should mark our dealings with those around us, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32); "as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:12-14)

The well-known parable in today's reading, that of the Good Samaritan, is all about kindness. This quality marked out the Samaritan as different from the priest and the Levite; he was the only one who stopped to help the man in trouble and was commended for this by Jesus. Traditionally, the Samaritans and the Jews would have nothing to do with each other, but in this parable, it was only the Samaritan who showed any humanity or kindness. The Good Samaritan is remembered for his kindness towards one who was an enemy. When you look at yourself how do you measure up to this level of kindness?

PRAYER

Loving Father, thank you that You are kind in the way You deal with me. Thank you that You take hold of my hand and keep me. Please help me to be kind to those around me and in that way lead them to You.

Amen

Goodness **Mark 10:17-23**

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. 'Good teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 'Why do you call me good?' Jesus answered. 'No one is good – except God alone.'
Mark 10:17-18

Don't confuse 'goodness' with 'goody goody-ness.' We should all "imitate what is good" (3 John 11), but never give the impression 'see how good I am!' The Greek word *agathos* describes that which is good in character and beneficial, or beneficent in impact and effect. It is another God-like quality; in fact, in our reading today, Jesus says that it is only God who is good. The rich young ruler was right to identify Jesus as good, as He demonstrated His Father's goodness to those around. As Christians, we are God's sons and daughters and should increasingly demonstrate His qualities to others. 'Like father, like son' has a special significance for the Christian, "the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, *'Abba,* Father.'" (Romans 8:15).

Goodness demands purity – not a mere conventional morality, but a quality of the heart. Goodness is far removed from things which pollute the heart of man – cringing, meanness, cowardice, indolence, lying, treachery, back-biting, seduction, lust and the like. Goodness produces love of clean, vigorous, healthy life and hatred towards all that is destructive of health, and all that is corrupt and filthy.

Test yourself by your attitude towards those you dislike or those who have wronged you.[56]

PRAYER

Lord, it is hard always to want to do the right thing. It's a lot easier to be good to people I like. Let me always be good and do good to everyone, relying on Your strength to help me. In this way, let me show Your love to everyone I meet.

Amen

[56]For further study, see Romans 12:2, 9, 21; Galatians 6:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

Faithfulness **John 15:1-17**

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23

Faith and faithfulness are the same Greek word, *pistis.* Faith (faithfulness) is unique in being both a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) and a gift of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:9). The fruit of the Spirit is more faithfulness than faith - i.e. it is a quality of character that flows outward from inner faith. It parallels the character of God, who is faithful (ie, trustworthy, reliable, constant, unswerving, loyal), and our reading today demonstrates the faithfulness of God to His word. What is true of God is true of His word (the Bible); you can literally bet your life on it. It follows that by the inner working of the Holy Spirit our weak and unreliable character will be transformed as we live day by day by faith, so that we too become faithful - the outward indicator of one who is faith-full.

The verse, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22) could also be translated, "Rest in the faithfulness of God". This makes all the difference, for instead of the struggling determination to exercise our faith, we can simply lie back in the arms of Jesus, knowing that God will always be faithful to His promises. Also note the restful attitude underlying the word 'remain', which is repeated 11 times in the first 10 verses of John 15. The branch does not struggle to remain attached to the stem. We need to hold unswervingly to God's faithfulness (see our key verse for today) and demonstrate that faithfulness in our own lives.

PRAYER

Lord, thank you so much for Your faithfulness. Thank you that You are always faithful to Your promises in the Bible and that I can trust You and Your promises. Help me to show something of Your faithfulness in my daily life.

Amen

Gentleness **Isaiah 42:1-7; John 8:2-11**

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out. Isaiah 42:3

A musician will throw away the bruised reed, as it is not worth repairing; you and I would stamp on smoking flax and extinguish it, as the smell is offensive. But it is not so with God. His gentleness is such that He is ready to renew the reed and to fan the flax into flame. Many people can look back to the time when they were 'a bruised reed' or smouldering instead of giving a bright light; the change has been largely due to the gentleness of the Lord Jesus.

We see in Jesus's life the gentle way in which He dealt with those who were downtrodden, or unjustly accused, or who had a small amount of faith that needed encouraging. In our second reading today, we see Jesus full of gentleness and compassion for the woman taken in adultery. He loved the sinner while loathing the sin, which He did not condone (verse 11).

Other verses which you might find helpful:

- Ephesians 4:2 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love"
- Philippians 4:5 "Let your gentleness be evident to all"
- Colossians 3:12 "as God's chosen people clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"
- 1 Timothy 6:11 "man of God… pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness"

PRAYER

Lord, I confess that there are times when I deal harshly with people who have annoyed or upset me or who have done things that I judge as being wrong. Please forgive me for those times and help me to be gentle in my dealings with everyone, particularly those who are weak or who need encouragement.

Amen

Self-control **Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 1:5-8**

For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age. Titus 2:11-12

Today's readings make it clear that we must be self-controlled in all areas of our lives, in our stories (not exaggerating), in what we say about other people, in the way we spend our money, in our language, in our food, in how much we drink, in our leisure, in our work for God, in our bodily comforts, etc.

We must submit to self- discipline. We must live balanced lives. The growth of Jesus was balanced - He increased "in wisdom (intellectual), stature (physical) and favour with God and men (spiritual)" (Luke 2:52).

Times of elation on the mountain top should give us strength for times of depression in the valley. Each is the complement of the other to enable us to live balanced lives. The words 'self-controlled' in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8 mean to demonstrate a well-balanced judgment, avoiding extremes. We must not be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly use.

PRAYER

I can be self-controlled Lord, when I *want* to be. I know that real self-discipline is being self-controlled when I *don't want* to be. Help me Lord, when I know I should do one thing, but I really want to do another. Help me to choose Your will over my will, and help me to grow and become more like You.

Amen

SECTION J - WARNINGS

“Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us - a crucified God - must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.”

John Piper

“God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.”

Max Lucado

“He who lays up treasures on earth spends his life backing away from his treasures. To him, death is loss. He who lays up treasures in heaven looks forward to eternity; he’s moving daily toward his treasures. To him, death is gain.”

Randy Alcorn

“The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of deep discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.'”

Billy Graham

“We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.”

Chuck Swindoll

Peter **Matthew 26:31-75**

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matthew 16:18

Note the sequence of Peter's downfall from the following verses in today's reading: Peter was no doubt quite genuine in his statement, but he was evidently trusting in himself (verse 35); he was asleep when he should be praying (verses 40,43); he deserted Jesus and fled (verse 56); he followed at a distance (verse 58); he gave a simple denial (verse 70); he repeated his denial (verse 72); he denied knowing Jesus a third time with cursing (verse 74).

But Jesus dealt tenderly with Peter. "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" (Luke 22:61). In Jesus's look there was surely no trace of "I told you so!" In that moment of failure and discouragement, Peter must have seen in Christ's eyes exactly what he needed - love, encouragement and hope. Didn't Jesus see in Peter, as He sees in us when we fail, tremendous possibilities for good through His help? He will never write off a repentant 'failure', "whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

Notice also that, after His resurrection, the Lord sent a special message to Peter, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, "He is going ahead of you into Galilee" (Mark 16:7) and He made a special appearance to him, "The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon (Peter)" (Luke 24:34).

It would be unfair to leave the story without recognising that Peter's fall was a stepping stone to higher things, fulfilling Jesus's prophesy about Him in Matthew 16:18 ("you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it"). God sees the potential of what we can become by living our lives in obedience to Him, however unlikely it might seem!

PRAYER

Oh Lord, what a horrible thing to do. But I know I have disowned You too. Thank you, Jesus, for taking Peter back, thank you for loving him because I am a lot like him and it shows me that You love me too and that You will take me back when I fail. Even so, please help me Lord not to let You down. I can't do it on my own; please help me.

Amen

Pride **2 Chronicles 26:1-23**

As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success… But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.
2 Chronicles 26:5,16

Note especially our key verses for today. Uzziah was so pleased with his power and so lifted up with pride that he became big-headed. In verse 16, he went into the temple to burn incense; it was a good motive, but he was taking the law into his own hands and doing that which in those days was only permissible for the priests (verse 18). No doubt he thought that he was as good as the priests. He didn't have the warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12, "if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Be on your guard against intellectual pride.

Uzziah's sin consisted in going directly into the presence of God. An exactly similar situation is not the case today, as all was changed when Jesus laid down His life on the Cross. In Matthew 27:51 we read that, "The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom". The normal way would have been a tear from the bottom to the top, but the reversed order shows it was the act of God, so now "we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus" (Hebrews 10:19), ie, there is now direct access to the Father through the mediation of the Son.

On the other hand, many today, like Uzziah, attempt to approach God, trusting in their own righteous acts instead of trusting in the death of Jesus Christ, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Remember that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6) and Paul reminds us that "it is by grace [we] have been saved, through faith… not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

PRAYER

Father God please keep me from being proud. Help me to remember to thank You for all the achievements You help me to accomplish.

Amen

Playing with sin **Genesis 13:1-18; 19:1-4**

…*do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.* 1 Timothy 5:22

You cannot play with the fire of sin without the risk of being burnt. It's as simple as that. You put a guard around a fire for a reason! The story of Lot is an excellent example. Note the sequence:

13:10,11	A selfish choice of worldly possessions.
13:12	Pitched his tent near Sodom - that wicked city.
19:1	Sat in the gate of Sodom.
19:4	Caught by the wicked men of Sodom.

Yet he was a "righteous man" (2 Peter 2:7 and 8) and therefore doubtless did not mean deliberately to have anything to do with that evil city. If a friend had said to Lot after he had made the choice in Genesis 13:11, "You know how very wicked that city of Sodom is; don't go there, sin has such an insidious attraction," Lot would no doubt have replied quite genuinely, "Yes, I know Sodom is very wicked, but I have no intention of ever going into the city."

Later perhaps he rationalised his presence there on the basis that he would be a good influence. Subsequent events showed the permanent harm done to his family through their exposure to the values of this sinful society (Genesis 19:5 - end).

PRAYER

Lord God. You taught us to pray "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil". Please remind me of this over and over and help me to remember to stay as close to You as I can.

Amen

False doctrines **1 Timothy 4:1-10; 1 John 4:1-3**

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
1 John 4:1

Our key verse today tells us that "many false prophets have gone out into the world". The Bible uses the word 'prophet' for those who speak on behalf of God, not simply those who claim to be able to tell the future. Our postmodern world can be quite anti-Christian sometimes and can tell us that we need to accept teaching from all kinds of strange sources. This can lead to the very real problem of confusing Christian believers into believing things that are not just simply wrong, but quite probably dangerous too. It's good to understand how to know what is 'good teaching' and what is false! Here are some practical suggestions:

- **Read** the Bible not just books about it. Books *about* the Bible usually contain opinions of people about God and His ways; the Bible tells us what God thinks about people. Make sure you read the Bible as the first priority.

- **Beware** of any teaching which belittles or does not emphasise the atonement (the death of Christ on our behalf). The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for sinners are literally the crux of the Christian faith.

- **A useful test** of all doctrines. When you read or hear of a new doctrinal thought or idea it is helpful to ask, "what do they teach about Jesus Christ?" Most false doctrines deny His deity. (1 John 4:2-3, "every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God").

PRAYER

Father God, please let me know the truth and keep away from deceit. You said the truth will set us free and I trust You with my life Lord, so please let me recognise Your truth.

Amen

Hypocrisy **Matthew 6:1-7; 23:13-31**

First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Matthew 23:26

A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be what they are not, or pretends not to be what they are. Each one of us should consider if we are guilty of this to some degree. Hypocrisy takes many forms, for example the Christian whose life does not agree with what they profess (whose walk does not match their talk). It can be good to ask ourselves:

- Is my Christian faith noticeable in the way I live?
- Can *anyone* who knows me accuse me of hypocrisy?
- What are my manners like? Am I polite to those with whom I come into contact in the everyday things of life?
- Is my driving courteous, safe and law-abiding?
- How is my language, my patience, my drinking, my use of the internet?

Being a Christian infiltrates the whole of your life. It makes you who you are, it's not a bolt-on extra. If you think it is, then maybe you need to revisit earlier studies on how to be sure you are a Christian. Does your life reflect your faith?

What proof is there, that others can point to in your life, that you are truly living what you believe in? Pray, ask God to help you to live the way you should.

The world is full of hypocrites and the Church has its fair share too. You may well find yourself being accused of being one. It's worth listening to this accusation and asking whether or not it is justified. If it is, confess it to God and ask Him to help you to live more the way He wants you to.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, I sometimes do feel hypocritical. I know I am not perfect and sometimes it's easy to imagine people seeing how I don't match up to what they think a Christian should be. Help me to remember it's You I am trying to please, no one else. Let me live for You, and then whatever people say about me will be fine.

Amen

Backsliding **Psalm 80:14-19**

Restore us, LORD God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. Psalm 80:19

Backsliding, or deciding to stop being a Christian, can almost always be traced to neglect of one or more of the four essentials (see diagram on the next page):

- **Bible Study.** Exposure to the mind and heart of God through the Holy Spirit who breathed the Bible into being. See Annex B for some ideas.
- **Regular Prayer.** Sharing yourself and every aspect of your life with God.
- **Witnessing (or Evangelism).** As we speak about our faith and work out answers to questions, "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have" (1 Peter 3:15), we are building our own faith. It is also what Jesus told us to do, "whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven" (Matthew 10:32-33).
- **Fellowship.** Christians were never designed to operate solo. We are all different individual members of the body of Christ.

If these four 'spokes' are equal in length, then the 'wheel' will roll correctly. Wheels are designed to roll not sit, stationary and unmoving. With our power coming from the central axle of Christ in our lives, we can roll uphill, even when the going gets tough. If our spokes are unequal, or even missing because we have spent too much time on one whilst neglecting the others, then we have no contact with our axle, no contact with our power and no chance of rolling uphill. Without access to our power source, we will start to slip downhill… we will backslide. Do all you can to discipline yourself to maintaining your spokes. When you have done all you can, you will find that there is still more to give because God's hand is on you and you will not turn away or backslide.

PRAYER

Lord, I don't suppose any one deliberately decides to backslide, it happens a little bit at a time. Please help me to be aware of Your face shining on me, help me not to wander off, but keep me walking in obedience to You by studying your word, praying, witnessing and having fellowship with Your people.

Amen


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Prayer
Witnessing
Christ
Fellowship
The Word
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SECTION K - PROPHECY

"I've read the last page of the Bible. It's all going to turn out all right."
Billy Graham

"All portions of Scripture ought to be approached with deep humility and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit. On no point have good people so entirely disagreed as on the interpretation of prophecy; on no point have the prejudices of one group, the dogmatism of a second and the extravagance of a third done so much to rob the church of truths which God intended to be a blessing."
J.C. Ryle

"You have to take Bible prophecy literally, just like everything else in the Bible."
Tim LaHaye

A note about this section:

I really don't want to be too dogmatic in the notes on Studies 93 to 97, because there are a variety of views on this topic that are legitimate. The Bible is totally clear on key topics such as salvation and less detailed on other matters, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). However, in examining prophecy it will be helpful to have something definite to work on. I hope therefore that these notes are definite without being dogmatic.

It is important, as always, to remember that Bible study is for application, not information, so there should always be the question 'so what?' in the back of our minds. Of the topics examined, by far the most important is the doctrine of the Second Coming of Christ (Study 94), which is the only one that is to be found in all the Creeds of the Church. Other topics remind us that God is working through

history to His own timetable, and that He is in control despite appearances. History is His story.

It is interesting to read the following note which appeared in the 1937 edition of this booklet:

"The Jews are one of the greatest proofs of the accuracy of prophecy. Although dispersed throughout the earth, they have always maintained their identity, thus being ready to come together as a nation at the appointed time. The 1937 report of the Royal Commission under Lord Peel emphasized the desire to give the Jews a 'National Home in Palestine' confirming the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the Macdonald Letter of 1931. The prophecies of Jeremiah 32:37, Ezekiel 36:21-24 and 37:12-21 are thus being literally fulfilled at the present time, for thousands of Jews are returning to Palestine, large numbers from Poland, thought by some to be the 'Land of the North' referred to in Jeremiah 16:14-15. Official statistics show that whereas in 1918 there were 60,000 Jews in Palestine, in 1937 the number had risen to 400,000. Although immigration in the future may be slower than in the past, we may expect a continuance of this return of the Jews to the Holy Land, vide (see) prophecy in Amos 9:14-15."

By 1947 the number of Jews in Palestine had risen to 650,000. Prophecy was further fulfilled (Amos 9:11-15) when Israel became an independent nation in 1948. Some believe that ultimately there will be Jewish possession of the land from the Nile to the Euphrates vide (see) Genesis 15:18 and Joshua 1:4. Other Christians take the view that such promises have been superseded with the incorporation of Gentiles into the spiritual Israel (Romans 11:17-21). Read Romans 9-11 for a fuller understanding of the spiritual future of the Jews. One thing is certain, that God's plans for the future include definite plans for the ultimate salvation of 'all Israel', believing Jews and believing Gentiles alike (Romans 11:26).

Biblical prophecy **Daniel 2 (especially verses 24-45)**

The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed…
Daniel 2:44

The great statue mentioned in today's study seems to be a prophetic outline of the world's history. The metals decrease in value, but increase in strength:

The head of gold represents the Babylonian Empire (2:37); the breast and arms of silver represent Media-Persia, inferior in form of government, though not in widespread dominion and power (see Daniel 5:31 and 8:20); the belly and thighs of brass represent Greece (see Daniel 8:21); the legs of iron represent the Roman Empire (Luke 2:1); the toes partly iron and partly clay, are thought by some to represent democracy. Note that the iron (of rule and authority) does not mix with the clay (the will of the people). In these days don't we find the 'clay' in opposition to the 'iron'?

There are varying views on the exact sequence of events in the future, but no-one knows for certain how or when these end time events will happen. We can, however, be sure that the following events will happen, and they are the subject of our next four studies:

- Jesus will return;
- Jesus will judge Christians and non-Christians;
- Jesus will finally triumph over Satan;
- There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

PRAYER

Lord God, I admit it confuses me to think about things that have not yet happened and imagine them in real terms, but I thank you that the Bible promises that these things will happen, please help me to trust Your word and trust You with my future.

Amen

Jesus will return **Matthew 24:23-44**

Then all the peoples of the earth will … see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. Matthew 24:30

Since prophecies concerning the First Coming and Death of our Lord were fulfilled in detail[57], it makes sense that Acts 1:11, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back…" and prophecies referring to His Second Coming and other future events will also be fulfilled.

The Second Coming and the first resurrection take place at the same time[58]. Writing to Christians, Paul says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven… and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive… will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). We don't know the date[59], but the signs are spoken of, for example, "There will be wars and rumours of wars" (Matthew 24:6), and "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13).

Shall we enjoy His coming? See the necessities in Matthew 25[60]. In view of 2 Peter 3:10-14, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief… since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him", how should knowing that Jesus will return impact on our lives?

PRAYER

It's actually exciting Lord to think of the end of the world and the beginning of a new eternity. Exciting but also scary. I admit Lord, I don't understand it all and I am nervous about how some of it sounds like it's going to be, but Father God please help me to be ready for whatever it is You have planned.

Amen

[57]See Psalm 22:16-18; Isaiah 7:14; 9:6-7; 11:1; 53:3-12; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9
[58]1 Corinthians 15:51-53; Titus 2:13
[59] See Matthew 24:36
[60]Also Revelation 20:6; 22:20.

Jesus will judge Christians and non-Christians **1 Corinthians 3:1-23**

If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

This event is the only occasion when Christians stand before God to be judged. It is not a judgment of their sins, for these are "remembered no more" (Hebrews 10:17). But it is our deeds that are going to be judged. This is clear from today's key verse.[61]

This teaching drives us to seek to serve our Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength - to press on in the face of every setback so that we qualify for the "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Luke 19:17), rather than standing naked and embarrassed, the substance of our lives consumed by fire, having been revealed as "wood, hay or straw" (verse 12).

Whilst understanding that our salvation is by faith and not by works, those who have stood firm for Christ will receive on that occasion:

"The Crown of Righteousness"	2 Timothy 4:8
"The Crown of Life"	James 1:12;
"The Crown of Glory"	1 Peter 5:4[62]

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that when I stand before You as I enter into eternity, You won't judge me because of my sin. Thank you that because Your Holy Spirit lives in my life I know that I can live with You forever.

Amen

[61]See also Matthew 16:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 22:12.
[62]See also 1 Corinthians 9:25 and Revelation 3:11

Jesus will triumph **Revelation 16:14-16; 19:11-21; 20:1-6**

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6

This will be a truly terrible battle. All nations will be involved in the conflict, "The LORD is angry with all nations… He will totally destroy them…" (Isaiah 34:2). Much may be learnt from Zechariah 14 and some think that the description in Zechariah 14:12 ("Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths") could describe the aftermath of a neutron bomb. In the fury of the battle, Jesus Christ comes and intervenes with the armies of heaven, including His saints (Zechariah 14:3,4,5). During the battle, the beast and the false prophet are captured and thrown alive into the lake of burning Sulphur. Christ emerges triumphant and all His enemies are killed.

Following the battle of Armageddon, our Lord will reign in person on the earth for a thousand years. This is known as The Millennium, see Revelation 20:4 and today's key verse. Micah 4:1-5 also appears to refer to this period. At this time, those who have been killed during the Great Tribulation, but who had been faithful to Jesus, not bowing down to false gods, will be brought back to life and will reign with Christ for the thousand years (Rev 20:4).

During this period, Satan is bound, as stated in today's study (Rev 20:3) and thrown into the Abyss, so that he can no longer deceive, "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

PRAYER

Lord God, even though this is too hard for me to really take in, I trust You and ask that where I falter in my trust that You would help me to understand and to obey You.

Amen

The new heaven and the new earth **Revelation 21**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away… Revelation 21:1

It has been said[63] that God's original, perfect plan was for Genesis chapters 1 and 2 and Revelation chapters 21 and 22. Sadly Genesis 3 happened; Adam and Eve were disobedient and the whole of the rest of the Bible is the story of 'plan B' and how God has determined to put things right. At the end of time, everything will be restored into God's perfect order; there will be no more suffering, pain or death and the Church will become the Bride of Christ, all sin and disobedience will be no more. The new Heaven and the new Earth will be God's Kingdom and He will reign supreme for evermore!

Are you looking forward to that day?

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord Jesus that You have already won the victory over Satan on the cross. Thank you that You have made my life new and that in Your good timing all things will be made new, in heaven and on earth. I can believe this because Your word tells me it will happen.

Amen

[63]Rev Murray Dixon speaking on 'The Bible' at Ellel Pierrepont, Feb 2009.

SECTION L - VARIOUS

The final 3 days will be spent looking at 3 totally unrelated subjects, but ones that are, nevertheless, important. Each one is over one page in length to do the subjects justice.

Sabbath rest **Mark 2:23-28**

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Matthew 2:27-28

The Jewish Sabbath was the seventh day of the week and the word 'Sabbath' means 'Cessation', indicating rest from work, "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Genesis 2:3). The Hebrew word here translated 'made it holy' is also translated as 'consecrated' or 'separated'.

For Christians, the rest day was changed to the first day of the week to mark the Resurrection of Christ. Although there is much that is not common between Sunday and the old Jewish Sabbath, two principles regarding its observance may be emphasised.

It is a day of worship. Going regularly to a place of worship is valuable for more than one reason: it is an acknowledgment of God, and it is an example. I have heard people say and I have even said it myself, "but I don't get anything out of going to Church every Sunday". The thing is that going to Church is an act of worship. In fact, you are supposed to go with the attitude of 'what can I GIVE to Church' more than 'what can I get out of it'. The funny thing is, like in so many other things… 'the more you give the more you get' and if you go to serve you will find you are receiving so much more. He always seems to bless more than He is blessed, so who knows what could happen.

There is value in corporate worship, "…not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another…" (Hebrews 10:25). Although compulsory church attendance is no longer a requirement, many occasions in service life create opportunities for Christian worship in which the Gospel may be preached. Regimental celebrations, commitment to battle, thanksgiving after victory are communal occasions in which it is entirely appropriate for worship to be included. Creative thinking will integrate this into all the other events of the day in a positive way.

It is a day of rest! During World War One it was found that output was not increased by keeping munitions factories open on Sundays and a Government

Commission reported strongly against the practice. Remember, too, the failure of the 10-day week introduced into France after the Revolution.

Rest does not actually mean doing nothing. It's really helpful if you can break from your normal daily work, but there are many things you can do instead. Gone are the days of banning sports on Sunday and all manner of physical activity can restore spiritual peace, but please don't make the mistake of saying things like, "the outdoors is my Church". Whilst there is a lot of truth in it for some and it may well lead you to worship God (it does me), there is nothing like being with others with the specific aim of worshipping the Living God. After all, He created everything, seen and unseen, including the waves you may have been surfing or the mountain you may have been hiking up and the views you see all around from the top.

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord, that once a week we have a special day that we can set aside for You. Please forgive me when work means I can't get to Church, but please do help me to make it a priority too.

Amen

The Christian and war[64] **Acts 10:1-33**

"We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to ask you to come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say." Acts 10: 22

Respect is due to those who honestly think that the principles of Christianity and those of the fighting services are so opposed that no true Christian can join the latter. But consider the following:

1. War is the result of mankind's sin, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1 (AV)). Fallen people, until redeemed by Christ, will always tend to act for selfish advantage.

2. While killing for personal gain is always condemned in the Bible, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13) (see also Leviticus 24:17 and 1 John 3:15), taking of human life in the execution of justice or in battle is never made the responsibility of the individual.

3. In the New Testament, many soldiers are mentioned, but they are never told to abandon their calling, "Then some soldiers asked him, 'And what should we do?' He replied, 'Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely – be content with your pay'" (Luke 3:14) (see also Luke 7:1-10; 1 Corinthians 7:20; Hebrews 13:17). In today's study we find an officer, Cornelius, conspicuous for being a believer (verses 2, 22, 30).

4. The Christian's armour is typical of warfare, "Put on the full armour of God…" (Ephesians 6:11-18). If it were wrong to take part in warfare, would it be compared in this way?

5. Many great and godly men of the Bible were highly proficient military leaders - Abraham, Moses, Joshua, King David. If the profession of arms were wrong, would this be the case?

[64] The AFCU has produced a booklet, *A Christian View of Warfare*, which deals with this subject in much more detail. Ask the Office for a copy.

6. Matthew 5:9 says, “Blessed are the peace-makers” not “Blessed are the pacifists.” It is immoral to do nothing to put right an evident injustice eg, every sane person should loathe war and do everything possible to prevent it, but true peace (a positive condition, not mere absence from war) follows righteousness. The Christian outlook must be ‘Righteousness at any cost’ and not ‘Peace at any price’, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin condemns any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

7. Action by the Armed Forces is often of the same nature as action by the police. Romans 13:1-7 explains the duties of governments to protect the weak against the strong and to punish the wrong-doer whilst rewarding the just. Part of that delegated authority from God is the ultimate sanction of taking human life (verse 4). Those who exercise such authority are accountable to God; our responsibility is to submit to the authorities, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority” (1 Peter 2:13) up to the point where their commands conflict with God’s, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to Him?” (Acts 4:19). We must also pray for them, “I urge, then… that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

We must do all we can to relieve suffering and injustice. Christians should be active in politics, in Third World relief and development projects and the like, provided we never lose sight of the greatest need of mankind, which is to know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father, as a serving military person, I do find I have some hard questions to ask about my faith and my service to Queen and country. Please help me to serve like Cornelius, let me be a devout believer always keen to serve You. May I still be able to do what those in charge of me want and let me be an example of how to follow You as Lord to those around me.

Amen

Knowing God Personally **John 3:16-21**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

As you have worked through these last 100 days, I hope you have noticed that being a Christian is not about WHAT you know as much as it is about WHO you know.

It's totally possible to learn a lot about God without getting to know Him personally and in today's reading I want to make absolutely sure that you don't just know about God. In four points I want to explain how you can have a personal relationship with God and experience the life that you were created to have.

Point One. God loves you and created you to know Him personally. The Bible clearly explains that God loves everyone. Since you are included in everyone it means that He loves you (see today's key verse). He also wants you to know Him. "And this is the way to have eternal life - to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (John 17:3, NLT). So the Bible says it. God loves us all... including you… and wants us all to Know Him personally… including you. So, the big question needs to be, why don't most people know God in this way?

Point Two. We are separated from God by our sin, so we can't know God or experience His love. We are all created to live in relationship with God, but we have rejected Him and broken this relationship. This rejection of God is what the Bible calls sin. We can show this attitude by being selfish, openly disobeying God or even just by ignoring Him. Everyone is sinful, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3: 23). And sin has big consequences, "for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

God is perfect and we are sinful so there is a huge gap between us and Him caused by our sin. We can try to bridge this gap with all kind of things: doing good works, being religious, helping other people, but all our efforts fail because they don't deal with the issue of sin. But there is a solution…

Point Three. Jesus Christ is God's solution for our sin. Only through Him can we know God and be forgiven for our sin. Because of the following three things, Jesus can give us the relationship with God that we need:

- **He died in our place.** "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3: 18).
- **He defeated death and came back to life.** "During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive" (Acts 1:3 NLT).
- **He is the only way to God.** Jesus said "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14: 6).

So, even though we deserve to be cut off from God forever, God loves us enough to send Jesus to die on the cross for us and pay the penalty our sin deserves. Through Jesus, God has bridged the gap that separated us from Him and made it possible for us to Know Him and be forgiven for our sin. But it's not enough simply to know the facts.

Point Four. We all need to respond to God by asking Jesus to come into our lives. Only then can we know God and experience His love and forgiveness. "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Asking Jesus to come into our lives involves:

- **Agreeing** with God that you are sinful and deciding to turn away from your sin.
- **Trusting** God to forgive you completely because Jesus died for your sin.
- **Choosing** to follow Jesus. In other words, putting Him first in your life.

Jesus promised to come into our lives when we ask Him. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20).

So, clearly, everyone has a choice to make and that includes you. Do you want to ask Jesus to come into your life or do you want to keep running it as you are, on your own, without Him?

If you decide to ask Him into your life you will be beginning a relationship with Him for which you were created in the first place. To do this you simply need to ask.

Asking God is just another way of saying 'pray'. God is not so concerned about what words you use when you pray, He is much more bothered about your attitude, whether you really mean it or not.

Here is a prayer you could say to God. Could you say this to God and mean it? If so, why not say it now? Jesus will come into your life, just like He promised.

PRAYER

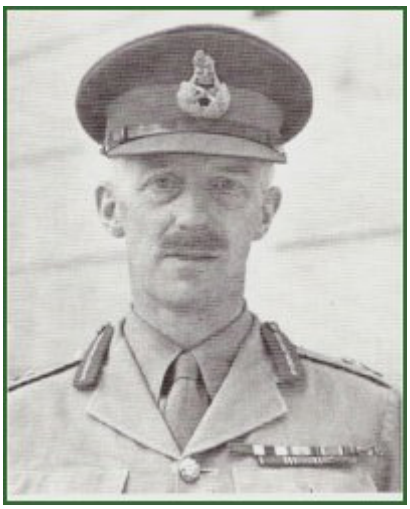
Lord Jesus, I want to know You personally. I am sorry for going my own way instead of Your way. Please forgive me for all my sins. Thank you for dying on the cross for me so that I am now forgiven. Please come into my life and make me the person You want me to be.

Amen

If you prayed that prayer, then you have begun a new life; you have become a child of God and you have begun a friendship with Him that will last forever.

It's helpful to make sure that other Christians know what you have done so please talk to the person who gave you this copy of 100 days, or to your padre, or church leader, or a Christian friend. They will be able to help you continue to grow as you have done over the last 100 days.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL SIR ARTHUR SMITH KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, LLD



1890 Born on 9th December

1910 Sandhurst and commissioned into Coldstream Guards on 3rd September

1914 Posted to the Western Front as an adjutant with the 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards. During the First World War he was wounded three times, mentioned three times in dispatches, awarded a DSO, MC and Croix de Guerre

1915 Became a General Staff Officer (GSO) in France

1917 Was seriously injured and nearly lost foot. Convalesced in Park Lane, London where he met his future wife who was working in the nursing home

1918 Married Monica Crossley

1921 Adjutant at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. During this period, he wrote 100 Days Bible Study to help cadets study their bibles

1924 Posted as Commandant at the Guards Depot, before moving back to London District in 1927

1930 Became Commanding Officer of the 2nd Battalion, Coldstream Guards

1934 Served as Commander of the Coldstream Guards and Regimental District

1938 Promoted to Brigadier on the General Staff of British Troops in Egypt.

1939 Promoted to Major-General General Staff, Middle East Command and served as Deputy Chief of Staff, Middle East Command

1941 Chief of Staff to Lord Wavell, Middle East Command before being promoted to Major-General General Staff 8th Army [North Africa]

1942 District Officer Commanding London District and General Officer Commanding Brigades of Guards

1943 Commander in Chief Iraq & Persia Command

1945 General Officer Commanding in Chief Eastern Army [India]

1946 Served as Chief General Staff, Army Headquarters India before becoming Deputy Commander in Chief India

1947 Commander in Chief British Forces in India & Pakistan

1948 Retired from military service and became Lieutenant of the Tower of London and the chair of SASRA (he continued this role until 1967)

1951 Became Chairman of the British Evangelical Alliance and President of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

1967 Became President of SASRA and held this position until his death.

1977 Died on 8th August.

METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

As recommended in Study 92, Bible Study is one of the key ways of ensuring that we continue to grow in the Christian life and do not backslide. The following describes some ideas that you might try.

1. DEVOTIONALS

There are many excellent devotionals on the market today, which give you a passage of Scripture to read, usually followed by a comment, questions, and a prayer. Select one that suits you. Many are available as a daily feed to your phone and there are some that are designed to help you to read through the whole Bible in a year. Some recommended sites:

www.cwr.org.uk
https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/bible-reading-guides#slice-navigation-pw-slice-412
https://www.ucb.co.uk/read

2. BOOK STUDY

Compare the gospels, remembering that generally speaking:

Writer	Wrote his Gospel to	Emphasizing	Specially Recording
Matthew	The Jews	The King	Sermons to people
Mark	The Romans	The Servant	Miracles and action
Luke	The Greeks	The Divine Man	Parables
John	The Christians	The Son of God	Conversations with Disciples

A fourfold gospel to reveal God in the terms of human life.

3. CHAPTER STUDY

After reading a chapter, or the daily study, note the following five points:

Subject. State principal contents in a sentence.
Principal persons.
Leading lesson. Truth most emphasized.
What does it teach about Jesus Christ? "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).
Most helpful verse. Ponder and mark it.

4. TEXT STUDY

Choose a verse from each day's reading and write it down on a weekly or monthly paper prepared by days. This ensures finding a helpful thought daily and the actual writing down is an aid to memory.

5. CHARACTER STUDY

Of such persons as Moses, Joseph, Gideon, Joshua, Nehemiah, Daniel, David, Mary, Paul, Peter etc.

6. SUBJECT STUDY

Look up, and study, all references in the Bible on such subjects as faith, holiness, worthiness, glory. Use a search engine or an online Bible to help you with this. Some people find it helpful to use coloured markers, for example;

Sin	in black
Salvation	in red
Prayer	in green
Promises	in brown
Second Coming	in yellow

7. WORD STUDY

Use a concordance look up all references to certain words.

8. TYPE STUDY

Get a good book on the subject and you will be surprised how interested you become.

Examples:

Abraham as a type of God the Father;

Isaac as a type of Jesus Christ His Son, and the ram as type of substitution: Gen. 22:1-14;

Moses as a type of Christ the Deliverer, in Exodus.

The wanderings of the children of Israel as a type of the experiences of Christians.

Joseph as a type of Christ's rejection by the professed people of God yet bringing blessing to the world.

9. PRECEPT INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

This is an investigative approach to the Bible using three basic components:

1. Observation – what does the text say?
2. Interpretation – what does the text mean?
3. Application – how does the meaning of the text apply to my life?

There are bible studies to help you study every book of the Bible. Go to https://www.precept.org/know-gods-word/ for more information.